

## The Love of My Life Was a Dog

*By Sharon Buchan*

In 2007 I decided to see if I was eligible for a Guide Dog. After calling Guide Dogs Inc. I was sent a 10-page application form. I had to obtain a physical and have a mental health evaluation. I was sure I could pass the physical, but was leery about the mental health exam. They sent a trainer to Orcas Island. She literally fastened a dog harness around her waist. I had to walk around town with a leash in one hand and hold on to the handle of the harness with the other hand. I found myself telling the trainer that there was a big crack here and a hole there. She replied, "I know, I can SEE." I want to know what you feel through the harness. All I could think of is what people were thinking as they saw me walking around with a person wearing a harness. As it turned out I passed all the tests with flying colors, even the psychiatric evaluation.

I thought I wanted to go to the San Rafael campus. I have family there. That way I could visit family when I had free time. Silly old me, the training lasted a month and we went from 6:00 A.M. until 10:00 P.M. The California campus is for city dwellers. I was sent to a little town in Oregon called Boring. I think it was named Boring, Oregon because all that was there were two churches and a bar. I thought it might not be so boring if there were two bars and one church.

There were easily one hundred rules to learn. **All of which were set up for bonding. This is a science and an art form.**

The threat was that you might not graduate and receive your dog if you did not OBEY. We worked several days on the tension of the leash. First with a trainer who was on all fours. The next was a sheet metal dog on wheels. Then we finally got a real live animal. It was love at first sight. We trained around chickens, rabbits, cats and horses. Mercy never reacted to any of these animals nor did she pay too much attention to the deer on the island when we got home. Unfortunately she thought that all skunks were to not only be growled at, but it was also her job to charge them. We did have a city excursion where I found out that Mercy, my dog, loved the city. She would beg to do the escalators over and over. She was amazing and never made a mistake except when food was hidden somewhere. This was done so that we would learn not to let them ever eat anything on the ground. Forget it if it was pizza. There was no stopping her. She found it and had it swallowed before I could react and correct her. I could understand. After all it was pizza.

One of the rules was to never allow the dog on the bed. I later found out almost everyone broke that rule. The few times I did she would start out at the bottom of the bed curled up in a tight little ball and somehow when I awoke in the morning would find her beside me with her head on the pillow and her paw would be draped around my neck. It was a love affair I will cherish for the rest of my life.