



MY GENERAL:

The Story of Kaylee and Her BFF (Best Furry Friend)

Being speech delayed made it difficult for Kaylee to connect with the world around her.

When she finally started talking, it was almost entirely in movie quotes.

"We had to figure out what movie she was quoting and how it responded to the situation," said her mom, Emily.

Autism brought other daily challenges. Kaylee was "a major eloper," often running away unexpectedly and putting herself in unsafe situations. She hid under tables during therapy, had frequent meltdowns, and even as her eighth birthday approached, she still couldn't stay in her own bed through the night.

Then Kaylee, now 9, met her service dog, General.

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A MESSAGE FROM TONY BLEVINS

Heroes come in many forms. They are the volunteer puppy raisers who open their homes, the donors and IAM partners who invest in our mission, the trainers and staff who dedicate themselves to every dog's success, and the graduates whose courage inspires us all. Together, they make life-changing partnerships possible every day.

That spirit is why we chose **Year of Heroes** as our theme for 2026. It reminds us that every act of generosity, service, and compassion helps create greater independence, confidence, and hope for the people we serve.

As we look ahead, I invite you to continue this journey with us. Every donation, sponsorship, and volunteer hour helps us provide expertly trained guide, service, and facility dogs at no cost to those who need them most.

Thank you for being one of our heroes.

Tony Blevins

Tony Blevins
President / Director
GDA | TLC



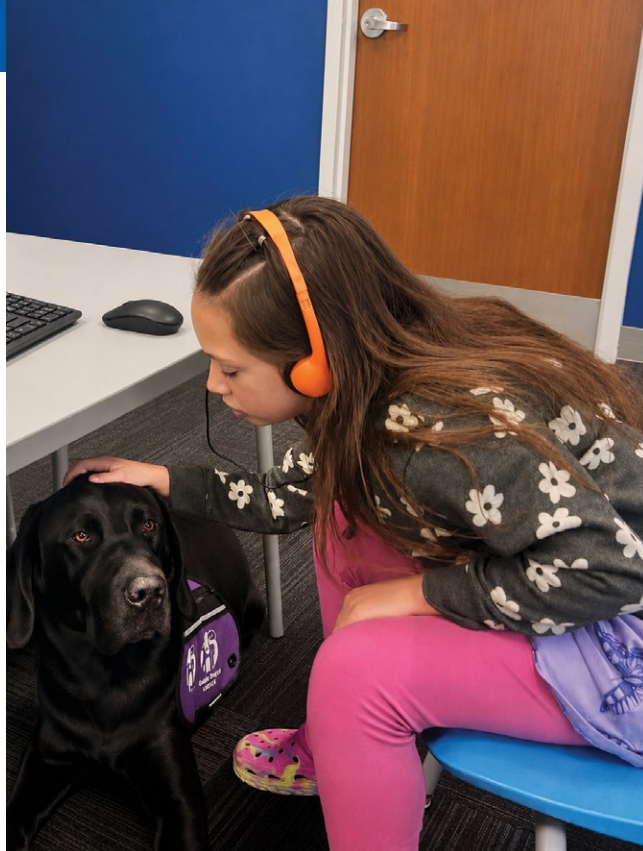
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"Kaylee will specifically request that General snuggle," Emily said. "He lays down next to her when she's on the floor. Even when she's just doing her homework, she will request General jump up in her lap. The deep pressure calms her."

Bedtime has changed, too. Instead of struggling to settle in for the night, Kaylee is excited to climb into bed knowing General will be right beside her.

Emily's hopes for Kaylee have always been simple — helping her build meaningful relationships.

"Gen's already doing that," Emily said. "It's not just General. It's 'This is my General. Do you want to play?' She introduces him to everyone. She calls him her best friend." 🐾



HOW LUCKY I AM:

Gratitude for Life with a Guide Dog

They say every dark cloud has a silver lining.

After losing one eye to a bacterial infection and most of the vision in the other from a retinal tear and detachment, John feared the independence he once enjoyed was gone for good.

"I live in a gated community complex, and I couldn't leave," John said. "I could go for walks within the community, but it was not safe to go outside the gates. Things were looking pretty bleak for me — anxiety, depression.

"Then everything changed.

The reason? A guide dog — and lovable goofball — named Gunner.

"When Gunner and I did our first route, it was the first time in over three years that I had walked independently, without a human and a cane. I became very emotional because I said, 'My life is about to get better.' And it did from that moment on. Changed everything."



Today, John rarely lets the gates define his world. He rides the bus, works out at the gym, navigates downtown Palm Springs, and confidently explores places he's never been before.

"I can even go to areas I've never been to before, and I know that with Gunner I'm going to be okay."

Looking back, John can hardly believe the difference between his life today and the days he spent "lying on the couch that first year with total blindness."

"I just believe the universe gives us what we need when we're ready for it," John said. "How lucky am I?" 🐾



HEAVEN ON EARTH:

Dancing into Better Days

After serving in the Air Force, Ann developed chronic fatigue syndrome, PTSD, and functional neurologic disorder.

"I was bedridden for a year and a half," Ann said. "When I was teaching, I'd teach, come home, collapse."

Then she met Dancer in May 2025

"It was love at first sight," Ann said. "Now I average three miles a day. Before, I barely walked at all. If we could give everyone the dog they need to be the best version of themselves, it would be heaven on earth." 🌍

Nonprofit of the Year

Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines is honored to be named a **2026 California Nonprofit of the Year** by California State Assemblymember District 43, Celeste Rodriguez.

For more than 75 years, GDA | TLC has transformed lives by providing expertly trained guide, service, facility, and therapy dogs at no cost to the people who need them most.

"This recognition belongs to everyone who makes our mission possible," said Tony Blevins, President & Director of GDA | TLC. "From our puppy raisers and volunteers to our donors, staff, and partners, every person plays an important role in changing lives."

The award celebrates the collective impact of the entire GDA | TLC community. Thank you for being part of this extraordinary achievement. 🌍





THE DETOUR:

Turning a Roadblock into a Bigger Mission

Morris knows a thing or two about unexpected detours. He worked in construction sales and planned to launch a facility dog program at his local hospital. But by the time he returned home with Vaquito, that opportunity had disappeared with a hiring freeze.

It could have ended there. Instead, “Little Cowboy” and his handler found an even bigger purpose.

“He’s had a pretty interesting life over the last year,” Morris said. “We work in the trauma ICU, helping patients and staff. I work at Camp Rapahope – summer camps for children with cancer or recovering from cancer – and I’ve got a highway safety program that I do.”

“We’ve been called into situations where a patient is dying,” Morris said. “In that brief moment, these dogs bring light to the darkness. And they bring life where there’s death.”

“The way he looks at you, you just know he was put on this earth to help,” Morris said. “And it’s like he knows that. ‘Hey, I know what my purpose is.’”

Their mission continues.

“It’s his job to share what he knows,” Morris said, “and it’s my job to share him.” 🐾

Learn more about their life-changing work through Morris’s new book, *Vaquito’s Voyage*, available on Amazon.

Employee Spotlight:

Jasmine Versales, Guide Dog Trainer

Growing up, Jasmine Versales always knew she wanted to work with animals.

“I found my purpose here,” Jasmine said. “Not only am I training the dogs, but when they get matched, that visually impaired client comes in for three weeks, and we teach them how to work with their dog.”

After completing a rigorous three-year apprenticeship, Jasmine recently became a qualified guide dog mobility instructor – a milestone that reflects years of dedication, skill, and hands-on training.

Her expertise made a lasting impression on guide dog graduate John.

“It’s not just a job for people like Jasmine,” John said. “It’s her passion. It’s her calling. It would be hard to fake doing what she does and have it translate to where I got to.”

For Jasmine, the greatest reward is seeing both graduates and dogs thrive together. 🐾





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Supporter Spotlight:

The Heart of One Volunteer's Experience

Barbara Patrick has always loved Labrador Retrievers. Knowing how much she admired the breed, her husband, actor Robert Patrick, arranged a special visit to the Guide Dogs of America | Tender Loving Canines campus several years ago. But it wasn't until a friend began volunteering for GDA | TLC that Barbara discovered a way to become involved herself.

"She was showing me pictures of these puppies in the nursery, these little lab puppies," Barbara said. "And I was like, 'Wait, wait, wait. Why do I not know about this?' So then I started volunteering in the nursery."

"Literally you're scrubbing kennels. It's not all fun and games. I clean more than I clean my own house sometimes."

But puppy socialization? That's gold.

"We work with the puppies from four to eight weeks," Barbara said. "We put their vests on for the first time. We have little obstacle courses we do. That is beyond fun."

Barbara also shares her home with her beloved Lab, Vespa, whom she describes as "the best lab I've ever had." Still, it's seeing the impact these dogs have on people's lives that keeps her returning to volunteer week after week.

"I got into it because I love labs, and I love being with the puppies, but when I see that big chain of how these dogs are affecting people and changing lives... that's what keeps me there always." 🐾





Guide Dogs of America
Tender Loving Canines

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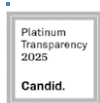
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