



An Architect's New Blueprint: Building Independence with His First Guide Dog

At age 72, Gilberto (Beto) carries himself with the quiet confidence of someone who has lived many lives. In his El Paso home, surrounded by the memories of a rich and varied career, he speaks with the warm cadence of a man who has found peace in unexpected places. This retired architect, father of three, and devoted partner to his adoring, Patricia, has spent decades designing sacred spaces and chasing dreams on horseback. Today, his most important companion walks on four legs and answers to the name Bruno.

Growing up in El Paso, close to the Mexican border where two cultures flowed seamlessly together, Beto embraced a life of vibrant contrasts. By day, he was a dedicated student who excelled on the tennis courts from high school well into adulthood. During quick visits to Mexico, he took part in the cherished tradition of the Charro, a Mexican cowboy, or as he fondly describes it, "a gentleman's gentleman."

The world of Charros was far more than sport to Beto; it was community, tradition, and artistry rolled into one. Unlike rodeo competitions, Charro events were team endeavors where riders competed together, supported one another, and celebrated as one. "It was as much a social organization as it was a sport," Beto recalls, his voice carrying the warmth of cherished memories. Those evenings spent riding broncos and bulls weren't just about conquest, they were about connection, something that would prove invaluable in the years to come.

This same sense of purpose and community guided Beto's professional life. His specialty was extraordinary: redesigning 5th century Classical Byzantine Churches across New York, Texas, Virginia, and New Jersey. Each project was a careful balance of ancient tradition and

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

Summer days are longer, brighter, and filled with possibilities, much like the transformed lives of our service and facility dog recipients. These life-changing bonds begin with volunteer puppy raisers who provide foundational training before our trainers take over.

While we always welcome puppy raising volunteers, those unable to participate can still make a significant impact through generous contributions, which help fund the extensive training and care each puppy-in-training requires.

Stay tuned for exciting announcements—we'll soon be sharing major developments that will greatly expand the reach and impact of our mission.

Tony Blevins

Tony Blevins
President / Director
GDA | TLC



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modern need. For Beto, architecture wasn't just about buildings—it was about creating spaces where people could find meaning, gather in community, and connect with something greater than themselves.

But life, as it often does, had other plans.

A FADE INTO DARKNESS

Vision loss ran in Beto's family through his mother's line, a genetic predisposition to glaucoma. Still, nothing could have prepared him for how his career might unknowingly accelerate that timeline. Beto was working in downtown NYC on September 11, 2001, when the towers collapsed, engulfed in the cloud of smoke and debris that would haunt so many. He vividly remembers standing in Liberty Park, watching in disbelief as the underside of the plane slammed into the South Tower. While no definitive research confirms the connection, Beto believes that day may have marked the beginning of his journey toward blindness.

The loss came gradually. First one eye, then his right eye began to fail. Despite multiple surgeries that

slowed the progression, Beto was eventually left with only light perception. For a man who had "lived a very visual life," the transition was devastating. "It was the most profound part of my life when I was doing that kind of work, so to all of a sudden not have sight, it was a heavy transition," Beto recalled.

FROM ACCEPTANCE TO BOND: MEETING BRUNO

It was Greg, our Sr. Manager of Admissions, who became instrumental in helping Beto accept his new reality and ultimately apply for his first guide dog. Sometimes the most important conversations happen with individuals who understand exactly what you're going through.

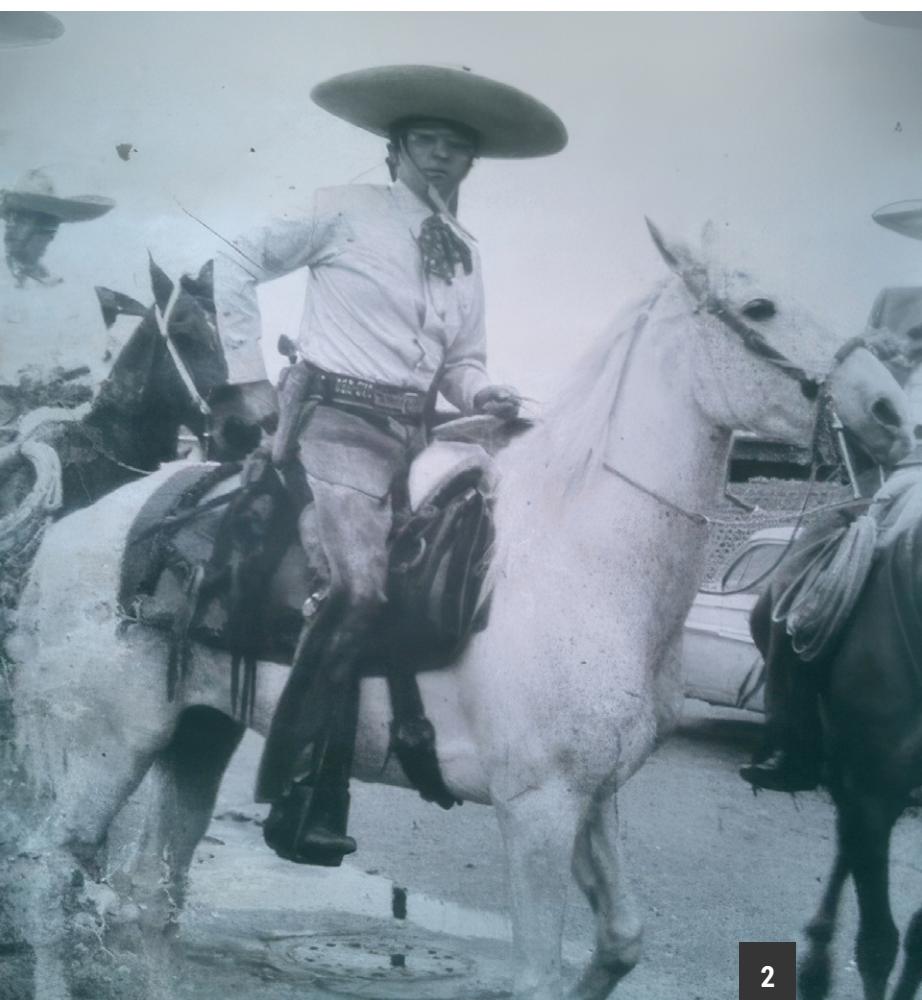
Then came Bruno, a golden lab mix who would soon become far more than a working guide dog. When asked about his preferred dog coat color, Beto chose the golden lab mix for a beautifully simple reason: "I could find his eyes." Still possessing some vision when they first met, Beto wanted to be able to connect with his new partner on that most fundamental level.

Their first meeting exceeded every expectation. "There was excitement and anticipation, but this was not like anything that I could've imagined," Beto remembers. "It was an instant connection. He came right up to me and just wanted to be loved from the get-go, so it was an immediate bond."

REDESIGNING LIFE: A NEW NORMAL

Yet even with Bruno by his side, Beto still grapples with the profound shift in his identity. His architectural career had been such a defining part of who he was that losing his sight felt like losing himself. The visual world that had been his canvas, his playground, his profession, had become inaccessible.

But Bruno changed everything. "Bruno takes care of me so well so I can walk normally down the sidewalk," Beto explains. "Without him, I'm stuck in my house. I'm literally on an island without





my ability to move.” What might sound like simple mobility to others represents complete independence to Beto, the difference between isolation and engagement, between existing and truly living.

With Bruno, Beto began to reimagine what his life could look like, laying the foundation for something new, built on trust, partnership, and resilience.

Today, Beto has found his “new normal,” a phrase he uses with acceptance rather than resignation. He’s discovered new passions: listening to books, enjoying classic black and white films, and taking memoir-writing classes at UTEP’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. His goal is to create an audible memoir for his children—Julian, Gilberto Jr., and Lorenz—as well as his grandchildren, ensuring his stories of charros and churches, love and loss, will echo through generations.

“Bruno’s just an incredible partner and just a beautiful boy and just my buddy. I can do things with Bruno,” Beto says, his voice carrying gratitude and wonder. More than a guide dog, Bruno is the keystone in a new structure Beto is building—not of brick and mortar, but of courage and connection. Though he no longer drafts churches or sketches skylines, Beto is still creating something sacred: a life shaped not by limitation, but

by purpose. He now serves as an advocate for others navigating vision loss, offering the same support and understanding that once helped him find his way.

With Bruno guiding each step, Beto proves that even when the blueprints change, there is still beauty to be built. 🐾

From Puppy to Partner: Flower’s Journey

At Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines, every service dog’s journey begins with a promise: to provide independence, healing, and unconditional support to someone in need. That promise came to life in Flower—a gentle, loving dog who now serves as a vital companion to Doug, a U.S. Army Veteran living with PTSD.

A VETERAN'S NEW BEGINNING

Doug proudly served 10 years in the Army, including time in Vietnam and as an instructor for Northern Warfare in Alaska. After his military service, he fought wildfires, earned a college degree, and spent 15 years as a special education teacher.

Still, life after service presented daily challenges. Living with PTSD made everyday tasks overwhelming—until Flower came into his life.

"I actually went shopping and enjoyed it, something I haven't done since I was a teenager! PTSD doesn't go away, but Flower makes things easier. She helps me feel comfortable in public. I'm incredibly grateful for this program."

— Doug, Veteran and Service Dog Handler



RAISED WITH LOVE

At just eight weeks old, Flower was placed with her volunteer puppy raiser, Vicki, who began teaching her the skills and confidence she'd need to succeed.

"She was tiny, sweet, and sensitive—our beautiful Flower. We hoped she'd be matched with the right person, and Doug is exactly who we prayed for. She was meant to bring comfort."

— Vicki, Puppy Raiser



TRAINED WITH PURPOSE

After a year, Flower entered our unique prison-based training program, where incarcerated trainers provide advanced service dog training—building a better future for both dog and trainer.

"People would wait in the yard just to see Flower. She made people smile—and she gave me something to look forward to. I hope she brings her new handler as much peace as she brought me."

— Ezekiel Johnson, Incarcerated Trainer, Mule Creek State Prison



Help Us Raise the Next Flower

From puppy raisers to incarcerated trainers to our expert placement teams—**every step of this journey is made possible by generous supporters like you.**

When you sponsor a puppy, you become part of the life-changing journey to transform a playful pup into a highly trained guide, service, or facility dog—empowering a veteran, a child with autism, someone who is blind or visually impaired, or a professional working in settings like hospitals, schools, or courtrooms. Your support covers the care, training, and expert matching that make success stories like Doug and Flower possible. 🐾



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And bring independence, healing, and unconditional love to someone who's waiting.

For more info, contact **Judy Reilly** at
(818) 833-6437 or JAreilly@GuideDogsofAmerica.org
<https://www.guidedogsofamerica.org/sponsorship/>

SAVE the DATE



EVENTS CALENDAR 2025:

Aug 23	Graduation
Nov 1	Graduation
Nov13-15	Las Vegas Charity Weekend
Dec 2	Giving Tuesday



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GRADUATES



CLASS #432

(PUPPY RAISERS IN PARENTHESES)

TOP ROW: Kelly & Dumpling (The Sepetci Family), Mary & Wyo (Joe & Missy Stayton), Jade & Stella (The Sjogren Family), Jessica & Luka (Jaylene, Kelsey and Karim Romero), Doug & Flower (Vicki Lymberopoulos), Morris & Vaquito (Gail & Dean Houser)

BOTTOM ROW: Don & Boomer (Audrey Rohrer), Agustin & Chibi (Cas Zirkelbach), Anita & Dux (Kristin Dennis & Joe Millham), David & Volt (Tracey Sampson), Mike & Eggo (The Hogan Family), Phil & Whelan (Rick & Kerry Muir and Kathleen Johnson)

INSTRUCTORS (FROM LEFT): Sonia Parisi, Sean Deeb, Natalie Hopper, Jasmine Versales, Sean Chiles



CLASS #433

(PUPPY RAISERS IN PARENTHESES)

TOP ROW: Ann & Dancer (Dave & Pam McKenzie), Amber & Colette (Melissa Rubin), Laura & Andi (The Kasman Family), Michelle & Bruin (Maggie & Drew Byers), Shannon & Fletcher (Elizabeth Marlowe & Betty Borowski), Kaylee & Maddex (Crissy Krueger), Dewie & Bodie (Kirk & Kelly Brunke)

BOTTOM ROW: Sharon & Ventura (The Sobel Family), Lynn & Napa (Nancy Hawthorne and Roy Nitschke), Derek & Lydia (The Kelly-Park Family), Arielle & Ike (Mary Gallagher), Karla & Mystic (Lorry Rawdin and Linda Loper)

INSTRUCTORS (FROM LEFT): Jasmine Versales, Nicole Maples, Hanna Belyea, Jessica Simpson, Sydney Fujishige



Guide Dogs
of America



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Canines

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**OUR MISSION STATEMENT:
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH SERVICE DOGS.**

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