

One  
veteran's  
story of  
survival

Taking on  
college with  
confidence

How a  
child finds  
adventure  
again

# Hope in BLOOM

Emily and Guide Dog John



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## from our CEO

Dear Friend,

When you look for the magical moments, you'll find them all around.

The first innocent breaths of a new puppy. The love that fills the room as a dog runs into the arms of his new person. The quiet nights when a furry companion nuzzles close.

These special moments glimmer amidst the darkness.

How can something so small change the world? That's the magic of our dogs. Their warm embrace, faithful guidance, and intuitive touch spark hope. And when hope ignites, people confidently step into new dreams, four paws leading the way.

The world watches these awe-inspiring matches—human and dog—and marvels. Yet we know it all started with a spark from you. Because of your generosity, everyday moments become life-changing destinies.

Warm regards,

*Titus Herman*

Titus Herman  
Chief Executive Officer





# MAKE A LASTING DIFFERENCE

The Dogs Inc **Cornerstone Society** is an exceptional community of like-minded friends. Members make a profound impact on our mission through a multi-year commitment.

**You're invited to join the Cornerstone Society today.**



## MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

- Partner** | \$1,200 - \$4,999 per year
- Benefactor** | \$5,000 - \$9,999 per year
- Visionary** | \$10,000 - \$49,999 per year
- Guardian** | \$50,000 - \$99,999 per year
- Founder** | \$100,000+ per year



Enjoy exclusive events and other benefits.  
Join at [dogsinc.org/CS](https://dogsinc.org/CS) or call **941.729.5665**.

# Life UNLEASHED ISSUE 11

## A publication of Dogs Inc

Our extraordinary dogs transform lives throughout the country—at no cost to recipients. What makes our pups so special? Top-notch pedigrees and countless hours of training and love. Guide dogs turn darkness into light for people with vision loss. Service dogs restore freedom for veterans. Skilled companion dogs heal the broken hearts of those struggling with loss. And they never ask for anything in return. Neither do we. We offer our clients their loyal friends, expert instruction, and lifetime support free of charge—thanks to big-hearted donors and volunteers.



4210 77th St E. | Palmetto, FL 34221  
[dogsinc.org](https://dogsinc.org) | 941.729.5665

## from our board chair

Dear Supporter,

A wagging tail and floppy ears—something about a pup simply melts the heart. Every morning, Missy and I are greeted by those little romping paws, and we think of the paths they'll one day pave for someone in need.

As we co-raise Ranger, our 11th Dogs Inc puppy, we're delighted to witness the beginning of his exciting journey. But there is greater joy in knowing that one day he'll walk with someone into their new beginning.

Right now, this cuddly fluff ball is all about play and exploration, but the destiny he carries leaves us and our co-raisers, Cathy and Bill Phillips, in awe. The independence he'll bestow. The hope he'll spark, leading the way to new adventures and setting his future human partner on a path toward freedom and healing.

Although these incredible pups offer fresh starts, it is your support that opens the door.

Thank you for your continued generosity.

Warmest regards,

  
Tim Griffy  
Board Chair, Dogs Inc



## Board of Directors

Members of our prestigious board of directors are dedicated to governance, strategic planning, financial management, advocacy, and resource development. This group of leaders brings passion and commitment to the organization and plays a pivotal role in our work of providing extraordinary dogs and life-changing services to the people who need them. **Members include:**

- Tim Griffy** Chair, Richardson, TX
- Robert Meade** Vice Chair, Sarasota, FL
- Andy Taylor** Treasurer, Lakeland, FL
- Katharine Saunders** Secretary, St. Petersburg, FL
- Drew Asher** Tampa, FL
- Colleen Flaherty** Parrish, FL
- Ken Folkman** Tampa, FL
- Gary Johnson** St. Petersburg, FL
- Vice Admiral Joe Maguire, USN (Ret.)** Austin, TX
- Bobby Newman** Tampa, FL
- Carol Sanders** Bradenton, FL
- Dr. Harris Silverman** Sarasota, FL

## Mission Advancement Council

Our dedicated Mission Advancement Council works tirelessly to create and implement our "friendraising" strategy—forming and cultivating relationships with individuals who share our values and vision to secure the long-term success of our organization.

**Members include:**

- Carol Sanders** Chair, Bradenton, FL
- Colleen Flaherty** Vice Chair, Parrish, FL
- Philip & Carol Beauchamp** Belleair, FL
- Paula Cummings** St. Petersburg, FL & Sturgeon Bay, WI
- Leo & Trish Eineker** Bradenton, FL
- George & Mary Graner** Placida, FL
- Jennifer Baltic Osgood** Tampa, FL
- Kathy Pou** Lakeland, FL
- Susan & John Rapp** Lakewood Ranch, FL
- Brian & Sherry Soucy** Canton, GA
- John Whitcomb** Tampa, FL





# Lighting THE Way

## A meant-to-be friendship.

Backpacks brush her shoulders; sneakers shuffle by—the school bell rings, and cheerful voices echo off lockers. Emily makes out a blurred view of the commotion. Feeling stuck in a bubble, separated by her vision loss. Isolated.

She wonders: How is it possible to exist in a high school hallway bustling with classmates yet still feel so alone?

It's a life she's grown accustomed to; all Emily has ever known. "Sometimes people don't know how to act around me because of my vision," she says. "I've always dealt with isolation in school. I've had some rough days."

As a high schooler, Emily felt a spark of hope when she attended Guide Dog Teen Camp.

Perhaps a guide dog could help. Maybe, she wondered.

Then, life changes rolled in—applying to college, selecting a major, preparing for dorm life—and her anxiety stacked higher. The pressure sunk deeper.

But a twinkle of possibility shimmered as she considered her experience at camp.





Now is the time, she thought.

Right on cue, guide dog John arrived—gently breaking through the invisible barrier, stepping into her space of solitude.

As Emily settles into college life, that little voice of anxiety still sometimes whispers. The flashes of

*“John is everything I needed.  
And everything I wanted.”*

fear tug at her mind, but John rests his soft chin on her knee and reminds her she’s not alone.

He’ll even let out a few of his endearing grumbles just to talk to her and watch her smile grow—confidence in bloom.

“It’s amazing how much he helps me,” Emily says. “I knew he would, but hearing about guide dogs and then experiencing it myself—those are two entirely different things.”

Now, when voices surround her on campus, Emily reaches for the harness, knowing she has a partner at her side. A constant reminder that she’ll never be alone in a crowd. John watches her, guides her—and his very name tells her a story of connection. A story from years past...

Just before Emily’s grandfather passed away, when she was only an infant, her dad made a special request. ‘Will you watch over my babies?’ Her grandfather, John, gave a resounding yes.

A yes that now walks on four paws, her grandfather’s namesake, promising a guiding light through a world where Emily no longer feels invisible. ●



Christina Wills &  
Service Dog Nick



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Learn more at [dogsinc.org/HS](https://dogsinc.org/HS)

What’s your magic number?



Take me home for 3, 6, or 12 months. Love me forever.

Become a puppy raiser with Dogs Inc and open a world of magic to those with vision loss, veterans with disabilities, and children who need a best friend.

**Your mission as a puppy raiser is simple.** Take home a cuddly bundle of joy and bring back a happy, socialized, well-mannered dog. That’s the magic of making a difference.

**Be a part of the magic. Raise a puppy.**

Find your magic at [dogsinc.org/pup](https://dogsinc.org/pup)





Watch the long-awaited tale of an inspiring legend.

# Celebrate the Heroic Dog who Saves the Day

A story of community, togetherness, and hope—our newest animated short follows the epic journey of a legendary guide dog, Ace, as he overcomes all odds.

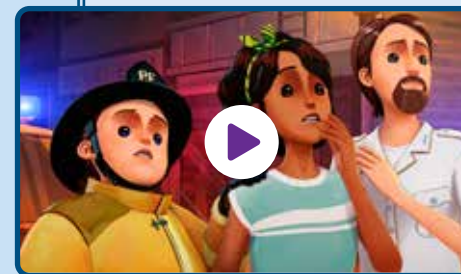
This extraordinary dog stops at nothing to save the day. Let his fierce love and loyalty uplift you, igniting emotions and making hearts flutter with admiration.

Discover heroism that will forever shape how you view the magical bond between dogs and humans.

**COMING JULY 16**  
to a screen near you.  
[dogsinc.org/Ace](https://dogsinc.org/Ace)



**The Story of Ace** A terror-filled night puts Ace's guardian, Joe, in grave danger. The town needs a hero—Ace—but will his mission put him in harm's way? Find out how Ace brings the Dogs Inc mission to life.



A legend. A hero. A guide dog—witness the magic in this animated short film, *Ace*.



*A heartfelt thank you to Gary and Melody Johnson for making Ace possible.*



# A Heart-Warming

The snow filled the ground that December day in Germany—a white Christmas—every child’s dream. For five-year-old Jace, the wintry day called for sledding. And as the flakes fell and the joy of laughter echoed in the white landscape, a little boy’s future changed forever.

The sledding accident happened in an instant. The impact of the chilling day seemed to freeze time—fears hanging over Jace’s mom and dad like sharp icicles. While families woke up to presents under the tree, Jace’s family spent over a week in the hospital, discovering that his sight was forever gone in one eye.

Half his world went dark. But it seemed his whole spirit felt the aching crush of the trauma.

“It traumatized him. Jace became reserved, and he was scared of basically everything,” Jace’s mom, Carmen, says. “He didn’t understand why this happened to him.”

This Air Force family returned to the States, searching for ways to help their once-vibrant, independent

“ little boy escape feelings no child should have to wrestle with alone.

**Bentley’s watchful eye and gentle companionship blanket the gusts of fear, ensuring Jace never feels alone.**

” something else will happen to him,” Carmen says. “Since we welcomed Bentley, that all changed. Her energy completely matches Jace’s personality; she’s just what we needed.”

Now, laughter fills their home, especially when Bentley hears her favorite words: “Where’s Jace? Go find him!” Paws bound around the house, tail wagging, as she searches for her giggling best friend. No matter what clever hiding spot Jace tucks into, Bentley always finds him.

He’s her purpose, her little boy. And as Jace loves to say, “She’s my dog.”

Bentley’s watchful eye and gentle companionship blanket the gusts of fear, ensuring Jace never feels alone. She reminds him that happiness lives around every corner—and that childhood is still full of adventures with the warmth of a furry friend. ●

# Love

*One chilling accident.  
Four warm paws.*







# A DOORWAY TO HOPE

A Special Friend  
to Honor the Past and  
Bring Light to the Future

Memorial Day, 2005: John Alvarez knocks on the front door, his heart pounding in his chest. The news he prepares to deliver sits like a lump in his throat. This family will never again see Major William Brian Downs. How will his wife and three children process the finality that he isn't coming home?



John Alvarez and  
Major William Brian Downs

John serves his country as the first-ever amputee to return to full, unrestricted combat duty as a pilot, paving the way for so many.

John stands at the threshold. On one side, a happy family. On the other, words of deep regret that will shatter those innocent hearts.

\* \* \*

Before the door opens, a flash of memories—the 1996 helicopter crash in the South American jungle near the Colombian border. As a Navy pilot assigned to a Special Air Force Operations unit, John embarks on a counter-narcotics mission, staring death straight in the eyes.

The Ecuadorian helicopter he's in plummets into the water, ejecting John through the windshield. Stranded in the river, John struggles to swim, fighting for dear life. His blood fills the piranha-infested waters. Why can't he battle the current?

That's when he realizes his left leg is almost severed. His right leg, fractured and dislocated at the knee. Just as death creeps closer, two fishermen pull him into their canoe, quickly applying pressure to stop the bleeding. A Navy SEAL also survives the crash, clinging to the side of the canoe, swimming alongside as he helps keep John alive. The fishermen return John and the Navy SEAL back to their jungle base, where his teammates of Air Commandos and Navy SEALs fight to keep him stable despite dangerous blood loss. John needs out. Fast.

The pilot of the MC-130 Hercules has only one option to help get John out to safety: land on a small, unapproved dirt strip. Dodging treetops and nearly crash landing, the pilot and his crew successfully evacuate John, helping to save his life.

The pilot flying that rescue-mission plane? Major William Brian Downs.

\* \* \*

With a heart forever indebted to this hero and dear friend, John stands at the Downs family's doorstep 10 years later to deliver the news that a beloved husband and father has died in Iraq.

Years pass, and John spends many of them serving his country as the first-ever amputee to return to full, unrestricted combat duty as a pilot, paving the way for so many.







Yet the trauma from the helicopter crash and the guilt of losing teammates in combat lingers.

He needs a soft place to land amidst the hard truth of his injuries and memories. Service dog Randall gallops in, bringing his fearless personality and energetic presence at just the right time.

“He’s in tune with me,” John says. “If I feel my blood pressure rising, I reach down and pet Randall or touch his ear, and it brings it back down.”

Randall stands strong, providing mobility support as he and John zip through airports on routine work trips.

\* \* \*

But it’s something intrinsically special about Randall that helps John honor the past while cherishing the present—his birthday. “Randall shares a birthday with the pilot who saved my life,” John says.

A day they celebrated together for the first time this past January . . .

John, his oldest daughter, Major Downs’ daughter, and Randall visit Arlington National Cemetery:

A joint birthday celebration for the hero who saved John’s life and the faithful dog who now brings joy and comfort to each day that John promises to live to the fullest.

Randall nuzzles closely. “He could tell how we were all feeling,” John says.

Together, they gently place a cupcake at the gravesite.

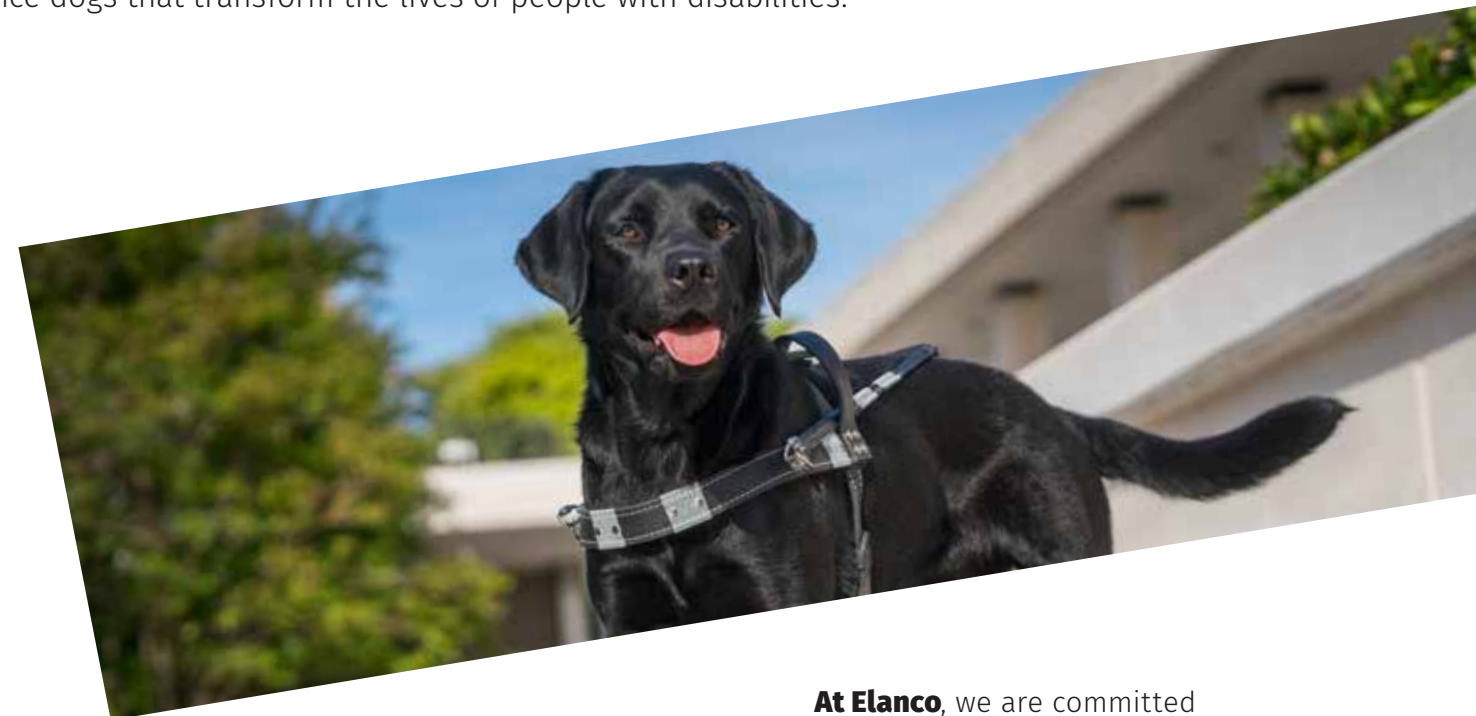
While John may hold the leash in his hand, Randall gently leads his person across the threshold—through the doorway, from hurt to hope. ●

“  
Randall shares a  
birthday with the pilot  
who saved my life.”



## Elanco is proud to be the Official Sponsor of Preventative Health Products for Dogs Inc.

We support long and healthy lives for the incredible guide dogs and service dogs that transform the lives of people with disabilities.



**At Elanco**, we are committed to creating a healthier life for animals everywhere. That means a more comprehensive portfolio of products along with unparalleled service and support for the health of animals, and for the good of people and the planet. **Elanco Healthy Purpose™**





## SPARK HOPE: A Giving Campaign

# IT ONLY TAKES A SPARK

A flicker of magic, a twinkle of something new—

that's where hope blooms.

It beams in the curl of a smile  
and twinkles in the eyes of a child.

When it's hard to see the light of hope through the shadows of trauma, the isolation of vision loss, and the darkness of grief, our dogs illuminate a path forward. Spirits brighten, and confidence shines.

As our extraordinary dogs change the world, we know it begins with a special spark—with you.

Because from one spark of generosity and kindness, light breaks through. And where light shines, hope grows.

Spark Hope today by supporting our dogs on their journeys of hope and healing.

Give today at [dogsinc.org/spark](https://dogsinc.org/spark)







## We're proud to support Dogs Inc

At Fromm Family Foods, we pride ourselves on offering a wide variety of premium dog and cat foods produced using the finest ingredients. Countless families across the country trust us with feeding their four legged family members. We are honored to be selected as the Official Dog Food of Dogs Inc, providing nutritional excellence to their extraordinary dogs throughout the United States.



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