

# MELISSA'S JOURNAL

## GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND, SAN RAFAEL, CA, CAMPUS

### Sunday, Guide Dog School Day 1

Hi Everyone,

David drove me to the airport and we checked in around 9 AM. They let David escort me to the gate. They made us take our shoes off at security but there were no problems. Oh yeah, we had to take my luggage to get hand inspected and swabbed before they put it through on the plane. Of course, no issues there! The flight was on time and the staff was very nice. They escorted me on the plane after an almost tearful goodbye to David. When we landed at our destination, I was escorted off the plane and met by one of the Guide Dogs for the Blind instructors.

I got on a shuttle bus with 7 other students and off we went to Guide Dog school! 45 minutes later we were there! One by one, we were escorted to our dorm rooms and later they brought our luggage to us. I have a roommate who, I guess, is in her 60's and seems nice. We all get a tour of the dorms. They have a room that has booth seats and a table to recreate a restaurant and on the other side they have airplane seating! There is a "dayroom" with couches and chairs, a television and VCR, and a piano. Also, there is a "library" of books on tape, tape players, and books in Braille. The "music room" has 2 sets of bongos, a keyboard, guitar and even an accordion! The "computer room" has 4 computers. Oh yeah, and some CCTV's that enlarge any print media (magazines, books, etc). They even have a Braille printer. There is a nurse's office and a K9 kitchen! The "foyer" has a few couches and chairs to hang out in and then there is the dining room where we're not allowed until we hear "the bell". They have a fitness center and some vending machines. Let's see if I can get some exercise in!

I unpacked and made myself "at home". I have a phone in my room. It's my direct line, with voicemail. We met at 4:30 PM in the dayroom and the instructors went over the "Code of Conduct" and showed us a video about the training. Later, at 6 PM the bell chimed and off to dinner we went. We have assigned seating. My table includes a woman who is here for "retraining" and will be getting her fourth dog and two other first timers. The students are from all over, from Virginia, to Canada, Colorado, Arizona, Oregon and California, and beyond. I had lemonade, and dinner was prime rib, broccoli, a baked potato with sour cream, a roll and for dessert chocolate mousse. Can you say I am going to gain some serious weight here?

Now I am writing to you and we have the rest of the night free. Tomorrow, we have breakfast at 7:15 AM and then the training begins!! I think I will get to bed early tonight since I feel tired and it's been a long day! Hasta for now and I will try and write you everyday and tell you of my adventure!!

### Monday, Guide Dog School Day 2

Last night I went to bed early and tried to sleep. I kept waking up every couple of hours paranoid I missed the alarm and would be late! My roommate snored for a while (now I know what David goes through), but I managed to get some sleep. My roommate woke up at 6:15 so I did too. She showered first. Got ready and at 7:15 went to the dining room for breakfast. We had apple juice and had the choice of first having Cream of Wheat, or cereal or start on the regular breakfast. I decided to have the regular breakfast which consisted of scrambled eggs, hash browns and toast with strawberry jam. It wasn't too bad. We could have seconds if we wanted to but I decided not to (have to keep that girlish figure).

At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and were introduced to the chef. He read today's menu and asked us our choice. For lunch we had cheese ravioli w/garlic bread or Monte Cristo sandwich w/chips or a roasted tomato salad with tuna. I went for the salad. For dinner, either a mixed green salad w/egg or a Filipino pork dish. I went for the pork. We met the nursing staff, other supervisors and some administrators.

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They told us that this week and next week on a Tuesday and Friday they can go shopping for us if we need anything or forgot something. We also had the option of going to a religious service on Sunday if we wished and they would arrange it for us. We then had a lecture about effective communication with a dog and how to do corrections with the leash.

At 9:30 AM we were split into teams. Each team has four students. We were each given a leash and shown the collar and how to make the leash "long" and "short". We made a short leash and then individually we went out to the hallway with the instructor showing how to hold the leash. The leash was wrapped around a rug to simulate a dog. This type of training without the actual dog is called "Juno Training". So we learned commands such as "heel" and "sit". Before we give the command we have to say the name of the dog, in this case the imaginary dog, Juno. So it would be "Juno heel" and the instructor would hold the rug as if it were the dog. If it moved off path, etc., we had to correct by doing a "jerk and release" maneuver with the leash to bring the dog back into the proper position. We had to praise Juno when it was doing the right thing. The instructor said I was a natural at praising and that I had a pleasant voice. I did the corrections pretty well. Then they brought us actual dogs to walk down the halls with! It was so exciting and nerve wracking. None of these dogs would be available for this class; they won't finish their training until January. I worked with a female yellow Lab and a male yellow Lab. Both were really good dogs and just gorgeous! There were other instructors with their own dogs trying to distract these dogs while we were training, by calling them, throwing balls and having other dogs around. It was so exciting!! The dogs I worked with were not that easily distracted so I had few corrections to give.

At 12:30 PM we had lunch. I had the roasted tomato salad with tuna. It was delicious! At 1:30 PM we met again in our teams and learned more obedience training with Juno. Now in addition to "heel" and "sit" we learned "down" and "stay". We also learned to use hand signals for those verbal commands. At 2:30 PM we all met to go on shuttle buses to the "downtown lounge". It's a small place in downtown San Rafael (still part of the school) where we went out individually with an instructor and walked around with our canes crossing streets, etc. They need to see what our pace is like and how we handle ourselves. This route will become familiar to us they said because we will be taking this route often with our dogs. It was fine, no big deal. Later, instructors called us individually into their offices to ask what type of personality each person wanted in a dog. I said I wanted a playful dog when it wasn't working. So, we'll see what I get!

At 6 PM it was time for dinner. Yes, I had the pork with white rice and green beans, a dinner roll and for dessert an Eskimo Pie. It was yummy. The re-train students (those whose guide dogs have retired or passed on) got their dogs today. They were so gorgeous! A few yellow Labs, a black Lab, a German Shepherd, and a Golden Retriever. The rest of us are jealous. Wednesday seems like forever before we get our dogs! At 7 PM we all met in the dayroom and they handed out a bag with grooming supplies. It has a Zoom Groom brush that we use in a circular motion all over the dog, a "slicker brush" which we use after, in the same flow as the hair or the opposite, then a comb in the same direction as the hair. They also gave us doggy toothpaste, a doggy toothbrush and a "finger puppet" to use first to get used to putting our fingers in the dog's mouth to brush its teeth and a washcloth because inevitably we'll get toothpaste all over it's face! The instructor brought over a male, yellow Lab so we could use the Zoom Groom on him. Afterwards she brought out a female Golden Retriever and we felt her long hair, then a female Lab/Golden mix that has short hair like the pure Labs. None of these dogs will be available for us. The instructor did tell us that no one is getting a Golden Retriever or a German Shepherd. So that leaves me with either a yellow or black Lab or a Golden/Lab mix!

And that concludes my day! I love you all and miss you lots! Talk to you tomorrow!

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### Tuesday, Guide Dog School Day 3

Mornings are becoming routine. At 7:15 AM, it was time for breakfast. I had oatmeal and some toast. At 8 AM we all met in the dayroom and the chef went over today's menu. Lunch had options of vegetable bean soup with a Caesar salad or soup with a turkey pastrami sandwich. I went for soup and sandwich. For dinner the options were vegetable lasagna or mixed green salad with shrimp. I opted for the salad. (I promised David I would have at least one salad a day. I didn't say anything about dessert though.) We then met the computer expert, but I have already been using a computer. Next we had a lecture about guide dog commands, verbal and body language. We broke up in our teams and reviewed the obedience commands with Juno. They said we should do obedience training every day and make sure we do it where there might be distractions. With obedience commands, there is no reason why the dog should not do them. Unlike guide work—I guess that's more of a request. We have to say a guide work command firmly but the dog has to assess if it's safe to obey the command.

At 9:30 AM we got on the buses to the downtown lounge. We individually went out and did guide work with Juno. We were introduced to the harness and the instructor pulled us along behind. We used guide commands such as "Juno Forward, Juno Halt, Juno Left and Juno Right". These verbal commands are used in conjunction with hand signals and body movement. The harness and leash are in the left hand while the right hand is used for hand signals. It was exciting to feel you can walk more freely, at a faster pace, and stop looking at the ground. Juno stops at all curbs. When we get off and on a curb, we have to do a lot of praising as well. Before we left for the lounge, they told us that one of the students will be going home today. He has an infection in his leg and it's not getting better. This happened before he came, but the staff decided he can't walk on it very well so he can't continue the training. Once he is better they will bring him back to do the full training. At least he hadn't gotten attached to a dog yet!

At 12:30 it's lunchtime. The soup and sandwich were good, but the banana cream pie was to die for!! We met again at 1:30 PM for a lecture on corrections. We should not feel embarrassed to give them in public because our safety is at stake! And if we give effective corrections, they do not hurt the dog. They talked about what type of corrections to give when the dog is distracted and so forth. The next lecture was on "counter corrections", using food as a reward. They are using that a little bit now and will show us how to do so if we like. It is used as a tool hoping a behavior won't go to the extreme or when the dog has done something exemplary, like if the dog always gets distracted with other dogs and one day it passes a lot of dogs without pausing then you can give it a kibble. We then split up into our teams for more Juno obedience training. Practice makes perfect! And trust me, none of us is perfect yet! We then left for the downtown lounge and individually went out with the instructor and the harness to do guide work. This time Juno was not behaving and we had to first give verbal corrections "no, Juno Hop Up" and if that didn't work then a leash correction is given. We take the same route in San Rafael so we get used to it. I am sure we look silly walking around following the teacher with the harness. But, the residents here are used to seeing it! They had us use a different harness this time, one that is "ergonomic". I can't tell if I like it or not yet. I have to try each with my dog and see!

At 5:50 PM we met in the foyer. The instructors did "Juno" training to show us how to enter the dining room with our dog, how to sit down and where to place the dog. The dog should sit under the table, out of the way and we have to put the leash under our left foot so if it moves we can feel it. For dinner, the salad was excellent and so was the banana cream pie!!

We are all so excited and it seems like tomorrow is so far away!! In 24 hours I will have my dog!! I can't wait! I am so excited and nervous. What type of dog? What color? Male/female? What's its name? None of us are going to be able to sleep tonight! We don't have any lectures tonight or any more training. The instructors are going to make the final matches tonight. I know MY dog will be the BEST (ha, ha) so does everyone in class. It is going to be an emotional day tomorrow. Talk to you then.

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#### Wednesday, Guide Dog School Day 4

Today's the day! I got to sleep around 9:45 PM, and surprisingly, I slept well. At 7:15 AM it was time for breakfast and we had a blueberry muffin and bacon. Today's menu was for lunch shrimp creole with rice, roast beef sandwich or chopped salad. For dinner it was udon noodle soup or teriyaki flank steak. I chose the salad for lunch and steak for dinner. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and had a lecture on "Feeding and Relieving". While at school we will be on an exact schedule on when to feed, water and relieve. The dogs will be fed twice a day. We relieve them about four times a day and give them water four times a day as well. We will meet every morning at 6:30 AM at the "relieving circle" to take turns to relieve the dogs. I guess in the beginning the instructors will scoop up the poop. Then they tell us "over to the right" and "oops you missed a nugget!" Everyone is so excited! (NO, not about scooping the poop!) We then met in our Juno groups and did the obedience training (I am getting the hang of it...or so I think). We learned a new correction "the high collar" correction. That one is used after you try a couple of leash corrections and the dog still doesn't respond, then you calmly move the collar up by its chin and ears, fold the leash in half and yank straight up and verbally tell the dog to "sit". That will get their attention to sit down and refocus. We practiced on a big stuffed dog named "Stuffie". This dog was so big I could have ridden it.

At 10 AM we met in the foyer and did Juno training with the harness into the buses and off we went to the downtown lounge. On the way to the buses they showed us how to make "moving" left and right turns instead of stopping and making formal rights and lefts. This is how to do so while you are in motion. For the left turn, you have to move up towards the head and say "Juno left, left, left" and motion with your right hand. For the right, you move back and say "Juno right, right, right" and motion with your hand. They also set up an obstacle course with cones that the dogs will have to guide us through. They said as the training progresses the course will become more difficult. At the lounge we had more Juno guide work training. I chose the regular harness for today. This time Juno was very distracted and I had to do many corrections. The instructor told me I did great. It's hard though because I have to think of what I have to do then do it. Our reaction time is a little slow but I guess that is to be expected!

12:30 we were back for lunch. We Juno trained back off the bus and through the obstacle course. The salad was nice and refreshing and I will have you know I skipped the dessert today, pineapple upside cake! We are all trying to pass the time. In an hour or so we will know which dog we get! The retrain student at our table who's had her dog since Monday had to give it back! I guess it was a slow start for them, which is no big deal, but the major issue was that the dog has behavior problems and will be career-changed and returned to her puppy raiser. Our classmate was very upset, but will find out about her new dog when we will later today.

We met in the dayroom at 1:30 PM and had a lecture on "receiving your guide dog". They will call us individually and tell us about them; then we heel them to our room and try to bond. We have to remember this a strange experience for them as well. They were with their puppy raisers, then four or more months in the kennels, now to us. We have to be patient, the bonding takes time. After what seemed forever, they told each of us our dog's info. I got a female black Lab named Anya! After everyone had been told about their dogs, we went to our rooms and waited, and waited to be introduced. Finally it was my turn. I had to go to the library and the instructor (who trained her) brought her to me. She is gorgeous!! Beautiful black coat. She told me that if I were a dog it would be Anya! We have the same personalities! She is 22 1/2 inches tall, weighs 56 pounds, and is 21 months old. She is sensitive but also a spitfire! (Like me, huh?) She licked me and we had a good old time! We heeled back to the room and I sat on the floor and played with her. She is so loving; it was great!!!! I couldn't stop smiling and laughing! We then heeled out of the room and walked down the hall together while the trainers distracted her. I had to correct a lot but we are getting used to each other. She loves her trainer so when

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she hears her voice or sees her she perks up. But, she has to get used to me now! I love her!! This is so amazing.

Right now she is sitting by my feet calmly while I type. I will try to send another e-mail after dinner if I get a chance but maybe not until tomorrow since they want us to bond more with them. I have to go and feed her right now.

#### **Thursday, Guide Dog School Day 5**

Last night was wonderful! We had such a good time together. I sat down on the floor with her and we just hugged, she licked, and we laughed. We then individually "heeled" our dogs down the hallway and back with the trainers distracting Anya and I had to correct her. They had me walk very slowly so Anya would pay attention to me and my pace. It was so surreal! At 6:00 PM we had dinner. I had to learn to pull out my chair, have Anya sit, make a long leash, have her lie down by my feet, and have the leash under my left foot so if she moves I can feel it and correct her if need be. For dinner I had teriyaki flank steak with rice and peas. Yes, I decided to have the pineapple upside cake for dessert to celebrate! The retrain student got her new dog as well; their bonding is working out much better for her. Anya was SO gassy last night; she cleared out the dining room! The trainers said if it continued for the next few days then we will talk. It could be just all the excitement...let's hope so! The rest of the night we bonded and had fun. All the students were out in the hallway chit chatting, and we all love our dogs! So here is what our class received: two male yellow Labs, one male black Lab, one male yellow Lab/Golden cross, one black female Lab/Golden cross, two female black Labs, and a female yellow Lab. Of course the best is Anya!! I fed her and gave her water and the first time I took her out to the "relieving circle", she peed and pooped with no problem. At 9 PM we went out for the last relieving and again she did both; everyone is so jealous.

She slept through the night very well. They gave us a little rug so the dogs can sleep on a tie-down. We have to have them on a tie-down or on the leash at all times here. I woke up at 5:30 AM. Got myself ready and went to the K9 kitchen to get her food and water. She ate everything and at 6:30 AM off we went to the relieving circle. No sooner did I get there than she "did her business". I walk forwards and backwards transferring the leash between my hands while Anya walks a circle around me to stimulate herself to go; and I say "Anya, do your business" and she does! We have to be out there for 10 minutes to make sure they do all their business!

Breakfast was at 7:15 AM, we had pancakes with blueberries on top and sausages. Everyone did well through the night, no accidents. But, my roommate had to take her dog out at 4:30 AM to avoid an accident! At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and they started the lecture with a major distraction. We had no idea and suddenly a dog runs through, loose, barking and of course Anya lunges towards it and I had to stand up and correct her. I was so unprepared for it! But we made it. Others lunged too, but one dog is the most sensitive and calm dog ever: it just sat up and stared then went back to lying down! We all joke that his partner has to put a heart monitor on this dog to make sure it's still breathing! Individually, we went out and did the obedience training. Anya was so good. There was another distraction when we went out: this time another dog was just lying around. Anya looked at it and kept walking! Good girl!! She did very well during the commands, only a couple of corrections needed and that was more positioning her body correctly when she was sitting or heeling. Minor stuff. After a correction though, she is sensitive so she needs lots of praising!! I was happy because Dina (who trained Anya and who Anya adores) was distracting her and I told Anya to "come" and she did so with no problem.

After that we went downtown. First we took them out to the relieving circle again and Anya "did her business" again for both. Of course, it's not bad because I don't have to clean it up yet! We got assigned

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buses; we are on bus 1. I got to put the harness on Anya (she looks so adorable), and I heeled her through the obstacle course and onto the bus. The ride downtown was difficult. We all had to keep the dogs sitting, cradling them in between our legs. Well, Anya and the rest were like butter and kept slipping down! Let me tell you, trying to lift 56 pounds off the floor is no simple task. They kept sliding around. It was funny though! They want us in that position for short trips because on public transit it could be full and you want the dog to be trained to sit and not sprawl out! We went downtown but not to the lounge. We individually went out down one block and back. It was our turn! The "Spitfire Team" as we are known!! I had the harness and uttered those amazing words "Anya Forward" and off we went! I can't describe the feeling...it was so freeing! I am getting choked up thinking about it. I haven't walked that fast in a long time, it was wonderful! How amazing we were together. She took me to the curb and stopped so I could feel it and would stop on the other side as well. She took me around obstacles so smoothly (like butter I tell you), you couldn't wipe the grin off my face if you tried. She is incredible. The ride back was a little better; she is getting a little used to it! I took off her harness, gave her some water and off to the relieving circle we went! This time she only peed. At last, our "Mr. Perfect" did something...he peed. We couldn't believe he hadn't done anything yet. We are going to throw a party when he poops (ha, ha).

At 11 AM we had a lecture on safe street crossing. We have to trust our dogs. Sometimes Anya might not go right away because she determines it is unsafe, and I have to trust her. At 12:30 PM it's lunchtime. I had a Thai salad and it was nice and refreshing. Of course, I had the triple fudge brownie as well. At 1:30 PM we went to at the relieving circle again. Anya went number one proving she is the relieving circle queen.

After that we were off to the downtown lounge. Anya was a little better sitting up all the way but not by much! Once we got there I took her aside and groomed her with all her brushes. She loved it!! She was licking me and wagging her tail. It was our turn for guide work and this time we were working on left hand turns. Of course at the beginning Anya literally ran circles around me! I had the wrong body language and even though I said "Anya left" she went right. So I had to correct her by letting go of the harness and correcting with the leash. After that it was pretty smooth sailing. A couple little mistakes, but it was so FUN! The instructor said I was a natural and we looked like a team that had been working together for a while already. She stopped at every curb and it felt amazing! She even went around a crowd of people who were on the sidewalk like nothing! Anya is awesome!! I have to practice moving my body more fluidly so she knows by my body cues what I want to do. The instructor complimented me on my pleasant yet firm tone of voice and how well I praise. She says it sounds genuine and I would be a kind of boss that everyone wants in the workplace (hmmm... the boss, huh? who wants to work for me... ha, ha).

We got back and the instructor noticed that the clip on the harness is a bit difficult for me so they are going to get another for me to try. I fed Anya and gave her water at 4:30 PM and off to the relieving circle we went. Boy, she licks the bowl clean!! Of course, she proved again she is the queen! Both number one and two. Good girl Anya.

At 6:00 PM it was time for dinner and I had macaroni and cheese with a stuffed tomato, it was very good. I skipped dessert tonight. Anya had her water at 7 PM and we went to the dayroom for a lecture. We got the finger puppet out and pretended to brush the dog's teeth. Anya was more interested in biting it. The instructor told us to pretend brushing for four days and then start with the poultry toothpaste. We all sat around afterwards and reminisced about the day and everyone kept making fun of "Mr. Perfect" who still hasn't done number two. The things we find funny, huh? And I am happy to announce that Anya is no longer gassy!! Yeah, Anya.

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### Friday, Guide Dog School Day 6

After going to the relieving circle (and I apologize about the details but I want to have a record so I know her "schedule" when we come home), she did number one and off to bed we went! I woke up at 5:30 AM and it was so hard not to go and play with Anya right away! I have to do my regular routine even if she is whining and not pay attention to her yet. At 6:20 AM I fed her and gave her water. At 6:30 AM off to the relieving circle we went and she did both her businesses. Finally, "Mr. Perfect" did number two...we all cheered. At 7:15 AM it was time for breakfast, I had a bagel w/cream cheese and jelly with bacon and fresh fruit.

At 8 AM we went to the dayroom for a lecture on "reworking errors". This means if while doing guide work, we bump into people, objects, or hit something overhead, we have to rework it with the dog. In essence, we have to stop immediately, feel with our foot or hand and say "careful" go back around and try again with the dog until the dog learns. If a dog misses stopping at a curb it's different. For a down-curb we must turn around go back half the block and retry. For missing an up-curb, you keep going until the next block because you never want to go back into traffic. The dog will probably miss the up-curb the next time; we will be more aware and able to stop more quickly to show the dog. We then had obedience training with food distractions. Anya sniffed at the food tried to lick it once so I corrected her. She didn't go for the food again! She sometimes slouches when I tell her to sit or heel so I have to correct her but then she sometimes gets a little sensitive!

We then relieved and she went number one only. I got her harness and they gave me the new clasp. It works much better for me. The class was told that we are losing another student to a recurring health problem. The good news though is that they are keeping his dog for him in the hope he can return for next month's class. We didn't get a chance to say goodbye but I am sure he is devastated! We did guide work over to the buses, working on moving lefts and rights. It wasn't so smooth but we made it through! At the downtown lounge we practiced making right turns. Anya was a little hesitant with me because her trainer was walking with me and Anya kept looking to her for guidance. It will take more time but we did hit a good stride. She slowed down when there were major cracks and a construction crew nearby. She knows the route so well, she just wants to go! But, I have to correct her and make her wait for my command.

At 12:30 PM I had lunch. I had grilled salmon with steamed vegetables and couscous with a side salad and for dessert lemon meringue pie. Delicious! At 1:30 PM we met up to do a "reworking error" workshop. I had to leave Anya on tie-down in the room and work with Juno. So if Juno walks through a doorway, I have to say "no", tap on the door jamb and say "careful". If Juno almost runs me off the curb, I stop immediately, say "no" and more forcefully say "careful". After that, off to the relieving circle and Anya went number one. We guided to the bus but unfortunately I am petrified of stairs and we flew down them. I was so spooked, Anya was running circles around me! I gained my composure and control and made it onto the bus. I pulled an instructor to the side later and asked about the stair situation. You see, Anya walks me to the first step and stops but right in the middle. Anya sees the handrails as a clearance problem and steers me away and my arms can't reach the handrail from the middle. So the instructor suggested that I praise Anya for finding the steps, let go of the harness, grab hold of the leash, and "heel" her over to the side where I can find a handrail. Then I just heel her up or down the stairs until I become more comfortable. That works for me!

At the downtown lounge I decided to work on left turns. Anya has a tendency to go right because of my body positioning sometimes. So off we went and we did well. Our turns were good and we only had to rework a curb once; she hit it straight on after that! She didn't get distracted with a bunch of children and walked me slowly through a construction area! She is awesome. With the sun in my eyes sometimes I was "totally blinded" and I was very calm knowing Anya was guiding me! Back at the school I heeled

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Anya up the stairs and that worked out very well. I fed her and gave her water and out to relieve. She was done with both in 2 minutes but we had to stay the full 10 minutes anyway. I then groomed her and practiced "brushing" her teeth with a finger "puppet". She looks beautiful.

At 6:00 PM dinnertime. I had a chef's salad and it was good. No dessert for me tonight! At 7:00 PM we practiced more heeling with distractions up and down the hallway. Anya did pretty well. She is very curious and turns her head but doesn't go for the bait. Great job Anya.

#### **Saturday, Guide Dog School Day 7**

I was SO exhausted last night! It seems like we are all emotionally exhausted and our brains overloaded. Anya and I took a nap then got up at 9 PM for relieving. Only number one and off to bed. Anya was a little whiney and squirmy this morning but I ignored her (breaking my heart) until 6:20 AM when I fed her and gave her water. I could tell she was ready to "do her business". Out at 6:30 AM she immediately did both businesses. We played together the rest of the morning until breakfast at 7:15 AM and I had oatmeal, fresh fruit and an egg, cheese and ham muffin sandwich. It was tasty.

At 8 AM we all met in the dayroom. We had a lecture on public relations. If we wish, GDB will write a story about us and send it to our local papers and see if they will publish it. If we want, we can also be part of their Speakers Bureau to go to schools, etc. They will supply us with info packets and a short video. It is all totally voluntary. I should have brought my bio. They will video tape the graduation and give us a copy as well as take a picture of us with the dog, the puppy raiser and the class. Next week they will take a picture of us with our dogs. I have to figure out what to wear! They also discussed that people who donate \$15,000 to the organization can sponsor a team. So we may be sponsored and get to meet the benefactor. I don't know if we are or not. Afterwards we had an obedience session in which Anya was very distracted. There was a dog running around and a ball being thrown about. I had to constantly correct her today. We did the guide work over to the bus and it went great today. I heeled her at the stairs and that worked out well for me. Out we went on the "basic route" today and we had to rework a couple of errors. Once I almost would have fallen into a hole where a tree had been removed if the trainer hadn't intervened. So, I had to tell Anya "no", tap with my left foot and say "careful, careful". We turned around did it again and this time we went around perfectly! The other time she curled to the right on a down curb. If I had said "forward", we would have crossed diagonally. So we reworked it the same way and she did great! The instructor said we look good; it's just the third day and so far so good. Anya is getting used to me and I am getting used to her. On the way back I gave her water, left her harness on, and we did guide work down to the relieving circle. I took it off when we got to the curb and she did number one. I put the harness back on and we guided back!

At 12:30 PM it was lunchtime. I had the Cobb salad. It was tasty and the dessert was flan. I had to try the flan and see if it was up to snuff and let me tell you it was! At 1:30 PM we met again in the dayroom and had a lecture on playing with your guide dog. They showed us two toys: a ring with which we can play tug of war and a Kong with which the dog can play fetch. They will give us a choice of one of those toys to have, and they will also give us a Nylabone. These are the only recommended toys for the guide dogs. We should play with them every day for at least 15 minutes and we should be the primary person playing with them. That is to say, others can play with Anya, but consistently it should be me. We went to relieve and to my surprise Anya faked me out twice, she was in position and did nothing! So off to the downtown lounge we went. We worked the basic route again and I was a little frustrated because again she would have run me into the planter/tree area in the same spot and again later in the route. The trainer assured me I have nothing to worry about she is just testing and it will take time. That is why we are here for 28 days! So I felt better. The whole route wasn't bad though, she seemed to have corrected the whole curling to the right on down curbs which was a positive.

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### GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND, SAN RAFAEL, CA, CAMPUS

We got back and fed and gave her water and off to the relieving circle. She did me proud and did both her businesses! At 6 PM dinnertime, I had pizza with cheese, pepperoni, bell peppers, onions and mushrooms and a side salad. I did not have dessert. At 7 PM we had a workshop to review grooming and brushing their teeth so I decided to go just to make sure I was doing everything correctly. Grooming is no problem, but I have to work on brushing her teeth. She licks the toothpaste off before I can get it on her teeth! They gave me her Nylabones which she loves. We tried the toy ring and had fun with it! I said "that's enough" but she didn't let go. I had to correct her; then she stopped. I said "ok". We played for a second; then I said "that's enough". This time she stopped immediately.

#### **Sunday, Guide Dog School Day 8**

I forgot to mention yesterday that they also taught us to clean the dogs' ears. We use a cotton ball; drench it with a solution; put it over our index finger; and stick it in the dog's ear. I did it while Anya was chewing on her bone. I stuck my index finger all the way until my first knuckle. She perked up but it didn't bother her. Last night we watched the World Series and took a nap. Anya played with the Kong but all she does is bite it. You are supposed to play fetch with it. So I think we are going for the ring.

Today is our day "off". Unfortunately for me, when I changed the time last night on the alarm clock I somehow turned on the hourly alarm. So throughout the night every hour on the hour it announced the time! Of course I figured how to turn it off this morning. I still got up at 5:30 AM, and at 6:30 off to the relieving circle we went. I was worried because Anya is always ready to go and with the extra hour I hoped she wouldn't have an accident. She held on and did her business (both). Breakfast is still at 7:15 AM and I had a vegetable and egg quiche with a croissant. It was delicious! I then went and did laundry. Of course I had to ask one of the staff members to help me. The machines are way newer than the one I have at home. We then went to the room and played with the ring for a while and Anya got to chew her bone for a while as well. She is so spoiled. At 8:45 AM off to relieving and to my surprise she did nothing!

At 10:30 we decided to go to an optional class about "T-Touch" doggy massage. I thought they had trained Anya to massage me! No such luck! We learned to massage the dogs' ears, rub the gums, then do circular motions over the body and rub from the belly to the back going against the hair. It was hard to get Anya to relax, but once I started the T-Touch she was out! She loved it and was so relaxed. I tell you, she is spoiled! At 11:45 AM gave Anya water and off to relieve, just number one. We then went back to the room and out to the enclosed patio and tried playing with the Kong. We seem to have hit a rhythm with it and she likes it too. At 12:30 PM lunch I had a mixed green salad with fresh asparagus, cucumbers, carrots, goat cheese. It was good and so was the cherry cheesecake.

At 1:30 PM off to relieve again. This time David was here to see it! Anya just loved him! And of course she did nothing this time! So we hung out with David for the next 3 hours. I had to leave her on tie-down when David and I went to visit the kennel. It is huge and we saw some dogs and puppies. Back we went for Anya and walked around the grounds. It is just gorgeous! David saw 2 deer wandering around the campus and of course took some pictures.

At 4:30 PM we sadly said goodbye to David. At 4:45 PM I fed and gave her water and off to the relieving circle we went. Before we went out though, the instructor told us that another classmate is going get a change-out dog. His "Mr. Mellow" barked at another dog and student and would not stop, then growled at the classmate's dog. Of course my classmate was devastated because he had become attached to "Mr. Mellow". We all have become attached to our dogs! So Anya did both her business, and when we came back in, this classmate had his new best friend, another male yellow Lab. He is much more active; let's hope this works out for both of them! At 6:00 PM dinner, I had roast beef, mixed vegetables and mashed

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potatoes. It was good. No dessert tonight. At 7 PM I gave Anya water. The rest of the night we will just relax for tomorrow it's back to work!

#### **Monday, Guide Dog School Day 9**

Well, last night was so hard for me. After I'd sent my e-mail, the trainer was working with the new dog and told us, if we wanted, we could heel our dogs up and down the hallway while she distracted the dogs with her dog and a ball, etc. So I thought what the heck. As we are walking Anya got easily distracted and I tried the corrections and she still would not focus, so I had to do the "high collar correction". And it broke my heart. Here I am lifting the collar high below her ears and chin, tightening up and folding the leash up so I had a good grip and yanked up. Boy did that get her attention! After that, she was focused! We then went back to the room and I tried playing with her but she was a bit mopey, so I did some T-Touches on her and that got her to de-stress, I think.

All went well this morning, I fed her and gave her water and she did both things at the relieving circle. At 7:15 AM my breakfast was oatmeal, muffin and a sausage. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and had a lecture about "keeping our orientation and mobility". The analogy was that the dog is a ship and I am the captain. I need to know where I am and where I'm going. The dog takes the directions from me. Before the lecture started a dog ran down the hallway. Anya sat up but didn't try to go after it. I was happy, and with one leash correction she was lying back down! Unfortunately, my roommate was still in our room and had her dog's leash under her foot, or so she thought. Her dog heard the distraction dog and went running after it! My roommate was so embarrassed and appalled! The trainers told her she has to remember the dogs are trained but they are still dogs and we shouldn't be lax with them. Off to the relieving circle again and this time nothing for Anya!

Off we went on the buses and to the downtown lounge. We did the basic route and this time we did the obedience sequence on the sidewalk. Anya did okay but she was a little distracted but pulled through. I gave her a kibble at the end per the trainer's instruction. From now on it is up to us if we want to use kibble as a reward for extraordinary work. The route went well but she was a little sluggish but that was okay by me because she didn't run me into any tree cut-outs today! On the way back I had to give her another high collar correction because she kept trying to lie down on the floor of the bus when she was supposed to be sitting. I tried telling her to sit and gave a couple corrections but nothing. As soon as she felt me pull the collar up, she sat up. But I can't use the collar correction as a threat. If I start, I have to finish. She sat up the rest of the trip. It seems like all the dogs are being little pains today. The trainers say they are getting comfortable with us so we need to be on our toes!

I gave Anya water and she lapped the whole bowl up and off to relieve, again nothing. At 12:30 PM lunch, I had the most fabulous salad, a French Niçoise salad. I can't rave about it enough with mixed greens, red onion, fresh green beans, olives, red potatoes and tuna (yum, yum). And a peach cobbler! At 1:30 PM we met in the dayroom for a lecture from the veterinary staff but it was cancelled due to a staff shortage there, so it will be rescheduled. They went over ear cleaning as a review. Off to relieve and again Anya did nothing! Back to the downtown lounge we went. Anya and I had the BEST walk so far! It was wonderful and exciting!! They had given me a shorter harness handle and that worked out better for me. We were both on! She didn't make any mistakes and neither did I! I went out with the supervisor, and he said tomorrow to tell the trainer to stay further back because things are going so well. I know everyone has their good days and not so good, today was my great day! On the ride back the supervisor told the class that as a whole we are above average. The way we are bonding and working with the dogs is more like people who have just finished week 2! Maybe he is just trying to make us feel better, but I'll take it as a compliment!

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At 4:45 PM time to feed and give Anya water. She was right on track and did her things. I was getting a little worried, you know. Then I groomed her and brushed her teeth (I use the term brush loosely since she licks the toothpaste off before I can get it in her mouth!) We then played with the ring and the Kong (now I think she likes the Kong more) and I gave her a bone to chew for awhile. At 6 PM dinner. I had chili con carne with cornbread and of course it was tasty. No dessert tonight for me. We won't have a lecture tonight, so we will hang out and relax. Oh I forgot to mention that one of the dogs has a urinary tract infection so she was resting all day today. I think she will be able to go out tomorrow and work with her partner.

#### **Tuesday, Guide Dog School Day 10**

Last night was nice. Anya and I went to the dayroom to watch some television but we were pleasantly surprised to hear one of the students playing the piano and then the guitar! Anya and I sat on the floor and played and then I did some T-Touches on her. We both enjoyed it.

At 6:30 AM Anya had her breakfast and refused the water (typical). At the relieving circle she did both (queen status intact...ha, ha). At 7:15 AM I had breakfast and it was delicious, banana pancakes and bacon. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and worked on alternative corrections. We discussed the high collar correction (which I know too well now and so does Anya), and they passed around a spike collar and a soft collar that goes with it. This collar is used so you don't have to give strong corrections. But, the trainers will come up to us individually and see if we need it. We all then got a Gentle Leader (head collar) made of nylon which goes around the mouth/nose area and fastens back behind the ears. I got Anya a black one so you can hardly tell she has it on. It connects to the leash and collar so the corrections aren't that hard to make. I for sure need it because I can tell Anya is living up to her spitfire reputation! One of the trainers came into the room clapping and yelling with her dog running around, Anya stood up and I immediately gave her a correction to settle down.

We then went to relieve. Anya didn't feel like doing anything. So off to the buses we went. At the downtown lounge we did our basic route and the trainer, instead of being right behind us, was about a half block away. The route went well and we did obedience training during the route. At first Anya was a little hesitant but then she was right on, and I gave her a kibble for it. She got startled again when a dolly fell inside a truck and made a loud crash, and in fact it startled me a bit. She jumped and took off; the harness slipped out of my hands but not the leash. Anya calmed down immediately, and we went back over to the truck so she could see it, and I gave her another kibble. I spoke to the trainer and supervisor about this and they are not worried because she recovers very quickly. Back to the school and gave her water and off to relieve; she did her business.

At 12:30 PM we had lunch: a shrimp salad and for dessert warm apple pie! At 1:30 PM we met in the dayroom for a lecture on how to handle "dog interaction and dog attacks". This lecture was about what can happen when you encounter an aggressive or barking dog that is not on leash, is behind a fence, or is trying to interact with our dog while it is working. We should continue working, keep the dog focused so it will not pay attention and cause the other dog to attack. Also, if the other dog does attack, we should stay away, not get involved. In this case, our safety comes first. If we try to get in the middle, we can get bitten by either dog. If we are with a sighted guide, they should try and poke a stick or cane at the offending dog, shoot some water with lemon in it at the dog, etc. Also, it is against the law for any dog, friendly or not, to harass a guide dog while it is working! During this lecture, one of the trainers came in with a dog that had bells on the collar. Anya didn't get up at first but then she sat up. I stood up and gave her a leash correction down and she stayed down the rest of the time. She was attentive to the dog, though and that is okay as long as she stays down! I really feel with the Gentle Leader I am able to give her more effective corrections.

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Back to the relieving circle and she did nothing. We went to the downtown lounge and did the basic route again and she was kind of slow but did everything great. Another supervisor walked with me and said we are working well as a team and I am fair, give praises appropriately and correct effectively. We got back and I gave Anya food and water and all she did was number one. I then groomed her and with the trainer's help tried brushing her teeth. (David will have to help me at home). I then went on a grounds orientation and that was fun to see all the areas we can go and just hang out, very pretty campus! At 6 PM time for my dinner which was pasta with meat sauce, garlic bread and a side salad (yum), no dessert.

At 7 PM we all (including the retrain students) met in the dayroom to hear a lecture about "the public and your guide dog". The instructor just talked about how we are going to be advocates and that less than 1% of the population uses a guide dog, so people will be curious. We need to be polite yet educate people not to try and pet the dog while it is "working". Also, to educate the public on how the corrections we give are not harmful to the dog in any way. Our safety is at risk if anyone tries to distract or play with the dog while they are guiding us. She also discussed the laws that allow the guide dog in any public facility. There are two major exceptions: a zoo/wild animal park and a bed & breakfast that has six rooms or fewer. We also saw a video in which Senator Bob Dole explained our rights in hotels/motels and restaurants.

We are both tired now but we have to stay up until the 9 PM relieving time! See you tomorrow.

### **Wednesday, Guide Dog School Day 11**

Well, last night there were no problems. We went out to the relieving circle and she did number one. This morning was the usual routine for us, I wake up at 5:30 AM, shower and get ready and by 6:30 AM Anya has been fed, offered water (she never wants water in the morning) and off to relieve! She did both this morning. At 7:15 AM it was time for my breakfast, which consisted of a country omelet, hash browns and toast with jam...delicious!

Right before my morning lecture I received news about a death in David's family. I was devastated! I was late coming into the lecture and the trainers asked me if everything was okay. I told them what happened; they gave me a hug and said I could miss this morning's lecture and stay in the room if I wanted to. I decided not to, because it would make me feel lonelier. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and I put the Gentle Leader on Anya and had a lecture about leaving the dog alone. We now need to leave the dog on tie-down for 5 minutes, then 10, 15 and so on so they get used to it. We should stand at the door and make sure they don't whine or bark. During the day, the dog should not be left alone for more than four hours and at night for no longer than eight hours. During the lecture, the supervisor walked in with two dogs to distract us, but Anya did very well, she stayed down but was very attentive to them. Good girl, Anya!

You know I am here physically but that is about it, my spirit and mind are with my family and I feel an overwhelming sense of guilt for not being there for them when they need me the most. I know David has told me that I need to finish this training and is supportive and understanding, but I still can't help feeling that way. Poor Anya, she probably can tell I am kind of out of it today! She didn't do anything at the relieving circle and off we went on the bus. This time we went to the lagoon, where there are ducks, geese and lots of other birds. We did our obedience training there and boy was Anya distracted! We finally got through it and took a walk around the lagoon. Anya was so excited I was practically running behind her! I tried to use the "steady" command, but she would slow down for a second then take off again! I kept losing grip of the harness. The trainers are going to look into putting something on the harness handle so I can grip it better and maybe adjusting the length of the harness as well, since she was pulling much harder this morning. We all then went to a residential neighborhood (where homes are

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valued over \$1 million) to take a walk. The whole class has been so supportive and they are helping me get through this day. They have become my extended family! I decided to do the short route and we did very well. Anya's pace was much better but my hand was still a little sore from the lagoon.

When we got back I gave Anya some water, which she drank this time and off to relieve; she did nothing. At 12:30 PM time for me to have lunch, and I had a mixed green salad and for dessert a blondie bar (think giant chocolate chip cookie)! We then met in the dayroom to have a lecture on "working your dog in buildings". We need to know where the building is and understand that, if we go often enough, the dog will recognize it and automatically start going there. We talked about going into elevators, revolving doors and escalators. Soon we will be working our dogs in buildings here in San Rafael to put this knowledge to the test. We cannot put the dogs through automatic revolving doors or on moving walkways because on the walkways their paws could get caught on the teeth at the end (unlike escalators that have a distinguishable level so the dog knows when to jump off). Off to relieve again and nothing. I got a new harness (again). First, they gave me a regular which was too long; then an extra short which was too short; now we are trying the short.

At the downtown lounge we walked the basic route with a classmate and her dog. We teamed up and "leap frogged" through the route. In essence, I would lead the first block, then she would lead, etc. The new harness worked great! Every time we were behind the other team, Anya would show that she definitely doesn't like to be behind; she likes to be in front. Anya didn't clear a pedestrian very well and I bumped into someone at a corner. So, I apologized then asked the pedestrian if she wouldn't mind standing there while I "reworked" this path again so Anya learned to clear it better. She said no problem and took off! I guess she really didn't understand! The trainer told me I did a good job articulating my position but most people feel they got in your way and just want to move. Oh, well. I reworked it with the trainer standing there and Anya did great.

When we returned it was Anya's time for dinner and water. We then we out to relieve and again nothing! So at 6 PM, time for my dinner. I had a sea bass with rice and mixed vegetables. It was good. At 7 PM we will do some "heeling" practice up and down the hallway with their Gentle Leaders on.

### **Thursday, Guide Dog School Day 12**

Last night after 7 PM I left Anya in the room for about 10 minutes and she did very well. No barking or whining. The heeling practice up and down the hallway with the Gentle Leader on went fabulously. At 9 PM off to relieve and she did both.

This morning the usual routine, by 6:30 AM Anya was fed and off to relieve. She did both this morning. At 7:15 my breakfast consisted of an applesauce muffin, a sausage and a bowl of fresh fruit. I left her in the room alone this time for about 20 minutes and she was fine. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom to have a lecture on "traffic checks and total barricades". Before the lecture, the trainer, Dina, who trained Anya and who Anya adores, ran around the room yelling "puppy, puppy, puppy" and of course Anya stood up and I had to correct her two separate times to lie down. "Traffic checks" means if a car cuts in front of us or zooms behind us, etc. "Total barricades" is when a car or object is completely blocking the path (like a car in a driveway blocking the pedestrian sidewalk). If the engine is on, the dog should stop at a distance until the car has cleared. If the engine is off, then the dog should take us up to the car so we can feel it and maneuver our way around it. Today we will be split up into two groups: one does traffic checks, the other walks into stores. I am in the traffic check group so tomorrow I will do the stores.

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For the obedience this morning we went out on campus. They had us stop, and unbeknownst to us we were near some speakers that made howling and barking noises. Needless to say Anya was distracted but I finally got her attention.

Off we went to relieve and she did nothing. Then off to the downtown lounge. It was an amazing experience! Anya was right on! First, one of the supervisors followed in a car and we had a trainer next to us. The car pulls into the driveway blocking our path; Anya stops and waits for the car to move; then I tell her to "hop up" and off we go. Next, the car has the engine off so she takes me right to it so I can feel it. Then I direct her around and she stops at the curb, continues going around, stops at the other side of the curb; when I tell her to go forward she hangs a left and continues on the same direction we were going. When a car tries to turn in front of us when we are trying to cross the street and I've told Anya forward, she "intelligently disobeys" until the car has passed, then I tell her forward again and off we go! If the car zooms behind us pretty close she speeds up to make sure we don't get hit. The most exhilarating part (and most scary) was when we were walking down the street and the car pulled right in front of us (of course, with no peripheral vision, it took me by surprise). Anya stopped on a dime and so did I! She blows my mind! Then the car was coming toward us and Anya kept backing up away from it and so did I. My heart was racing, Anya was saving my life!

Back at the school, time for water, she drank a little, then off to relieve and she did number one. We then met in the dayroom and the instructor read us a menu from Chili's so we can order food. I asked what the prices are and she said it was on the house! They will order in advance and take us out on Saturday so we can practice going to a restaurant with our dogs! They think of everything here!

At 12:30 PM it's time for lunch and I had a Chinese chicken salad and for dessert an apricot cake. It was delicious. I then groomed Anya and at 1:30 PM we all met in the dayroom for pictures. Outside we took a class picture then individually we went to the library for our own pictures with our dogs. After all that we went out to the relieving circle and Anya did number one. Then onto the bus again. This time we did a "bus-to-lounge" route. They parked the bus about five blocks away from the lounge. The instructors were scattered around, and we went 3 minutes after each other to find our way back to the lounge. It was so exciting and fun! We felt like we were on our own! We made it with no major problems. After we had all made it we had the option of doing the basic route again (yawn), calling it a day or walking back to the bus. We unanimously voted to walk back to the bus again in increments of 3 minutes. And we did fine! We loved it! Anya had fun and had a good pace. It was something different for her!

Once we got back, I fed her and gave her water. Off to relieve and she did both. At 6 PM I had dinner, it was meatloaf with mashed potatoes and gravy and mixed vegetables. It was tasty. At 7 PM our group decided to meet in my roommate's and my room to discuss pitching in and getting our instructors a gift. We also went over the Chili's menu so we all knew what we wanted to order. We really have a great rapport with each other and we are a great support for each other. I tried to give Anya some water but she refused it. I now give her a bone and she chews for a while then she wants to bring it to me so I can throw it and she'll bring it back to me (I think she thinks it's the Kong toy)...silly Anya!

### **Friday, Guide Dog School Day 13**

Last night went well. At 9 PM Anya did her business (both) and off to bed we went. The last few nights have been crazy out in the relieving circle, it has been very windy and the dogs have been going crazy! They are hyper chasing each other, jumping, etc!

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Same routine this morning, fed, watered and relieved Anya by 6:30 AM and she did both. At 7:15 AM I had breakfast which consisted of a fried egg, hash browns and cinnamon-raisin toast...yum, yum. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and to our surprise no lecture! (yaa, yaa). They brought in 2 dogs running around and Anya only stood up once. I had to correct her, but after that, she just kept an eye on them. We did the obedience sequence outside and again the 2 dogs were running around. Anya was distracted a lot of the time, and wouldn't do about half of the commands right away, the other half required corrections to get her attention. Oh, well, it takes time! Off to relieve and she did nothing.

At the downtown lounge a classmate and her dog went out with Anya and me and a trainer. We went pretend shopping. We decided to go to a pet store. It is great doing guide work, Anya was terrific. The trainer took us in one by one, so Anya and I were first. Boy, Anya was in heaven! I kept correcting her, she was sniffing the food, jumping for toys that the trainer showed her but at least it only took one correction for each bad behavior! We went up to the counter and she showed me how to put Anya in front of me, facing sideways, and having her sit while I make my purchase. It started to rain so we waited inside while the other team went in. We returned to the lounge and it was only sprinkling by then.

When we got back, it was time for water and relieving and Anya did number one. I was called into the instructor's office for my mid-week evaluation. This was just to ask me if there was any specific training that I need with Anya which would be relevant when I get home. I couldn't think of any because we will have building, escalator, and downtown San Francisco training which I think that should cover what I need. I told them I go to a lot of sporting events, movie theaters, amusement parks, museums, etc. All they said was to be aware of what is on the floor so Anya doesn't eat it, and to put a blanket down so she can lie on it and not get so dirty. They asked how it was going with brushing her teeth and I admitted it is a challenge for me. They will try and work with me some more, but I can also ask David to help and they are okay with that (did you hear that David?). They asked me if I thought they had found a good match for me and I said "of course"! They told me it has been a pleasure to work with me; they think things are going very well but not to let Anya get away with anything! Watch out Anya!!

At 12:30 PM I had lunch, a chef's salad and for dessert a chocolate raspberry pie...great food. At 1:30 PM we met at the relieving circle. Anya didn't do anything. We did the "bus-to-lounge" thing again but the route this time was a little longer. Anya and I did fine; this time we were separated by 5 minute intervals. The supervisor gave us a speech about how well we are all doing and how cooperative we are. We all were like, "how else should we be? This organization does so much for us!" We all voted to walk back to the buses. On my route some random lady gave me a dog biscuit for Anya, weird, huh? I didn't give it to her, but the trainers did not say whether they planted this lady or not. On the other hand, a completely blind classmate with his dog had some serious craziness going on in his route! As they were walking a big dog jumped out of a moving car and raced towards them! My classmate stopped and had his dog sit. The owner of the dog stopped in the middle of traffic to run after her dog! (All the while the supervisor was a few blocks away watching this.) My classmate handled it well, and no intervention was needed. Further down the route, a lady in big high heels was walking a chocolate Lab which was dressed as a pumpkin. The dog raced towards my classmate and his dog while the lady tried to control her dog! I tell you it was craziness!! Nothing happened, but my classmate tried to keep calm and keep his dog focused.

We got back and I played with Anya trying to teach her to fetch. I think she kind of has the hang of it. I then fed her and tried to give her water. As I was bending down to show her the bowl, she looked up at me and bam! We collided. My lip hurts. Off to relieve and she did both! At 6 PM time for dinner, I had sweet and sour pork with rice and a side salad. It was delicious. I then went and groomed Anya, we played with the Kong and the ring for a while and I gave her a doggy massage. We had such fun. Right now, she is napping in the room. In the dayroom they have the fireplace going, so I am headed that way right now!

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# MELISSA'S JOURNAL

## GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND, SAN RAFAEL, CA, CAMPUS

### Saturday, Guide Dog School Day 14

Last night after sending the e-mail, I went to the dayroom with the fire going and just chit-chatted with my classmates. At 9 PM I had to wake up Anya, who was none too pleased, but off we went to the relieving circle. She did number one and we went back to bed.

Yesterday, I forgot to mention that GDB staff members will sit at different tables during the meals and get to know us. So, yesterday at lunch Michael Hingson, who escaped on 9/11 from the World Trade Center with his guide dog, was at one of the tables! Those at his table were truly awed to be sitting next to him and his guide dog. He has been coming to GDB for 39 years and got his first dog here when he was 16. After 9/11, he decided to work for Guide Dogs for the Blind since there is so much he can do to increase the awareness of guide dog organizations and working teams. The money from his speaking engagements goes directly to Guide Dogs for the Blind. I hope he has an opportunity to speak to the whole class in the next two weeks.

This morning, same routine: fed Anya, gave her water and off to relieve by 6:30 AM. She did both this morning. At 7:15 AM I had breakfast and it was scrambled egg, sausage and a Danish! At 8 AM we all (including the re-trains) met in the dayroom to hear a lecture on "Going Home with Your Guide Dog" and "Speakers Bureau". So, they just opened it up to questions. Most of us wanted to know how to handle family and friends with our guide dog. Most people were of the opinion that the less you have people trying to pet your dog the better because your dog may go in search of petting and get distracted from guiding you. We should build that bond and it literally takes six months to a year to solidify that bond. The Speakers Bureau is a list we can be on and possibly get requests from groups in our local areas for speeches and presentations about guide dogs. I decided to go ahead and be on that list. They will give me a packet of information so I can be prepared for presentations for school children and groups of various ages as well.

We then went out to relieve and Anya did number one. Then off to the lagoon. Anya and I and another team from our class got to go in a minivan to see what it is like to take your dog in a car. That was cool! I wasn't looking forward to the lagoon because the last time she was so distracted and hyper. But, the trainers said you should go back to those places that were so difficult and keep working at it. Once we got there and started the obedience sequence, Anya was much better! I wouldn't say she did everything 100% but she had a definite improvement from last time. I was very pleased! We then went to the downtown lounge and did the basic route with the other team. Boy, Anya is so bored with that route! At the end of course we had a major distraction: a woman was walking towards us with two little dogs on a leash. Both dogs went for the little dogs. The trainer was with us and told us to stop immediately, let go off the harness and do the obedience sequence of "sits and downs". Anya did very well, got refocused on me and the lady stood there in front of us with her dogs as distractions while we did this (finally a pedestrian who helped out). So we made it back okay.

Back for a quick relieve and water break and off to Chili's for lunch. We all sat together and it was amazing, you couldn't tell there were eight dogs together! Not one made a sound; they were excellent! We all had fun and I had the steak fajitas, yummy. Back for another relieving at which Anya did nothing and back on the bus for another "bus-to-lounge" walk. This one was even farther and we came in from the other side. We made it unscathed! We all felt tired and had a long day out! The re-trains were also doing the same "bus-to-lounge" route. After we all made it they just brought the buses back and we finally headed back to the dorms! Then it was time to feed and they gave us a Heartgard pill to put in with the food to prevent heartworm (we have to give it to them on the first of every month). Anya was whining so badly I thought she was dying to go relieve. I gave her food and she didn't want any water. Before we could go to the relieving circle, we had to try out a new way to relieve (only three of us started today). It is called curbing. Instead of being on the street and having them walk around us in circles, we stand on the

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## **MELISSA'S JOURNAL**

### **GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND, SAN RAFAEL, CA, CAMPUS**

curb and walk side to side while they are on the edge of the street closer to the curb. Well, Anya didn't want to do anything so I thought she was uncomfortable curbing, so I went back to the traditional method and yet she did nothing! She faked me out. I guess all the whining was because she was hungry!

At 6 PM I had beef stroganoff and Cinderella pie (basically pumpkin pie) for dinner. At 7 PM we met in the dayroom to have a lecture on Advantage flea control. They will supply us with Heartgard and Advantage for the working life of the dog. How great is that? I thought it would be harder to apply but it's not. Just open this little tube, pull the fur from the area between the shoulder blades to expose her skin and squeeze. That's it! Apply on the first of every month. We then played and I gave her water. Then some of us just hung around talking and laughing and then I cleaned her ears. At 9 PM time to relieve and we did the curbing thing and she did both!

### **Sunday, Guide Dog School Day 15**

I received Anya's ID tag yesterday. It is a round, metal tag placed on her collar. One side has the inscription of Guide Dogs for the Blind with their 800 number and the other side reads Anya and has her ID number (which is also tattooed in her ears).

This morning for some reason I still woke up at 5:30 AM got ready and then fed Anya, tried to give her water and then off to relieve. We continue with this curbing method and she does number one only. I start my laundry and at 7:15 AM I have breakfast. I had oatmeal with brown sugar, scrambled eggs with potato, ham and toast with jam. It was tasty as always!

At 8:45 AM off to relieve again and she did nothing. We then played with the Kong for awhile. At 10:30 AM went to another class on T-Touch. This time I started on the ears and Anya was out, she even started snoring a little bit. Then we did the legs, which she liked, but when I did her tail, she jumped up. That one is not relaxing for her! Lastly, I did a whole body rub to end the session. At 11:45 AM I tried to give her water but she refused, then off to relieve and this time she went number two, but only after I came off the curb! Then we walked around the grounds for a bit and I groomed her. I noticed some white stuff on her fur and asked the trainer about it and she said it was normal after a couple of days to see that when you apply Advantage.

At 12:30 PM I had lunch, a mixed green salad which was nice and refreshing with a raspberry meringue pie. At 1:30 PM time to relieve again and she did nothing. A classmate's daughter came to visit and take her to the mall, so she asked my roommate and me to join them. So off we went without our dogs. I missed Anya, but it was nice to leave the campus for a couple of hours. Surprise, I didn't buy anything! I fed Anya and gave her water at 4:15 PM today. She did number one at relieving time.

At 4:30 PM the gift shop staff came into the dayroom to make a presentation and show us everything they have available for sale. Just about anything you can think of, they have it! There was SO much stuff! I ordered a couple of things. After Wednesday, I can pick them up. At 6 PM I had dinner; it was cheese tortellini, salad and garlic bread. It was delicious. At 7 PM I gave Anya water. Our group has been talking about having a "reunion/retreat" around Spring/Summer of 2005. That sounds great and we are all interested.

Now, I might take a nap until the 9 PM relieving or...?

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# MELISSA'S JOURNAL

## GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND, SAN RAFAEL, CA, CAMPUS

### Monday, Guide Dog School Day 16

Last night I wanted to take a nap before the 9 PM relieving, but my group all got together and we met in the dayroom and had the desserts we didn't eat at Chili's (molten chocolate cake and ice cream). Then we all sat around and laughed for a couple of hours and time flew by! We had fun and we all decided our "reunion/retreat" will be Summer 2005. At relieving time Anya did number one.

Typical morning, fed, watered and relieved by 6:30 AM. Anya did number one. At 7:15 AM my breakfast was waffles, fresh fruit and yogurt, and yes, it was good. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom with the retrains and had a lecture from Graduate Services. He discussed how we can call the 800 phone number with any questions and or problems. Also, they will come and follow up with us individually at home after the first year and make sure all is well and again in the second year. After that, it is our choice if we wish to have them visit or not. The emergency program is when you don't have a scheduled visit anytime soon and you need someone right away; they will fly in to take care of any problems we are having. He also discussed that after one year we can request legal ownership of our dog. None of the services change though, so it is up to us. He also discussed the \$250/year stipend for veterinary care. It is available if we need it. If we can afford it ourselves, that saves them money but if we can't then by all means they will help pay. No more than \$250/year unless it is major surgery, an emergency, etc. There is a Graduate Advisory Council if we would like to join, it's a two-year service. It was just amazing how this organization is so supportive and willing to go that extra mile for each of us to make sure we make a successful guide team! Guide Dogs for the Blind rules!

We then went outside to do the obedience sequence. The trainers were running around us yelling, clapping their hands trying to distract the dogs. Anya did pretty well. A few corrections, but she is getting better. We then went to relieve which she finally did number two once I stopped "curbing". They said to keep trying until she gets used to it. Off to the bus! We did another "bus-to-lounge" route. This time, in the middle of the route they took us into the Albert Building and we worked (individually) how to get in the building, find the elevator, get in (by the way that elevator is tiny, it creaks, and once we stopped it still felt like it dropped a little), get out of the elevator, find the stairs, go down the stairs and exit the building! I told the trainer it felt a little awkward because I had to keep dropping the harness, then get ready, pick it up, etc. So I am just going to keep the harness in my hand and that is much easier for me! We found the lounge no problem, although, there was what I thought a crazy man behind us yelling at one point. He was cussing and it scared me because I had no idea who he was yelling at. I told Anya to "hop up" but it seemed like the voice was getting closer! Suddenly a bus stopped next to us on the curb and the guy was pounding on the windows telling the bus driver off because he had almost run over him! Whew, thank God it wasn't at us! We walked on! We then went back from the lounge to the bus, except that one classmate stayed behind. He finally had a great walk with his dog where nothing crazy happened, so he wanted to stop while he was ahead. We all then went back to pick him up.

When we got back, I gave Anya water and off to relieve, again nothing from the curb, so I stepped down and she went number one. We will keep trying! At 12:30 PM for lunch I had a spinach salad and for dessert banana pudding. It was delicious as always. At 1:30 PM we went off to relieve and as I was going out, Lori from Admissions said that Anya's puppy raiser would be here for the graduation! She is 18 years old and this is the second puppy she and her mother have raised for Guide Dogs for the Blind. She wrote that as a puppy, Anya would sleep next to her on a blanket on the floor. Anya was very attached to her and their beagle. She would put oil in with the dog food to keep her coat shiny (I need to ask the vet about this) and that she was very sweet and would not need hard corrections (yeah, right, remember that high collar correction?). They live in Utah. I don't know why, but I got so emotional when I heard all this information. I was close to tears!

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### **GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND, SAN RAFAEL, CA, CAMPUS**

At the relieving circle, Anya did nothing. Back onto the bus for another "bus-to-lounge" route. This time, halfway through the route we went into City Hall. The route was great but working in the building wasn't so hot! First, the stairs going in, I tried not to heel her in but let her guide me. I was so nervous that I guess I wasn't following very well and she kept stopping. Then she was supposed to stop at the doorway but she just went right past it, so we had to rework it. Then on the stairs inside she didn't stop at the first step to show them to me; she just went up. So we had to rework that! Lastly, she tried to go through a hallway instead of onto an elevator. But, the trainer said that was acceptable because they are trained to look for an opening. The way out was much better! Back at the lounge I told the trainers to help me work on stairs. I need to get over my fear of falling! We worked back to the bus and that went fine.

At 4:45 PM time to feed Anya, give her water and off to relieve. Anya went number two off the curb! I then went outside and groomed her and brushed her teeth. At 6 PM I had dinner which was beef stew and cornbread and was fabulous. We are now going back to the room to play awhile because we have no evening lecture tonight!

### **Tuesday, Guide Dog School Day 17**

Last night I was getting ready to take a nap but our group decided to meet in the dayroom. We popped some microwave popcorn and just talked. It was really fun, and can you believe I didn't have any popcorn? It's true. At 9 PM Anya did both things and off we went to bed.

This morning was the same routine. By 6:30 AM I had Anya fed, she ignored her water and off to relieve. She did number two off the curb! At 7:15 AM I had breakfast which was a fried egg, hash browns and an English muffin, oh yeah and some oatmeal! It was all tasty. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and had a lecture about escalators. Those of us who wish to learn to work them with our dogs will have the opportunity this morning at the mall. The others will do stairs and elevators at the mall. Only four of us did the escalators. After the lecture I kind of didn't want to. Even though the dogs have been trained, there is still a risk involved because they can cut their paws, or if the hair at the bottom of their feet is too long, it can get stuck and their toenails can get stuck as well! After that warning, we were all hesitant but the trainers said, at least learn the method and if you decide not to use escalators, that's okay. If we don't use them often enough (at least once a month) the dogs will forget how to use them safely. Off to the bus we went and Anya and I decided to take a longer, more scenic route to the bus and it was nice. The obstacle course had been changed but Anya did fine.

First, we went to a grocery store. They took us out individually. I tried heeling Anya and steering a cart with my right hand, but that was too awkward. Then I held on to the cart with my right hand while the trainer steered and that was fine. So, I decided to try the "follow" command. The trainer was in front of me, I had Anya's harness and I told her "forward, follow" and through the store we went! Up and down different aisles, pretending to get items off the shelves, it was fun! I even went to the register and pretended to pay. Some students actually did buy some things! Then off to the mall. We had to hang around a bit until the stores opened because we got there at 9:30 AM and the mall didn't open until 10 AM. Some students went and bought some coffee. Finally, it was our turn to go! We went down to Sears. It was nice walking with Anya somewhere other than downtown San Rafael. It was actually something I would really do...shopping! First I went up and down the escalators by myself to get the hang of it. I was scared! Then it was with Anya! She finds the escalator, then I go to the edge, probe with my foot and say "ready, let's go" and step on! I have the leash pretty close to me, I then have my right foot on the step in front of us and I am leaning forward on the railing to feel when it starts to level off, then I let go of part of the leash say "ready, ready, let's go" (in a much more excited tone) and walk off. The first couple of times I was too hesitant and Anya leaped off. We then walked over to Macy's and tried it there and it went really well. I think I am getting the hang of it!

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When we got back we had to rework part of the obstacle course. I guess I moved my body the first time we went through so I wouldn't bump this barrier (and so did a lot of other students). After the rework, it was all good. I gave her some water which she drank and off to relieve. She didn't want to do anything off the curb so when I went down on the circle she did number one. At 12:30 PM it was lunchtime and I had a chicken Caesar salad. It was very good! And for dessert I had pecan pie. At 1:30 PM we met in the dayroom and the trainer read us our puppy report. Anya was raised by a teenager and was taken to high school every day and to work. She went to the mall and the movies and would sit through 3 hour church services! After they were all read, we went out to go to the kennels. But, the supervisor asked me to wait. I was thinking, "did I do something wrong?" She pulled me to the side and said that Anya and I have been chosen to be sponsored by Mr. & Mrs. McKenzie from Newport Beach, CA! I was so touched; of course I said yes that was fine! This couple donated \$15,000 to Guide Dogs. All I have to do is thank them during the graduation ceremony because they will not be there but they will get a copy of the video. Now I have to come up with a speech! Two other students were sponsored: one team by another couple in California and the second team by Betty White (yes, *the* Betty White, and no she's not coming to the graduation!).

At the kennels, we did obedience training. To my pleasant surprise Anya did very well. We got a tour of the kennels and even walked in the one that Anya was in for a bit! We then were split in two groups of four each and saw a vet. She had all the information about our dogs. No big surprises for Anya: just ear infections. She'd been considered as a possible breeder dog but the cardiologist determined she couldn't because she has a small leaky valve, which is hardly detectable and will not interfere with her work. Hey, we were meant to be together! I have a leaky valve in my heart too. It was so funny at the vet's office. After the vet examined her (oh yeah, the folds in her ear need cleaning and her skin is a little dry)...no big deal...anyway, when they brought the other dogs up for examination, Anya would sit up and keep moving her head around to see everything! If the vet got in her way, she would move her head to the other side, it was hilarious; she is so nosey! (Yeah, yeah, I can hear you guys saying "just like you"). They put another tag on her collar that states where and when she had her rabies vaccination. We then came back and relieved, Anya did number one.

We then got on the bus. Because we were running late, instead of another "bus-to-lounge" route, we went to a dirt bike path by the water where we could walk as far as we wanted. Anya wanted to run! I had to keep steadying her, she gets so happy to go to new places. We went about a mile and a half while the others went three miles. It was cold and that was far enough for me! We got back and fed, watered and relieved the dogs later than usual. Anya did both. By the time we were back in it was time for dinner. I had pasta with shrimp and a side salad. Delicious as always! Then at 7 PM time to relieve again, she did nothing. Then back on the bus for our first night route. I was so nervous! Seeing at night for me is a whole new ball game. I have much more vision during the day. Luckily, the route wasn't too complex and we had been down those streets before. It was a "bus-to-lounge" route and I am pleased to say we did great!! It was harder for me than for her and she had never been out on a night route before! A first for both of us.

Back on the bus and to relieve, Anya did number one and off to bed!

### **Wednesday, Guide Dog School Day 18**

Boy, are we dragging today! We are so tired, but still have to get up at 5:30 AM and hit the ground running! By 6:30 AM Anya had her food, refused her water and we were off to the relieving circle. We now have to trail the leash and follow their back with our hand and try to tell by the shape if they are doing number one or two. We still don't have to pick up, but I am sure it's coming soon! Anya did both this morning. At 7:15 AM I had breakfast which was a cinnamon roll, bacon and fresh fruit. It was all good.

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At 8 AM we met in the dayroom. We didn't have a lecture this morning. We went to relieve and Anya did nothing. Then get on the bus and off to San Francisco! We went to Chestnut Street, took the bus (the one on the cable) down a couple of stops, crossed Lombard Street and of course we stopped in front of a park to do obedience! And Anya did everything perfectly except for the "down", she was way too distracted. I kept correcting but she wouldn't do it. Finally I had to give her a high collar correction and the rest was smooth. It started raining on our walk, but not too heavily. It was fun to go into the city and Anya seemed to enjoy it very much. We got back and off to give her water and to relieve which she did number one.

At 12:30 PM I had lunch, which was a great salad and the dessert was just about the most delicious thing I have ever had! It is called 911 pie. Its crust is a rice krispy treat dipped in chocolate and the filling is a peanut butter mixture with cream on top!!! Wow! I may have to have it again for dinner! Sorry, David. At 1:30 PM we met to relieve our dogs. Anya did number two. Off we went to the lounge. We got to freelance today. That means we pick any place we want to go and pick the route; we have to be back in 45 minutes. We left in groups of four, since there were four trainers. One trainer followed each group. I decided to go check out a furniture shop. It turns out to be a Scandinavian furniture shop, and boy, were they snooty! They didn't acknowledge me when I walked in and I heard them acknowledge other customers! So we walked around and Anya did great! We soon left and Anya left them a present (just kidding)! We then took off to a clothing boutique but on the way I saw a folk gallery. It had a giant Day of the Dead skull on the window display. Anya and I turned around and off we went into the store. The lady was very nice and thought the world of Anya! After I walked in and saw all the fragile, expensive stuff that was at Anya's level, I thought "what did I get myself into?" But she was awesome! I held her on a very short leash, had her sit while I was looking at stuff. It was really fun! We then finally made it to the Viva Diva store. The clothes were super cute and super expensive! A jean miniskirt was \$122. But, they were really nice and adored Anya. I didn't buy anything and back to the lounge we went!

Once we got back it was time to feed, water and relieve. Anya did number one and off the curb!! At 6 PM I had dinner: grilled chicken with vegetables and risotto, yum, yum. Of course, I had the dessert again but this time I only had about half, so sue me! Well, there is no lecture tonight, so I am going now to groom Anya, have some playtime with her and possibly, more like hopefully, take a nap!

### **Thursday, Guide Dog School Day 19**

So last night was great! I did end up grooming Anya, then we played with her bone. I was about to call David when my phone rang and who do you think it was? It was Anya's puppy raiser. We talked for about an hour! She is 18 years old and lives in Utah. She is super sweet and loves Anya so much. She told me she secretly wanted Anya to fail so she could keep her! It was great talking to her and getting to know each other. We hit it off and we both have open invitations to visit each other! She keeps in contact with the family that has her first puppy and they are coming to the graduation as well. I can tell this will be a lifelong friendship. Currently, she is raising her third puppy! Wow, she is amazing to put all this love, time and attention and eventually have to give it up. I admire her and all puppy raisers! At 9 PM off to relieve we went and she did number one.

This morning was typical, by 6:30 AM we were at the relieving circle. Anya did both this morning. At 7:15 AM I had breakfast which was scrambled eggs with cheese, hash browns and fresh fruit, oh and oatmeal. Yum. I was so excited about Anya's raiser's call. Other people had their puppy raisers call them too! At 8 AM we all met in the dayroom, including the retrain students. We had a lecture about using sighted guides. We should use sighted guides or our canes in unfamiliar areas, so the next time we can direct our dog where to go. She showed us different canes like an ID cane which is much thinner and folds up more compactly which you use with a sighted guide because you just hold it out as an identification to

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## **MELISSA'S JOURNAL**

### **GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND, SAN RAFAEL, CA, CAMPUS**

show others you are visually impaired, or a glow-in-the-dark cane. We also discussed "talking signs", new electronic stuff like GPS or a locator that you put in your hand and it vibrates when there is an obstacle or an opening. Also, a new monocular that looks like a camcorder which has a wide field of vision, and can zoom in, zoom out, freeze frame, change polarity, contrast...it was really cool and really expensive, almost \$2,000! Oh, well! We then went to relieve and Anya did nothing.

Off to the bus and to the lagoon to do obedience. Anya did pretty well, although we had some problems with the down command; she was very distracted. After a few corrections she did well. We then took a walk along the lagoon and she did much better! I gave her the steady command and we went at a much slower pace. It was nice. We then went and walked a dirt country path. Not that I will be walking a lot of those, but it's good to learn! We go on the left hand side so traffic coming towards us can see us and the dogs can see the traffic as well and won't get spooked. We keep to the edge and turn away from traffic when we hear a car coming. I walked about half a mile, while some of the others went three quarters of a mile. Before we got off the bus, the supervisor was trying to tell us to watch out for "beefalo and condors" and gave us this big lecture on what to do if a beefalo charges, etc! How silly. Then he would walk by us and start howling crazy like to see if we would get scared! It was funny; Anya would perk her ears and look at him but kept walking. Then we went to the mall to freelance and I went to Papyrus by myself, found a thank you card for my puppy raiser and a little picture frame, and made my first purchase with Anya! She was well behaved. Then I went with a trainer into Macy's and practiced escalators with Anya and we did great! It was fun. We finally got back and I gave her water and back to relieve and Anya did number one.

At 12:30 PM lunchtime I had cream of asparagus soup and salad. It was fabulous! And for dessert a giant white chocolate and cranberry cookie with vanilla ice cream, that was really good too. At 1:30 PM we all met in the dayroom again, with the retrains to get a lecture from the vets. They talked about flea control and heartworm. Nothing really new, the same stuff the trainers already went over. And ticks. Being overweight is now the number one reason dogs come back to the vet. After we got a lecture on sidewalk-less streets, off we went to relieve and Anya did nothing. We went to the bus and it was kind of the same thing, just stay to the left curb. They showed us how to get around parked cars (just like a total barricade). Anya did fine, no big deal, it was all good! Back we came and I gave her food, water and off to relieve; she did number one.

At 6 PM I will have dinner. I am going to send this e-mail now and tomorrow I will fill you in on the rest of the night. We are going on a night route again tonight so I will be exhausted and ready to go to bed when we get back! They gave us each our own jacket as well to wear at night and it has a reflector strip on it so we can be seen at night! How cool, huh?

### **Friday, Guide Dog School Day 20**

Let's call today "Melissa's Emotional and Physical Breakdown". I know you think, "I thought everything is going so well?" And it is, but the hours, the daily grind, brain overload, the cold, all caught up to me. Well, before I get into that, let me tell you about last night.

The night route was great! When we left the dorms to get on the bus, there were absolutely no lights on outside! This was the first time I felt that it was pitch black. It was scary but amazing, we got through the obstacle course and stairs with no problem and it was raining! I got as bundled up as I could and off we went. Anya was excellent on the night route! We made it to lounge with no problem! We are making a good team. I was exhausted when we got back and off to bed we went after relieving and she did number two.

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I woke up this morning and could barely move! I was so stiff. The room was freezing because the window was left open. The cold air does quite a number on my arthritis. It got the best of me this morning! I could barely bend down. After my shower, I got ready, fed Anya and off to relieve. She did number one and two. Everyone could tell that I was not doing well. I tried to put on a brave face but my body movements told the real story. I decided to up my prednisone today to get me back to normal, but that would take a while to kick in. While talking to David this morning, I broke down. I wanted to come home. I wasn't sure I could make another week! He reassured me and told me that I could do it and said not to give up. I was really homesick. The trainers did talk about week three being the worst week when everyone is at each other's throat or ready to go home.

7:15 AM and we go to breakfast which was a bagel with cream cheese and a sausage. The nurse saw me and rubbed my back and I immediately knew she knew that I was not doing well. I was terrified that they would send me home if I couldn't complete every day. I ate my breakfast and went back to the room. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and one of the trainers showed us the equipment that was discussed yesterday and said we could use it if we wanted to. We were going to the administration building for obedience when Dina, the trainer, pulled me to the side and asked me how I was feeling. Of course I say fine, but she knows I am lying. She says why don't I go talk to the nurse and maybe take the day off. I started crying and told her the truth. I am terrified if I miss a day I won't go home with Anya! I only have one week left and that can't happen! She reassured me that wouldn't happen and that Anya and I are doing excellent work together. They don't see any issues with us and that it won't affect anything to rest today and get myself up to 100% again. She said I have been putting my soul into this. I am a natural and I probably have run myself into the ground and to give myself a break, stop being so hard on myself! I admitted that my room is freezing because the window is always left open. She immediately said that I could have my own room, crank up the heat and not to worry. I didn't want to miss getting on the MUNI today in San Francisco, so she said okay, but I didn't have to do the two-mile walk this afternoon. But, I still had to talk to the nurse.

I went to the nurse and she was amazing. She said she is not going to send me home, just have me rest, warm up and feel better. She understands this weather is hard on me. She wanted me to take the whole day off but we compromised. I could go to San Francisco if I wore her big down jacket. It was super warm. I agreed. I went to the relieving circle and suddenly my ankle gave way. I tell you, I completely broke down! So going to San Francisco was out! Rest all day for me! Oh, and Anya did number one.

I stayed back and I didn't have to move, the staff did it for me. The staff cranked up the heat and brought me a portable heater as well! This place is awesome. I called David and poor guy was so upset that he was ready to drive up right then and there. I tried to explain that I was doing much better. I think the weight had been lifted off my shoulders and I didn't have to be scared anymore. They were not going to send me home! The nurse, Cecilia, talked to him and made him feel better. I wanted him to have a great time at the conference, make loads of contacts and not worry about me. David is just wonderful! Cecilia ran a hot bath for me and I just soaked in it for a while this morning and it was great! I then took a nap. The gang came back and Dina told me next week we will go back to San Francisco and she will make a special detour with me to teach us to ride the MUNI. Off to relieve and Anya did number one.

At 12:30 PM I had a shrimp Louis salad and it was tasty and for dessert, homemade chocolate cake...yummy. After lunch everyone, even the retrains were called into the dayroom. The supervisor, Kelly, was choked up telling us that they did what they could but one of the dogs is still having health problems and needs more medical attention. So, the dog's partner will be getting a new dog. She's devastated. She loved her dog but knows the medical treatment is the best thing for her right now. My classmate is leaving this afternoon with her husband and will be back on Sunday morning when they will present her with another dog. We were all stunned! She will finish training with us next week and a trainer will go home with the new team and help her there for a while. We all went over and talked to her, she tried not to cry but she couldn't help it and we all cried.

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The rest of the gang hugged me too and encouraged me and told me everything will be fine and to make sure I rest and get to feeling better. Another student said she broke down on Monday, so homesick she was ready to go home and end the training. She couldn't take it anymore either. So, I wasn't the only one feeling homesick. Another student admitted he, too, was homesick; this has been the longest he has been away from his family and he has been married for over 25 years! We are so there for each other!!

At 1:30 PM we met in the dayroom and had a lecture about feeding your dog. These dogs eat Eukanuba Adult Maintenance Mini Chunks (got that David?). We shouldn't change their diet and only the best for them since they are working dogs. We can give them treats, but only natural stuff and only once in a while, like on their birthdays. We should put the treats in their bowls though and not hand feed them. We need to be aware and make sure that other people are not feeding them or giving them treats because that causes obesity and cuts into their lifespan as working dogs. They told us a story about a man who kept calling, worried about his dog's weight. They had him cut down on the food and still, the dog was gaining weight! Finally, someone came down to see him and the dog. They did his normal morning route which consisted of going to this coffee shop every morning. What the trainer saw astonished him. When the blind man was ordering his coffee, the waitress would give his dog a doughnut and the dog would eat it in one bite without making a sound! That was why the dog was obese! Crazy, huh?

Went back out to relieve and Anya did nothing. We went back in the room, played for a while and I took another nap. Boy, I feel tons better! When everyone got back I fed Anya, gave her water and off to relieve, she did number one. I know I am doomed to pick up her poop at 9 PM tonight! Ugh! At 6 PM dinner, I had pepper steak with rice and it was delicious! No dessert tonight! We met in my old room at 6:45 PM to discuss having a mini-graduation ceremony next week for the classmate getting a new dog. Now we have to run it by the trainers, but I think they will go for it. I tell you we have been on a serious roller coaster here and I am about ready to get off! One more week, I know. I will probably sleep that whole weekend! I am going over to the nurse right now and see about getting a bandage or something to support my ankle, it's not 100% yet but I can walk on it now! I have to write my speech for tomorrow but I have to make it short and sweet!

### **Saturday, Guide Dog School Day 21 – Graduation Day**

*[Editor's note: This diary was written during an experimental period when the graduation ceremony occurred at the end of the third week of training. The retrains and their dogs then returned home while the other teams stayed for the fourth week of training.]*

Well, last night went remarkably well. At 9 PM I took Anya out to relieve and of course she did number two! Here in my hand I have a "mutt mitt". It's a plastic bag that you put your hand through and it's kind of like a puppet, it has a space for your hand so you can grab the poop. I trail her leash, feel her back, point my toe where it is, she moves out of the way, I tell her to sit, and down I go. "Don't breath in" everyone is telling me. I pick it up, luckily it's formed and not too soft. I pick it all up, then I stand up and make the mistake of breathing in. Whoa! Quickly I try to pull the bag inside out and now I try and make a knot. For the life of me, I couldn't make a knot! I think I was so obsessed that there was poop in it, I couldn't think straight! Finally, I tie the knot and hand the bag over to the instructor. I did it!! I was the last one in class to try it, and I did it! From this point forward, I have to pick up her poop! How exciting...NOT! Off to bed we went.

I woke up at 5:30 AM as usual and Anya was fed, refused her water and off to relieve by 6:30 AM. Of course she did both this morning, and yes, I picked it up. At 7:15 AM I went to have breakfast and it was oatmeal, a breakfast burrito and sausage. I am not a huge fan of breakfast burritos personally, so I only had about half. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom to talk about graduation. We will all have an opportunity to say something and our puppy raisers will be here at 11:30 AM.

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We ended up going outside (since it wasn't raining at this point) and played Simon Says during our obedience training. It was really fun. Slowly it trickled down to just two teams, Anya and I and a male student and his dog (the shortest and the tallest!). We both hung in and the session ended in a tie. Off to relieve. Anya did number one. I sprayed her with Miracle Groom and groomed her so she didn't smell like wet dog! I even brushed her teeth. She looked fabulous.

We all then just putzed around. None of us were excited yet. It didn't feel like graduation day. I got my clothes out, played with Anya a bit, talked to others, etc., to pass the time. Finally at 11 AM we had lunch which was a grilled cheese sandwich and a fresh, homemade tomato soup. It was fantastic. (I hadn't had a grilled cheese sandwich since I was in high school!) Then we all started to get excited! One of the retrains who sits at my table, started crying. It was hitting her that she was going home. I gave her a hug and said goodbye and good luck! I was panicking hoping I had enough time to change and be ready for the puppy raiser. I quickly changed then just sat there with the door open. The student across the hall was in her doorway and we just talked about how nervous we were getting. Then I hear Dina say "Melissa, we are coming for you!" Oh, God! Suddenly, there was Anya's puppy raiser and we just hugged! I took Anya off of her tie-down; gave her puppy raiser the leash; and let them just love each other. The trainers told us that it was okay to let them enjoy each other for the last time and make it a positive experience for all. Anya went nuts!! Her raiser was so happy to see her and her dad couldn't stop taking pictures. It was very sweet! We talked and I gave her a little gift from Anya and she gave me one that has a bunch of pictures from when Anya was a puppy! Adorable!! We were escorted out to the library and had our picture taken (Anya, her raiser and me). Back in the room, they kept on playing together and Anya would come by for a pat from me (at least she didn't totally blow me off). I am just kidding, it was great! Finally, it was time to go. My stomach started hurting!

Her raiser took Anya and I was escorted to my chair. As I was walking, I hear "Hi, Melissa", and it was my cousin! He was with his sister, my aunt and uncle! They said "turn around" and there was David's dad, his twin brother and his wife, and her mom! Wow, I was truly touched to see everyone made it in this torrential downpour. As I was seated, another cousin and her husband came by to say hi with their gorgeous baby. I was seated in chair number two. When I told a classmate he was number one, he started to get nervous and it didn't help by me telling him there were lots of people! Oops! It was sweet. Bob Phillips, the CEO of Guide Dogs for the Blind, said some words. Then a supervisor presented the new breeder dogs, and their puppy raisers came up individually and said a few words. A staff member brought out a puppy for all to see. "AWWWWWW" the crowd exclaimed!

Then Dina came up and gave an example of one of our typical class days. Finally they called the first student to "receive" his dog. He went up and so did his puppy raisers. They handed him the leash and then he spoke. He started to choke up but he held it together. Suddenly it was my turn. I walked up, Anya's raiser handed me the leash and I got a lump in my throat! Darn it! So I wave, take a deep breath and read my speech. My voice was shaky from the first word and I started crying. I was overwhelmed by emotion and I guess the audience was too! I deviated from my speech and just spoke from the heart. You will have to see the video to know what I said, if you can understand me! I really tried hard to keep it together, but it didn't work. Anya's raiser said a few things and back to our seats. Immediately, Carrie, one of the trainers came with a Kleenex! I remember the next student going up next and saying "Thanks Melissa, I wasn't going to cry!" We chuckled, but let me tell you, none of us stopped crying until the end! It sounds ridiculous but it is so emotional and everyone is just out there pouring their hearts out and overtaken with gratitude and joy. They were all tears of happiness. Of course, Anya was lying down and suddenly I can hear her snoring and so can the entire first row! Anya, how embarrassing! Oh, well! We all laughed and thought it was funny.

Finally, about two hours later it was over and the chaos began! We tried to get out to see everyone but there were so many people I didn't get a chance to say goodbye to the retrain students or take any pictures. It was pouring rain, so nobody wanted to go on a tour! We all headed back to my room and

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Anya's raiser said her final goodbyes. Afterwards, Anya kept looking out the door for her raiser; it broke my heart. I think it was a bit overwhelming for her as well. First, she sees me, then her raiser, then Dina, her trainer. She must be thinking: "Who is my mom?" I take her out in the rain to relieve and she does number one, with some family members attentively watching. Back in we go and I tell you it felt chaotic. I let everyone love Anya since it was a crazy day, but no more after that! I had to leave her on tie-down and we all went out to dinner. We caravanned to downtown San Rafael and found a nice Italian restaurant, I think it was called Joe's. We all sit and decompress! Everyone shot video. The school did, David's dad did, etc.

We had a great time! It was nice to get away, but I missed Anya. After stuffing ourselves we went back to their hotel and hung out for a while. I was back at 9 PM to relieve Anya. I thanked everyone and of course I got choked up again! I tell you, these emotions of mine! I hope they realize how much their presence at the graduation meant to me! I could never repay them. It was raining and Anya did nothing. I was worried because she always does number two twice a day, and she was due. Darcy, the trainer said, it could be the rain, she doesn't want to! So I might have to take her in the middle of the night! NOOOO! I hope not. Everyone was in their room already with the door closed. BOOO! I wanted to talk, man! One person was up so we chit chatted about how surreal the experience was, etc. I called David and didn't get to bed until about 11 PM. Thank God Sunday is our day off!

### Sunday, Guide Dog School Day 22

Yeah, we survived graduation. Anya held it until I took her out this morning. She started whining about 5 AM, but I tried to not take her out until 6:30 AM and it worked. I was paranoid she might have an accident, but nothing happened. Anya you are the best!

She did both this morning and of course, it wasn't raining today! Go figure! At 7:15 AM I had breakfast which was a breakfast Danish, scrambled eggs and bacon. Yum, yum. We all couldn't stop reminiscing about graduation. We all were surprised how emotional it got and we got! The rest of the morning, I got my clothes together to wash, took my suitcase out and started to clear up the room and get things organized. My brother-in-law and sister-in-law had bought me a Guide Dogs sweatshirt which I am wearing now and is very warm! Dad bought me a frame with bones, etc., on it to hold a picture of Anya. My sister-in-law's mom gave me a paw print link to put on my bracelet. Adorable.

My uncle called me at 8:15 AM to see if we could get together so I told him any time after 8:45 AM and I have to be back by 11:45 AM to water and relieve Anya. At 8:30 AM I took Anya out to the grass paddock, an enclosed area in which she can play and run around on a flexi lead. I have to call her back to me, sometimes she comes, but sometimes she ignores me! I might have to get myself one of those leashes. She can go a distance from me, but I can always bring her back! She had fun. I took Anya out to relieve at 8:45 AM and she did nothing. I changed out of my sweats and continued to pack my suitcase. At 9:45 PM I hear again from the relatives; they can pick me up in 5 minutes. So I put Anya on tie-down and go in search of Darcy, calling her name to no avail. Maureen, the nurse says it's okay for me to go just be back by 11:45 AM. Off we go!! We find a breakfast spot in downtown San Rafael and have a great time all together.

I forgot to tell you, this morning, Anya was very clingy. I think yesterday confused her. Maybe she was afraid I would leave her too! Poor thing, so we spent a lot of quality time together this morning!! And then I go and leave her, I know!

We got back at 11:45 AM and my uncle and cousin go in the dayroom and watch sports. I give Anya water and take her out to relieve. She does number one. We walk around and talk to other students. I

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saw our classmate with her new dog, a female, yellow Lab. She is beautiful. They seem to be bonding so far, so let's hope for the best! We walk around the grounds a little bit and I stay out awhile, while relatives visit the kennels. I guess they saw some black Lab puppies! Anya was being really good. We took some pictures outside and it was 12:30 PM so Darcy calls me in for lunch. We say our goodbyes and I received a monetary gift to buy Anya the supplies she needs! I tell you, Anya is spoiled.

At lunch I had a mixed green salad with olives and Parmesan cheese. Delicious, and for dessert a banana, raisin shortbread—scrumptious. At 1:30 PM time to relieve and she did nothing. We then finally put the clothes in the washer and played in the room! Around 4:15 PM I went out and took Anya into the grass paddock again. She just goes around sniffing. Of course she does number one and two in there! I clean the number two up and I guess they always go in grass! It starts raining so we head back, just in time to feed, water and relieve. I still had to take her out to relieve according to Carrie, one of the trainers! She did nothing, no surprise there! I finally pick up my clothes from the dryer, fold them and then we all start showing each other pictures that we had received from our puppy raisers. Someone has the bright idea of seeing them under a CCTV which is brilliant!! We can now really see the pictures instead of them being blobs. The CCTV mega magnifies the image up on a screen.

At 6 PM time for dinner which was chicken adobo, rice and broccoli. It was very good! The dining room has been so quiet since the retrains left! At 7 PM time to give Anya some water and we met in the dayroom to talk about building a website where we can upload pictures and chat. One classmate has his own business consulting and is going to do it. We are all on board with it. I feel tired so maybe I can get a quick nap in before the 9 PM relieving!

### **Monday, Guide Dog School Day 23**

Well, it's finally winding down! Today is our last Monday! Still, I got up at 5:30 AM and did the typical routine. Anya went out to relieve by 6:30 AM and she did both like normal. At 7:15 AM breakfast which was an egg muffin sandwich and a bowl of fresh fruit and oatmeal. Good stuff. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom, discussed the day's events and off to relieve. Anya did number one.

We left for San Francisco and of course I slept on the way! Some of us went with Dina to Union Square where we did the obedience training. I guess it was crowded and everyone stopped and watched us. Dina asked us if we wanted to go somewhere in a corner instead but we said no and our dogs were on today. Anya did great! We should have had a cup out there asking for money I tell you! We walked all over the place and it was fun. Anya did great with all the people and traffic. We walked into NikeTown and used their escalators. No problem! We got back and I gave her water and relieved her.

At 12:30 PM we had lunch which was mahi-mahi with a mango salsa and roasted potatoes with a side salad. It was amazing. And for dessert a homemade ice cream sandwich. Yummy! At 1:30 PM we met in the dayroom and had a lecture on "Taking Care of Your Guide Dog". We talked about watching their weight and they brought in a dog that was overweight so we could see it. We felt our dog's rib cage and right before their hips they have an indentation. Key things that indicate the dog is gaining weight: can't feel the rib cage, no indentation by hips, collar getting too tight, keep loosening harness. Grooming everyday is important and we won't have to bathe them that often maybe once every four months. If you bathe them too often they lose essential oils, and do not shave their fur. They asked us if we needed tick control as well but I said no but I can change it later if my vet deems we need it. Back to relieve and Anya did nothing.

We had the option of going to do sidewalk-less streets. One other person and I decided to stay on the bus, no big deal. Then we left to go to a bike path that is next to the bay and leads into the city of

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Tiburon. It was a nice walk. We didn't go the three miles; so we sat on the bench with another classmate for a bit. Back we came and time to feed Anya and relieve. She did number one.

At 6 PM time for dinner and I had this fabulous mixed green salad with smoked Gouda, turkey, tomatoes...yummy. At 7 PM the counselor Heidi wanted to hold an informal discussion about going home with your guide dog. It was okay, the best information was that it is common for your spouse (ahem, David pay attention) or your family to feel displaced for a while. Let them know it is temporary but your main focus for a while will be the dog to secure that bond and make sure your safety comes first. So, family and friends, fair warning...Don't feel like I am ignoring you or paying more attention to Anya, give us some time to really bond and build that connection, remember my safety is in her paws. Okay, lecture time is over.

I am going to just relax now until the 9 PM relieving!

### Tuesday, Guide Dog School Day 24

So, another day closer to going home! Of course Anya decides to do number two at 9 PM last night. This morning at relieving she changed it up and only did number one. At 7:15 AM my breakfast was scrambled eggs with salsa and a cheese quesadilla and a bowl of fruit. Good stuff. We met in the dayroom at 8 AM this morning. Four of us were pulled to the side individually and had our exit interviews done with other supervisors. There were 14 questions and the scale was 0-4, 4 being very satisfied. Of course, they got a 0 on everything! Just kidding! The others did obedience. We met up in the relieving circle where Anya decided to do her number two. Joy, joy!

We got on the bus and left for Petaluma. We walked around a neighborhood that has rounded corners. These are sidewalks that don't have the wheelchair slopes, so it is hard to tell where the "corner" is to cross the street. First of all, why don't they have wheelchair accessibility. It's not an old neighborhood! But, that's a rant for another day! So we feel ourselves curve, then when it feels as if we are straightening out, we say "hop up" and direct ourselves to the left or right depending where the curb is. We are ready to cross the street; we are not at the exact corner, but a little inside and go "forward" to the next block; "forward" again and the dog will go in the same direction we were originally going before we rounded the corner! Aren't guide dogs amazing? Hey, at least mine is! That walk went well.

We got back and I gave her water and off to relieve, she did number one. At 12:30 PM my lunch was a mixed green salad and for dessert I had blueberry crumble pie. Delicious. Bob Phillips, the CEO of Guide Dogs for the Blind, came and sat at our table. He is a very nice man, not fake nice like some other CEOs we have encountered in our jobs! His daughter is blind and she got her dog here, before he was involved with this organization. At 1:30 PM we met in the dayroom for a lecture on "Word Association". So we talked about teaching our dog certain phrases like "find escalators", "find elevator", "outside", "inside", "find stairs". This could go on forever, but we have to remember if we use some of these, just pick a couple of phrases, do not go overboard, because then to the dog we just sound like chatter (like Charlie Brown's teacher). Also, body language is what is most important and gives the dog their cues. We all have turned our bodies left and said "right" and luckily the dog goes left! It's because of our body language. Carrie told us a story about a man with a severe speech impediment who came into the Continued Assessment class. They accepted him into the program and retrained a dog specifically for him because he couldn't say the normal commands. So the dog learned "go" instead of "forward", "stop" instead of "halt", and "left" and "right" from pure body language!

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Dina noticed that my ankle still isn't 100% so she suggested I take the afternoon off and rest up for tomorrow because we are going to Fisherman's Wharf. I thought that was very nice of her and she said it was no big deal, just another "bus-to-lounge" and then freelancing in San Rafael. So stay in I did! I relieved Anya first and she did nothing. Two others had also stayed behind because of illness or exhaustion! I played with Anya in the room for a while and I took a nap. The group returned and I fed Anya. She refused her water and off to relieve. She did number one.

At 6 PM dinner was spaghetti with meatballs, side salad and garlic bread...yum, yum. At 7 PM Anya refused her water and now she is lying on my foot and relaxing...what a life! Only a couple more hours to go and off to bed!

Talk to you tomorrow!

### **Wednesday, Guide Dog School Day 25**

Last night was uneventful (yeah). We went out at 9 PM and Anya did number two and off to bed we went! This morning was very routine and Anya only did number one. At 7:15 AM for breakfast I had a poached egg, sausage and a biscuit. It was very good. At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and Anya did well with the distractions. They brought in two dogs and Anya sat quietly; she looked but didn't get up...yeah. Dina took me over to the vet clinic to recheck Anya's ears. I've used ointment in her ear because they are a little red. First, we did obedience in the kennel and Anya did great! We saw the vet and Anya has a clean bill of health; her left ear looks good...yeah. We then went out to relieve and Anya did number two and onto the bus we went. We went to Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco. Anya did well, but boy did she love to sniff! I had to give her quite a few corrections. We walked over to Pier 39 and saw the sea lions. It was fun. When everyone got back they treated us to coffee since this was our last trip to the city...sniff, sniff. On the way back I rode in the minivan with Anya and she did very well!

We got back, I gave her water and off to relieve, she did number one. At 12:30 PM for lunch I had a grilled cheese with fresh avocado sandwich with chips and a side salad. For dessert it was a sour cream-cranberry cake...yummy. At the end of lunch, one of the Continued Assessment students came by to say goodbye and she said she was the only one who did not make it! We were so sad. She was crushed and trying to hold back the tears. We couldn't understand why she didn't get accepted. But I know in my heart that the school had to have a very good and legitimate reason why she wasn't.

At 1:30 PM we met in the dayroom and had a lecture on "Traveling with Your Guide Dog." We discussed traveling in a vehicle. The dog should be up front with you on the floorboards or in the back on the floorboards. They don't recommend getting the dog used to sitting on the seat because then in every vehicle (i.e., buses, cabs, people's cars) the dog will want to jump on the seat. If you have a pickup truck, always put them in a crate if they are in the back. On a bus or train, they can go by your feet but make sure they don't block aisles and that their tails don't get stepped on. On an airplane they have to go through security with you and the harness will set off the metal detector. Airport security personnel can just wand the dog. We can go through with the dog guiding or just heeling or we can go first, make a long leash, and command the dog to stay. We go through the metal detector then ask the dog to come and they go through. I haven't decided which way to go yet.

At the end of the lecture we all had planned a surprise for our classmate who wasn't at graduation. So Dina asked us to put our dogs on tie-down and come back for a Q&A session. The person being surprised was puzzled but I told her to just go with it...something different. We all came back and our supervisor Kelly made a speech, had our classmate go up, and we had a mini-graduation ceremony for her! She was so touched and of course we all started to cry! We gave her a yellow rose and she made a

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speech. She said the best thing about these 28 days was meeting all of us and making lifelong friends! (The reason we left our dogs on tie-down was so she and her new dog could be the center of attention). We then surprised our trainers by giving them each a card and a gift certificate. We all pitched in. They got emotional and we had more tears! I tell you, we are going to be crying these next couple of days...a cry fest I tell you! Finally, time to relieve and Anya did nothing and back to the buses!

This time during the obstacle course there was an overhang; yes, one that was low enough that even I would hit it! So we had to walk through with our eyes closed and our hand out in front just in case we ran into it. And yes, all of us ran into it and we had to rework it with our dogs. Anya had to rework it twice and on the third time she stopped so I could feel about and safely walk under it.

We were nervous because it was time for our "self-orientation" route. That means they drop us off at different locations in the city and we have to find our way back to the lounge. We have to use our orientation skills (they said we wouldn't have been accepted if we didn't have good orientation and mobility skills), but we can ask the public for directions. I was the third one dropped off so I had the third hardest/farthest to go. They asked me how my ankle was. I answered, "Why? If I am next then ow, my ankle hurts!" They didn't buy it and off the bus I went! I had faith in Anya and myself; we can do this! I decided to go to the corner and turn right. As I got to the next corner, someone walked by me. So I asked him what streets were in front of me and to my left. He said I was facing Lincoln and that 5th was on my left. Yes, I knew if I kept going straight, I would hit the numbered streets soon and the lounge was on 4th between E and F. At that point, it was easy. I had been on 5th many times during the basic route! We made it with no problems. YEAH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! We all made it back to the lounge safe and sound! So there David! He who thinks I get disoriented by getting spun around! I did it! But, don't ask me to do it at home where every street curves and never goes in the same direction!!

We got back, and yes, we had to rework the overhang in the obstacle course again! This time three tries; then on the fourth she stopped and showed me...finally! Oh well, everyone else had problems with it too! It's all a learning process, dogs can make mistakes too! I still love ya Anya! We got back and I fed her, gave her water and off to relieve. She did number one. At 6 PM time for dinner and I had a delicious salad. At 7 PM I gave Anya water which she refused, and now I am e-mailing you guys while she is asleep at my feet! Four out of the eight classmates decided to go on the optional extra night route. I opted out to rest my ankle and just plain relax.

Love you all and thanks for all your support! One more day to go and Anya will be home with me.

### **Thursday, Guide Dog School Day 26**

Last night I was going to go to my room and just relax but suddenly as I was finishing my e-mail one classmate comes in, followed a couple of minutes later by another, then a third. We all ended up just talking and laughing the rest of the night. At 9 PM we went out to relieve and Anya did number 2. As I was going to bed, the night route group came back. They ended up doing a "lounge-to-bar" route! They met up at a bar and had drinks! How rude! While the rest of us were here, oh well, we were just chilling out anyway.

This morning was exciting, the last working day. YEAH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! We cannot wait to go home, but it's kind of scary, there is no safety net (an instructor) making sure we are doing the right thing! Typical morning and Anya did both this morning. At 7:15 AM breakfast was a fried egg, hash browns and toast—our last breakfast here. We all said we weren't going to start thinking about it because we would turn emotional! At 8 AM we met in the dayroom and had a lecture on "A Guide Dog is Really a Dog". We talked about our dogs still being puppies. We should keep things consistent and clear. If we let them get

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away with something, the problem will just escalate. They need their playtime but it should come from us. If we are sick then, yes, someone else can help care for the dog but just temporarily. It will take time for the dog to understand that our home is now their new home. They think they will eventually come back to the dorm which is home to them now.

We should have them on tie-down or on leash for a while and gradually introduce off leash privileges. They can sniff in their new surroundings and sniff the people at home to get used to them. Make sure their tie-down is not close to something that they can get into or get into trouble. In the backyard let them sniff around, and if it is enclosed, maybe get a flexi-lead to let them roam around. They will bond to us but remember this takes time to solidify. Keep a routine; they need routines in their lives such as consistent feeding and relieving schedules. Even if you normally don't wake up early on the weekends but you do during the week, you still need to feed at the same time every day. We then went out to relieve and Anya did nothing.

Off to the bus and the overhang was up, we had to rework it and third time's a charm! We went to UC Berkeley. We walked around town and on campus. It was so much fun. Anya did great! We did the obedience on campus in front of some squirrels and she did very well! We even walked into the Zoology building (even though Dina had never walked in a building before with students) and we peered into classes trying to find a big lecture class to sneak into! No luck! My ankle was feeling good so the walk was terrific and Anya was excellent. We got back and I gave her water and off to relieve, she did number one.

At 12:30 PM we had lunch and I had an antipasto salad which was fabulous. I had to write out the card to the kitchen/dorm staff and during lunch I made a speech (and yes, I started to tear up) and presented them with a gift from all of us, a box of See's Chocolates. They were touched and thanked us all. Oh, how can I forget the butternut squash soup was to die for! Dessert was a coconut, chocolate chip bar, yum, yum.

At 1:30 PM we met in the dayroom and we were presented with our binders. It has everything you can think of! We get an ID card with a picture of Anya and me; a 4" x 6" of Anya and me; another of the puppy raiser, Anya and me from graduation; and a 5" x 7" of the whole class. We got all this paperwork: the vet information, ADA laws, guide dog info. I tell you the binder is awesome! I can't wait to show it to everyone. We went over the info and then off to relieve again. Anya did nothing.

Three of us decided to go to the mall while the others decided to walk on the bike path again. We went with Dina and decided to walk over. Anya did just fine. I didn't have anything to buy so I just followed while we looked into the stores. Boy, it is hard to have this split brain Dina keeps talking about! You need to pay attention to what your dog is doing while you are trying to do something else! I met this lady in the mall who has a breeder dog for Guide Dogs. He is a black Lab named Skipper; he is a stud. She had his father as well until he died at the age of 14. Skipper was raised in Santa Barbara. She was very nice. All these people wanted to pet the dogs. One lady asked permission, and a classmate said no because her dog is working and they are still cementing the bonding process. The lady then snidely remarked that she can't stop everyone from wanting to pet her dog and left! People can get so irritated! It is going to be hard to try to explain to others that Anya is a working dog and not a pet! Another woman asked permission and got a "no" answer and reason; then as the woman walked away she reached over and petted the dog anyway! So much for explanations! While all three of us were on a bench a woman came up to us with her baby and had her hand outstretched already almost petting our dogs without even waiting for us to say anything. Right before my classmate said she would rather her dog not be petted because they are working, the woman walked away. I mean people don't understand. Just because the dogs have a harness doesn't mean they can't suddenly become aggressive; but they just come up to us like nothing! Oh, well, this is what I am going to have to deal with everyday from now on. I hope the public will be understanding!

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We left and got back in time to feed, water and relieve. Anya did number one. I am going to send this e-mail early because after dinner we have a lecture. Then I need to make sure everything is ready to go and spend sometime saying goodbye. Trust me, I am sure we will all be crying tonight and tomorrow. Plus I need to get some rest, I have to be on the bus at 5 AM (all of us do) to get to the airport! But, it has all been worth it! I can't wait to go home!!

I really want to thank each and every one of you for all your love, encouragement and support! I really could not have done it without you. Knowing that you care and were interested in what was going on was so special! Again, thank you. I love each and every one of you so much. Anya sends you all a big lick on the cheek. You have made the difference, and I know that Anya will be happy to be part of our happy family with all of you in it!

Love,

Melissa and Anya

\* \* \* \* \*

**ADDENDUM:** Melissa, Anya and David live in the greater Los Angeles area. They have recently welcomed a Guide Dogs for the Blind puppy, Martine, into their home, with David as primary raiser. They are all active in the Los Angeles Southwest Guide Dog Raisers group. Melissa, Anya, David and Martine participate in many presentations to groups of all ages and are committed to raising awareness of the special role of service dogs in the community. The friendships formed in the Guide Dog Class endure; Melissa and the others from her class remain in close contact.

Melissa's Journal has been edited by Judy in the hope it will provide puppy raisers with a greater appreciation of the raisers' role and the ultimate goal for the puppies in our care. Judy raised six puppies as a member of LA Southwest Guide Dog Raisers in Southern California and is currently raising her seventh pup with Guide Puppies of Seattle.

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