
Blind Courage: Reflections of a Guide Dog Instructor in England, Australia, and New Zealand

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Brian Peel (2012). The Copy Press.

This publication is a collection of brief experiential and ‘remarkably honest’ stories of the author’s life and ‘antics’ as a guide dog instructor over 48.5 years. The book is written with a clarity enabling the reader to visualise each situation. The author shares with the reader many experiences as a guide dog instructor whilst observing trainees with vision impairment completing their exercises. There is also a selection of coloured and black and white photographs of the training centres, groups of trainees, guide dogs, and the author which enhance the stories. The sections include:

Preface: The misconception the public has of the guide dog and the explanation of the significant role the handler plays in the success of the team.

Section 1. *In search of passion:* The influences which led the author to apply for a guide dog instructor cadetship in 1959.

Section 2. *In the beginning:* Challenges of early training experiences at the training centre, Exeter, Devon, UK.

Section 3. *Film star:* The author’s role in a promotional guide dog/trainer movie and some of the antics that ensued.

Section 4. *Reflex:* Some unorthodox guiding.

Section 5. *Unique:* Guide dog “Shandy” the boxer stole a bun while working.

Section 6. *Foresight:* Outsmarting a police dog.

Section 7. *Temptation:* A dog returning a biscuit to its mistress (an unlikely story?)

Section 8. *Cruel to be kind:* A person giving guide dog “Jess” chocolate that contributed to her death.

Section 9. *Lost:* A class of new guide users working in heavy fog.

Section 10. *And found:* A guide dog sensing danger ‘saves’ the handler.

Section 11. *Fantasy:* A chance meeting with the actress Susannah York.

Section 12. *Miracles:* The explanation of guide dog client training techniques as well as a scenario describing the negative effect of a person with congenital blindness regaining sight.

Section 13. *Role-play:* The experience of a continual two-week blindfold test and its impact on the public and author’s family.

Section 14. *Insight*: Techniques used to train clients with dogs.

Section 15. *No bloody good*: When instructors visit remote parts of Australia they are expected to ‘go with the flow’ to a large extent. This chapter describes vividly the environment of a mining town in which the instructor found himself.

Section 16. *Redundant*: Australian outback conditions are described where guide dogs may be required to work. The author explains the significance of the city of Perth, Australia as the origin of the guide dog organisation in Australia. Aspects of client assessment for a guide dog are also explained.

Section 17. *Perception*: A dog’s response to traffic lights.

Section 18. *Poaching*: The strip club operator who was blind.

Section 19. *Skipper*: A person with vision impairment sailing; and the grief guide dog users experience at the death of their guide dog.

Section 20. *Free spirit*: Horse whisperer takes a guide dog on his own terms.

Section 21. *Trust me*: When the respect and bond is strong the dog can still work after the master has had a stroke.

Section 22. *The making of a guide dog*: The characteristics a variety of dog breeds and their value as a guide dog including breeding, puppy walking processes, and responsibilities.

Epilogue. The career path of the author.

The book contains some important historical facts about guide dog breeding, matching, and guide dog organisations. As a minor point, the book title *Blind Courage* seems misleading because at the completion of guide dog training clients have developed trust in their dog so ‘courage’ is usually not an issue. Perhaps the book’s greatest strength is its honesty with the author emphasising the importance of flexibility when working with a guide dog and handler. For this the author should be congratulated.

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