

Adventures with Basco!

Around midday, 3 December 2021, I received a call from an unidentified number. I was busy cooking and missed it. I listened to the voicemail a few



moments later to find out that it was the owner of the guide-dog school calling. He had a potential dog for me.

After a few phone calls, some photos, and a bit of discussion, it was agreed that a little furball, named Basco, would come to try to be my new guide dog. It is an oversimplification to reduce the emotional tornado as excited or anxious. It's so ... so... sooooo much more.

This is the ideal format to present what a guide dog is and isn't, why I wanted want, and all that comes with inviting a new dog into your home, even if you've had one before.

The Decision to Ask for a Guide Dog

Let's talk about this frankly, shall we? I was suddenly thrust into a situation of severe vi/blindness. Where before I had driven whenever I felt like it,



walked where and when I wanted to, cycled, swam, any form of mobility, suddenly I could not see my own hands let alone my feet or anything in my environment.

It is incredibly traumatizing to have no idea where you are or how to get where you want/need to go. My first rehab counselors got me a blind stick; which opened up my freedom again. I was so excited when I got the stick... until I realized the problems.

- Leaving my house means grabbing my stick, my keys, my phone, bone-conduction headset (so I can hear directions and my phone's voice over), and eye protection. This is beyond the normal stuff like wallet, purse, etc.
- Sticks only note the things you run them into, you can easily miss uneven tiles etc.
- Sticks do not detect low hanging things
- Sticks do not detect body-level signs (only the poles if you hit them)
- Sticks will go under a car bumper and then your face slams into the car. That's a ball of joy right there.
- Sticks might miss a pole or a cycle, but you won't.
- Sticks get stuck.
- Things get stuck on the stick... those masks everyone so carelessly leaves everywhere
- The ball gets gross, and needs washed
- You need to follow blind lines because otherwise you'll end up in the street or something unsafe
- People do not always notice or care that you're coming with your blind stick
- IF people notice they don't always know what it means
- Components of the stick need replaced and because it's specialized it can take a while to get those parts
- Sticks are not convenient for sand, dirt, trails, gravel, any non-level surface really.

I already knew about guide dogs. I like dogs. Guide dogs don't need to follow blind lines, they can keep you away from hanging branches, or trash on the ground. Guide dogs can navigate the beach or a trail. If I want to go to a music festival, a guide dog would be far superior. People see guide dogs. I needed a guide dog.

Next step: Ask for a guide-dog and go through a lengthy process.

Asking for a Guide-Dog & the Process to Get One



In the Netherlands, most insurance companies will cover the cost of a guide dog, if the vi/blind meets the criteria and is determined to need one. How was I going to get one, though? I talked about it with my mobility trainer when I was in rehab with Visio het Loo Erf. My trainer was a super cool guy who really thought a guide dog would suit me really well.

The first step was to find out if my insurance would cover a guide dog (provided I met the conditions). I, also, needed to review the different guide dog providers and pick one or two that I was interested in. Finally, I needed to do some practice with a faux guide dog.

What's a Faux Guide Dog?

This is a metal frame with wheels and a bar similar to a guide dog harness that the trainer can help to mimic the movements of a dog for preliminary training. In this case, Eelko, my mobility trainer, would push the faux guide dog along as I gave the command I wanted. He would also have the faux guide dog make mistakes so that I would have an idea of how to deal with it.

And then?

Then, there was paperwork... a lot of it. I don't remember what all Eelko needed to fill out, but he needed to make a recommendation to the main mobility team in my region. He also needed to sign me up for a guide-dog presentation/trial, while I was in rehabilitation. Needless to say, he was very busy trying to get the process started for me.

After the first steps with Eelko, I moved on to being tested by the mobility trainer from my region. She tested me with a faux guide dog, with the commands and with the routes. She asked probably 642 questions about my life, my routine, what I wanted, what I expected, etc. She wrote up her recommendation and then asked if I had settled on a guide dog provider; I had.

The Interview

It just so happens that the school presenting while I was in rehabilitation was a smaller provider. I liked their method of teaching and the types of dogs they provided. I had already narrowed my choices down to two before I even had the presentation, and they were on that short list.

During the presentation, I had a short interview with the owner of the dog school, Serge. We talked about my needs/desires and what he could provide; it solidified my decision for me.

After my mobility trainer wrote her recommendation, she asked for an appointment for me to meet with Serge, at my home. He would also ask me several questions and make a determination. What determination?! As a trainer/provider of guide dogs, it's part of his job to assess the client and determine if placing a dog with them is beneficial to both the client and the dog.

The interview is a really good chance for him to assess my personality and try to get a handle on the type of dog that would suit me best. Just as every person has a unique personality, so does every dog.

He did end up asking several questions. He asked many of the same questions as the mobility trainer; which was a little frustrating but understandable. He determined I should have a guide dog. He informed me that it would be 1.5 to 2 years. Let the wait begin!

Next Step: There's a Dog for Me!

There's a Dog for Me!



After agreeing to proceed with the guide dog trajectory, I had several calls and a couple of emails concerning the procedure. Basco would be delivered on a Friday with the trainer and the owner so that I could meet Basco and my trainer. Basco would stay with me for the weekend so that we could both adjust. The following Monday we would start with training. I received a 4 day a week schedule for training. Each training would be 2-3 hours. Wow, what?!

It just so happened that I had the unfortunate task to put my Kotabear to sleep. He was very ill. His heart, among other things, was surrounded by fluid and he couldn't walk very well. I would be losing my very best friend in the same weekend I would get my new guide dog. I don't suggest that combination.

The Delivery

Friday morning came and with it Basco, Serge, and Alette. Basco had lived with Alette, and she had spent the previous year training him. Serge, of course, is the owner of Gaus Assistant Dogs. When I opened the door, Basco was nothing but wagging tail and lots of kisses: he appeared to approve of me.

We spent a very long time talking over things. Serge spent a fair amount of time adjusting Basco's brand new guide dog harness, his gentle leader, and prepping all of the supplies. The guide dog was delivered with everything he would need, including food and a brush.

We talked about how training would proceed, Basco, his personality, what I could expect and so on. I probably forgot about half of it because my mind was torn between excitement and sadness.

Finally, it was time to take him for a test walk.

The Walk: Not as Expected

The three of us set out walking: me with my stick and Basco in tow, Serge and Alette. We planned to walk to the place where I could let Basco out. Basco was excited and had almost no focus. As we walked, I needed to stop and reward him every 10 paces. The entire time we walked, Serge talked about different techniques and gave tips on how to handle situations.

IT WAS SO OVERWHELMING!

We had a situation where there were other dogs in our path. I learned very quickly how to deal with that, and admittedly got so overwhelmed with the whole process that I cried. There's an important thing sighted people should understand about vi/blind people: stimuli is overwhelming. It's already overwhelming to navigate through the environment, to do so while being talked to and having a new dog on a leash is a tornado of chaos.

By the time we got home, Alette was exhausted and needed to leave, Basco and I were exhausted, and I think Serge was a little worried. Serge took the time to stay and explain some more things and make sure everything would be fine. He made sure I had the urgent number if things went poorly. Then, he was gone. I had to face putting my best friend to sleep and then an entire weekend of a foreign fluff.

Next Step: The Weekend: CHAOS! RUNAWAYS! Is This What I Ordered?!

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Everyone was gone. It was me, Basco, and a whole lot of neither of us knowing what we were gonna do. I was distraught and, I think, so was he. We didn't go for a walk that night, but the next morning we set out to walk to the park where dogs can run free. Serge already told me that Basco couldn't be in his working apparatus, but that he should be in his harness.

Basco's harness is comprised of two parts: the part that attaches to Basco (I call it the harness) and the bar that attaches to the harness which allows me to hold on to Basco and be guided around. He also has a Gentle Leader; which you can find [here](#).

Chaos Ensues...

Getting his guide dog harness on was already a challenge; he doesn't like it. Despite coaxing with treats, he really does not want the harness on. It's a whole process just to get us out the door. I need walking shoes, clicker, stick, hat (it's cold), gloves, keys, and my phone. He needs the gentle leader, harness, lead, and working bar. It's a bit much. Oh! The most important thing: treats!

We start down the same path toward the park as we took the day before. I'm using my stick to keep track of where we are, counting 10 paces and either giving a treat or telling him that he's good and counting 10 more paces. He just has to sniff everything. Now might be a good time to mention that the sidewalk was previously a disaster of uneven tiles, and the city spent the previous 4 days fixing and leveling the tiles. They left a pile of sand... which every cat in the neighborhood used as a litterbox. Basco, of course, views this as not a sandbox, nor a litterbox, but a box of treats.

As I'm sure you've guessed, Basco was distracted by cat waste, every bit of trash on the ground, every bird, every noise and in general anything that moved... and some things that didn't move. We finally made it to the park, though!

The Runaway

While walking to the park, I hold Basco's lead a bit shorter because I want to be able to quickly correct him. When we are at the park, I loosen it a bit so that he can have room to relieve himself. He seemed a bit distracted, but he had been distracted the whole walk. We were about half-way through the park when suddenly he bolted.

He jerked with such intensity that despite having the lead wrapped around my hand twice, I lost grip on it, and he ran. With it, he took my keys that I had been holding (because of the clicker that's attached) and my glove. I screamed both in pain because he's a strong dog and my hand got squished, but also in fear. I had just lost my guide dog!

There were some dogs running free and Basco had decided he wanted to run, too! Thankfully, Coen (who does most of the photography/videography for my site) was nearby and helped get Basco, my keys and my glove returned to me. I was shaken. I knew there was an "emergency" number that I could call if there was a problem.

Basco and I walked straight home, no stopping, no passing Go, no collecting 200 monopoly dollars: straight home.

You're on Your Own, Kid

We got home, I got Basco in his crate and I looked up the emergency guide dog number. I was panicked and stressed. The person on the other end asked if I was okay. I don't even remember how I answered. They told me that my trainer would come Monday and that I just needed to hold on until then. They said that Basco and I should only go for a walk to do a potty and nothing else. I yelled, "THAT'S WHAT WE WERE DOING!" The emergency help replied with: "take him somewhere that other dogs can't be let free." I can't... it's all free run or not at all, in the area.

I told the person that I was afraid to take Basco out. The person told me I had to. Normally, I face challenges head on. This was different and I am different. Basco is a living being and while he is responsible for leading me around, I'm responsible for caring for him. If he runs off, then what?

The Rest of the Weekend



We didn't have any catastrophes or calamities the rest of the weekend, but it was stressful and difficult. Basco didn't listen to a single command. Why should he? Who am I to him? He's been abandoned with this person that speaks a foreign language and that he's now won several battles against. If I wanted him to do anything it would take waving treats in his face and telling him 10 or more times. I would treat him, when he did what he was told, but I felt like I was rewarding terrible behavior.

I had a good amount of time to think about Basco and what he would mean to me. He wasn't what I expected. I knew there would be an adjustment period. I knew that he would have to trust me, and I would have to trust him. I didn't know that he would be so much chaos. It felt like he had no training at all. I even compared him to Kota. I remember when Kota was a year old, I would leave him with my mom from time to time. Kota was a big chunk of muscle, but even at a year old, he never once pulled my mom. She could walk with him without him having a leash. Kota would be horribly distressed if he thought he upset someone. Basco, though, wants to do what Basco wants to do.

Is this what I ordered? Is this normal guide-dog behavior? Was I dreaming when I thought of what a guide-dog should be? Were my expectations too high? I made the statement and I still stand by it: Basco is the kind of dog that would be my dog. I would not choose him, in his current state, as a pet. If he can do his job and provide the service that my insurance is paying for, then I will absolutely keep him. I wouldn't take him on as a house pet, though.

Up Next: It's Finally Monday! Help is Here! Or is it?

It's Finally Monday! Help is Here! Or is it?



Monday morning came and I was an overfull balloon ready to pop. Alette asked me how my weekend went, the balloon popped. I'm sure I said many emotional things, one of which was to complain about how afraid I was he would run off and I would lose the guide dog. I told her that if this was how it was going to be that I wasn't sure I was in for the ride. She assured me that it was an adjustment process and that we would make a team soon enough

Walking with Alette

Alette decided we would first walk without the bar for the harness. We would go to the park and back. Only

then would we try it with the working bar. The walk to the park wasn't perfect but Basco acted like a completely different dog around Alette. I was disappointed and also a little miffed.

We got back to the house, and I put the working bar on his harness. This would be the first time we walked with him as my guide, not the other way around.

Being Guided

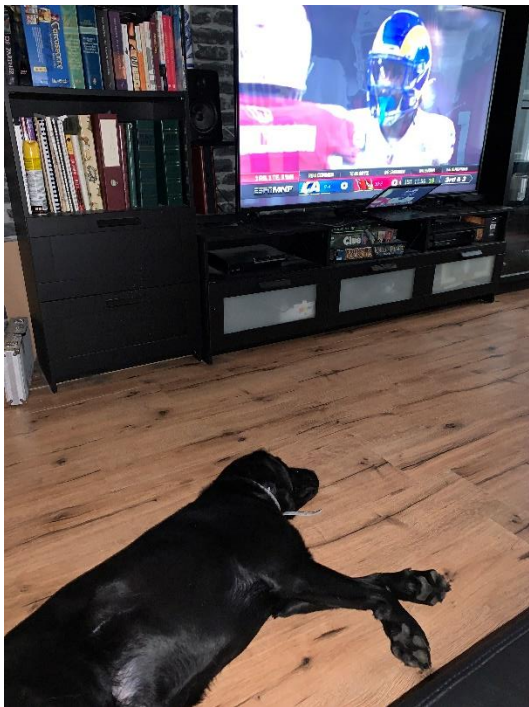
Basco had the bar on, he hated it. He didn't want to walk. With some encouragement from Alette, he did walk, though. The commands are all in Dutch; which is a little more stressful to remember than if they were in English. In my left hand I had his bar, his lead and the clicker. In the right hand I had my stick. We began and immediately there was the problem of trying to hold everything and then give a treat.

Alette suggested that I duct tape the clicker to the stick. I don't have duct tape, so I would have to come up with something else. (When I got home, I attached it with a hair tie) For the moment though, I just held the clicker to the stick until treat time.

Basco knew the way and didn't have much trouble following directions. I trusted him, he was working, and I also had my stick as a failsafe. He made some mistakes, but overall things went well when we walked with Alette.

Up Next: Why is it Different When Alette isn't Here?!

Why is it Different When Alette isn't Here?!



I had experienced the problem the previous weekend, but attributed it to his being dumped in a new environment.

Unfortunately, the pattern continued throughout the next week to the point where I really, honestly, and whole-heartedly questioned if I wanted to continue.

After Alette Leaves

Monday night, I tried to take Basco for a walk with the full working harness. He was almost impossible to direct, and I didn't trust him even a little bit. He pulled to wherever he wanted, did what he wanted, and chose to do commands if he felt like it. I was so disappointed.

Tuesday morning, we walked in the full harness, again. We went to the park and, also, to the bus stop. Basco worked almost flawlessly. Again, after she left, Basco would be difficult and refuse to listen. I was losing my patience and he was chaos in a black furry coat.

Wednesday, we had a slightly altered schedule because I had an early doctor appointment. Alette got her first glimpse of him being chaos because his schedule was changed, and he wasn't behaving as he should.

We didn't have a lesson on Friday because I was in the hospital for a procedure most of the morning. I did quite a bit of thinking over Basco. I talked with Coen and some others about how I was feeling. I knew I didn't want Basco in his current state. He was making me too tired, and I was frustrated all the time.

When I talked with Alette, she suggested it was still adjustment period, I wasn't giving him enough treats, and that I needed to wait for the bond to form. She would encourage me and tell me that Basco likes me. That's great, but do I like Basco?

Up Next: Weekend 2: Lunging at Other Dogs, Standing His Ground, & More Chaos!

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Alette had been on the Wednesday but because of a medical situation, not on Friday. Basco continued to devolve. His attitude was stubborn, defiant, and head-strong. I was getting more and more frustrated. Even when I let him out in the back yard, he wouldn't come back inside until he was good and ready.

By the time Friday evening came around, I actually screamed because it was midnight, and he wouldn't come in and I wasn't going out there.

Admittedly, I made so many mistakes in that situation. I shouldn't have let him out without the leash. I shouldn't have lost my temper, and I shouldn't have allowed him the freedom to make poor choices.

Saturday Morning Disaster

I decided to take him for his walk, early Saturday morning. We went in full working harness and walked toward the park. He did okay-ish, but was still with the very stubborn attitude and there was very little correction I could

do, other than to stop and restart. It took almost 30 minutes to do a 5-minute walk because I had to keep stopping and resetting Basco.

The routine is to get to the park, have Basco sit, remove the working bar and let him have a little freedom while still on the leash. I removed the bar, and we began to walk alongside the grass. I heard someone say “Morgen” to me. At this point, I didn’t know if it was only a person letting me know they were in my vicinity or if there was also a dog. I didn’t have the time to listen and figure it out. Basco lunged in the direction the voice came from. I heard a little dog yipping and fast footsteps away.

Basco had lunged at someone else and their dog! I’m vi/blind. I have no idea if the man made a signal for Basco to come. I have no idea if Basco was lunging at the man or the dog. I know Basco lunged, and the people left. I was embarrassed and also a bit afraid.

Sunday Morning Tears

I was determined to continue on despite Basco being a royal pain in my ass. Sunday morning, we suited up in full work gear and headed to the park. He struggled with commands, got very distracted, and I had to pull him along more than once. We began the park routine, and I took off the working bar. We walked up the one side and turned to come back. I told him to do his thing at least 3 or 4 times; he didn’t. We got to the end of the trail, and I put his bar back on. I told him to continue forward; he refused.

I told him 3 or 4 times to go forward; he simply would not. I tugged on him, and he dug his heels into the gravel, dropped his butt to the floor and refused to move. He tends to put the brakes on when he needs to toilet. So, I removed the working bar and let the lead out so he could toilet. He didn’t want to. He just wandered around sniffing things on the ground.

I put him back in the bar and tried again. He refused to move. He held me hostage in that spot for 15 minutes before he decided he was going forward. He had won the battle. He got his way. I cried. I cried a lot. We walked home, but I was dejected. I decided I was done with him. I would ask for a new guide dog.

I barely interacted with him Sunday evening. I was beyond my limit with him. This is NOT what I ordered, not even a little bit. This dog was stubborn, difficult, head-strong, and didn't give a shit about me. I wasn't going to fight with him for 6 months just have a somewhat functional guide-dog. Another weighing factor was that Alette had explained how Basco has trouble in trains.

Why would I keep a guide dog that I had to fight with AND couldn't go on trains when I'm on trains 3 days out of 7. If I get a full-time job, I'll be on trains 6 days out of 7. What use is a guide dog that can't go on trains?!

Up Next: Monday comes: I'm done. I sit through a long, tedious lecture from Gaus, and it's time for a decision.

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I had thought it over and talked about it with others; this wasn't the dog for me. He was headstrong and difficult. If the trainer said he was a pain in the ass, stubborn, and struggled with trains, why would I want this dog?! 9am came along and with it, Alette. She didn't even get a word in before I laid out the

whole situation. She said she understood, and that she would call with Serge Gaus to determine what we would do.

The Lecture from Serge

Alette was outside for quite some time talking with Serge. When she came back in, she told me that maybe it's better if she takes Basco because she thinks he will just keep repeating the behavior when she's gone. About 5 minutes later, Serge calls and she puts him on speaker phone.

Serge has been doing this 20 years, I've been doing this 2 weekends. Serge lays out the situation, but perhaps his tone is a bit stern. I'm not sure I have it in me to fight with Serge after the weekend I had. I laid out the situation for Serge. I'll be the first to tell you that everyone I know tells me I have a very direct and strong personality. I'm not sure Serge was prepared for me!

I put all of my concerns on the table. I explained how the weekend went and that I was concerned about the trains. Serge got rather gruff with me. At more than one point I told him I was done with him. I even told him to go to hell. Admittedly, not my best moment. At the end of a 1.5-hour conversation, it got boiled down to some points:

- Do I want to continue to train with Basco?
- The problem is me not using the system properly, not their dog or their process.
- If I opt for a different guide-dog I will have to wait another 1.5 to 2 years.
- If I get another guide-dog, I could have the same problems because it is definitely not their dog; it's me (Serge's point of view)

Alette asked me to think it over and text her in the evening. If I decided against continuing, then she would be prepared to take Basco with her the next day.

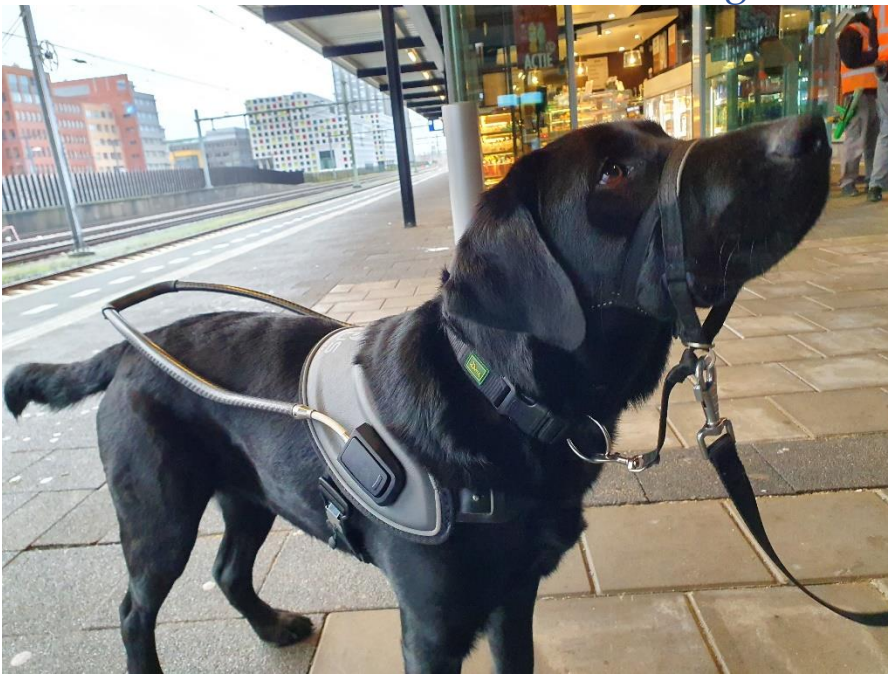
Asking Others

Basco was far from what I considered trained. Remember, I just put Kota to sleep, and Kota was the picture of near perfection. Kota didn't need a leash, never argued, wasn't stubborn, he was just excellent. How could I consider Basco trained if he couldn't walk on a leash properly, if he lunged at dogs, if he refused to follow orders, and if he wouldn't go on a train? What if the problem wasn't Basco, though? What if the problem really was me?

I messaged and called with other vi/blind people with guide-dogs to get the stories of their experiences. The experiences were varied, but I definitely understood one thing: none of it is Basco's fault. From my research, I ascertained that some dogs just shouldn't be paired with vi/blind people. The dogs that should be paired still take effort to make the team. I either needed to go in, full-bore, or I needed to call it a day. If I was going in, full-bore, then no more of this bitching about it; just fix it and carry on.

Up Next: The Decision is Made: 100% or Nothing.

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I made the decision. Basco is probably too strong-willed to actually be with a vi/blind person. I'm a stubborn pain in the ass, too. A friend suggested that I record our sessions both inside and outside of training to measure progress. My final decision was to set goals for every week and for the 3-month

period after his arrival. I would review the film and determine if he had met the goals for the week. Every Friday I will make the decision to go forward or not. If after 3 months, he still can't do the things he needs to do, then I will ask for a different dog. Until then, I'm 100% all-in. There will be no excuses and no giving up. Instead of bitching, I will just find solutions.

Walking Without My Stick!

Alette arrived Tuesday and we headed out. The walk began with a stick, but within a few minutes, we decided it was easier for me to walk without the stick. I had his lead and clicker in my right hand, his bar in my left hand and a front-pocket full of goodies.

We walked to the bus stop and then to the tram. Most things went really well, despite him being very overwhelmed. The route to the tram was new and he had to be corrected several times, at the start. Eventually he got himself together and walked relatively well. You can view the walk [here](#) & [here](#).

By the time we got home, I was exhausted and so was he. I talked with Alette, we had to work on the train situation. This was Tuesday, I wanted to take him by train on the coming Sunday. We had much to do!

Up Next: Trains? YES, HE CAN

Trains? YES, HE CAN



Wednesday morning, Alette had a plan. We would drive to the train station and practice on trains. Friday, we would practice with the tram and then take the tram to the train and practice with the train. Hopefully, then he would be ready for a complete trip on Sunday.

The Station

After we parked and started walking toward the station, there was a point where I knew exactly where I was. I suppose it was then that my confidence shot to the ceiling. Basco calmed himself and we walked into the station. He was great.

We tried to find a platform with trains coming and going. We tried a couple of platforms and just barely missed the trains. It was so cold! We ended up getting some hot beverages and just picking the platform I always go from.

New Trains vs Old Trains

The first train came by, and Alette wanted to try with him, by herself. He jumped right in. She was pleasantly surprised. Apparently, he was trained with old trains, which have a huge gap, grated steps, and more steps. The new trains were so much easier for him. I almost never see the old trains, so, we both thought this would actually be okay!

I, too, practiced with him several times and with a couple of flat-entry sprinters. Basco and I were tired, and he had done so well. We walked toward the car; both of us were making mistakes. I didn't treat often enough, and he wasn't paying a whole lot of attention. It was okay, we worked hard.

Up Next: After-hours training, trams, trains, and disaster

After-hours training, trams, trains, and disaster



Thursday is Alette's day off. I decided that we should practice going in and out of the tram, on Thursday. We waited until the evening so that it was less busy. Basco and I walked to the tram station, we tried to search the benches and walked both sides of the platform. He failed searching benches correctly, but I never sit on

them, so it's irrelevant. He jumped in and out of about 5 different trams, both old and new. He was great!

Practicing the Complete Trip

When Alette arrived Friday morning, I told her about our practice the previous night and she was super happy with us. We started off going toward the tram. Basco had no problems. It was Alette's first ride in the tram, and apparently Basco's too. They did great.

When we got to the station, Basco was walking like a proud pony. He thought he knew what was going to happen; he was only partially correct. He jumped in and out of several trains and then we made the decision to ride one over to Den Haag Central. It's only a 5-minute ride each way.

Disaster Ensues

When the next sprinter toward DH Central arrived, we all got aboard; Basco did a great job. We had a seat and took the short ride. When we got to the station, I was a little stressed because I don't know it so well. We found the return sprinter and headed toward it. Basco made the first jump successfully. However, Alette thought maybe because we had a 10-minute wait we should practice several times.

Basco jumped out and then refused to jump back in. He wouldn't jump in for Alette and he wouldn't jump in for me. I asked Alette to give space and let me try. I almost had Basco to the point where he would jump in, and a station worker came to ask if I wanted help. I told him I didn't, and he persisted. Eventually Alette came to tell him everything was fine. He went away grumpy; but this is how it goes when people insist you need help when you don't.

Eventually, Coen had to lift Basco into the train. We rode back frustrated. Everyone was tired and frustrated. Alette was sure, though, that Basco would be fine in the newer trains.

Up Next: The Complete Trip to a New Place on our own & the Complete Failure.

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Sunday came along and with it a bit of excitement. I really wanted to send Alette a text about how great he did. I was already predicting he would do so well, and I would be so proud. This was a huge change from just a few days earlier. We got all ready to go and the walk to the

tram went perfectly. Basco got on the tram with ease, and we made it to the station with no problems. Basco walked the station as if he was a boss there.

The Wheels Come off the Train (Figuratively)

When the train arrived, the doors opened and Basco put on the brakes. He absolutely was NOT going in that train. Coen had to physically pick him up and put him in the train. Basco had zero focus, walked down the path backward, wouldn't search a seat, and was completely lost to my communication.

The train ride was alright, but again trying to get off of the train was sketchy, at best. He didn't navigate to the lift, I did. He didn't navigate out of the station, I did. It was as if I had a brainless meat-sack attached to me. Coen went ahead to let his mom know she couldn't greet Basco, while I stayed back and tried to re-center Basco. Coen wanted me to come with Basco toward the car, but Basco wouldn't move. He wouldn't look for the stoop, he wouldn't go forward, he wouldn't even focus on me.

Eventually, I have dragged him and then he started moving. He got in the car with me and sat between my legs. The car ride was alright, but it was obvious he was not okay. When we got to the tiny village, I wanted to take him to relieve himself. About half-way there, he saw a goose and decided to chase it... while I was still attached to him. He broke the working bar and nearly yanked me over.

I did get him wrangled and we managed it back to the house, but I knew he was not going back by train that night. Coen fixed the bar as best he could. I sent Alette the text. I wasn't happy. It's great that he can do trains when she's there, but she's not going to be there. What if Coen wasn't there to lift him into the train? I can't lift 30kg of dog into the train every single time. I'm, also, not going to call ahead for assistance every time, either.

Up Next: Monday is Market Day

Monday is Market Day



Alette was disappointed with the events of Sunday. We talked about our plan for the week and decided that since the market is closed on Tuesday, we would try trains on Tuesday and practice the market today.

The Market!

Basco was trained in a tiny village with a very tiny market. The Haagse Markt is the largest wet market in the Netherlands and one of the largest in Europe. The market wasn't overly busy, but there was still a lot of noise and a fair amount of people. Alette had never been to a market that big, either.

I learned about how to help him guide me through and we started off. We stopped at my favourite veggie stall and my favourite cheese stall and then headed down what I call "Fish-Alley." One strip down the market has almost exclusively fish mongers with a few butchers sprinkled in. I knew it would be difficult for Basco.

Something Fishy

As we approached Fish-Alley, Basco was immediately drawn to the smells. The best way to describe this is fish mongers and butchers on either side of a long walkway. The walkway has a central drain. The fish mongers tend to have big ice boxes on the ground with fresh fish in them. There are even boxes with live crabs wiggling around. The other side has butchers with fresh meat, sausages dangling, and both sides competing to get your business by shouting out their deals. It's chaos.

Basco did not do well on the first lap. I could barely get him to walk straight, and I don't really blame him. The fish mongers tend to push their waste toward the drain and so the whole central drain has fish bits on it. We got to the end and Alette taught me a centering exercise. She had me click every time Basco looked at me. As soon as I clicked, I needed to give him a treat. It took several times before he stopped looking at the fish stalls and focused just on me.

As soon as he was focused, we went down Fish Alley again. This time, he did it perfectly. I was proud of him and of myself. The market is an important thing, to me, and it's important he can do it with me. He did great!

Up Next: Tuesday Trains

Tuesday Trains: Can He Do It?



Alette had been disappointed in the story of the previous Sunday with Basco and the train. She asked me if it was a deal-breaker if he doesn't go on trains. We had a long conversation about it, Monday, after the market.

It is a deal-breaker. It makes me sad because I'm beginning to become quite attached to him. Even during Covid-

times, I am on the train 3-5 days a week. While I can and do take a medical taxi, regularly, I do not want to have to take a taxi every time I have somewhere to go because my GUIDE-DOG will NOT go on the train. After Covid-times, there's a very good chance I will be on the train 6 days out of the week.

When I applied for a guide-dog, my need for daily travel and of course recreational travel (occasionally) were a motivating factor for getting a guide-dog. I was looking forward to the dog helping me find a seat because I find it a little creepy to just be pawing everyone and everything finding a seat.

If Basco can't travel, which was the one big thing I wanted him for, then he can't be my guide-dog. It seems just so bizarre that they put him with me if he struggles with public transit considering how adamant I was about it. If he really can't do trains, that isn't my fault or problem, they didn't give me the correct dog.

The Station

She drove us to the station and the anxiety was just rippling off of Basco. The first troubles happened with the lift. He nearly yanked my arm off coming out of the lift. I stopped, backed him up, and did it again. When he successfully went out of the entrance smoothly, we walked forward, made a small lap, and did it again until he stopped pulling at the elevator, entirely.

It was time for trains. The first one arrived, doors opened, and Basco put his ass on the ground and refused to move. Alette couldn't get him to go in, either. She was disappointed. We decided to have him search the bench; which he did with limited success. I decided maybe I would take him for a walk to the end of the platform to calm his nerves.

As we were walking back, a flat-entry sprinter showed up and he easily went in. We played with a toy right after and gave lots of treats. After that, a new intercity showed up on the other side. We tried it: he jumped in easily. We played some more and gave lots of treats. He jumped in and out of 2 more intercity trains before an old sprinter showed up. We gave it a try: he jumped in.

Alette Asks How I Feel

When I decided 100% or nothing, I really went in 100%. I want Basco to be my guide dog. I want it to work. I don't want to wait for a new one, I don't want to build a bond with a new one. I don't want Makituk to lose his best friend. I don't want to lose my chance at freedom.

I'm not relieved that Basco jumped in the train. Why? He jumped in the train after much walking and then with the reward of playing and treats. Alette was there. Okay, he did jump in several trains, even the old ones, but will he do that when we are alone? I'm dubious. I feel dubious. I'm still 100% in and we are absolutely going to push the train issue on Friday. I might even take him on the train Thursday. When I trust that he will do it for just me and maybe some delicious snacks, then I will be relieved. For now, we're working on it.

Up Next: We Visit the Market again

We Visit the Market again



The 2nd time we visited the market, Basco was much better. We went a different route, and we stopped a couple of times to “reset” him. He struggled in a couple of places and had a complete loss of plot in fish alley, but he did recover.

Obstacles

A regular and significant problem for vi/blind people are the obstacles, largely directly or indirectly from other humans. One of the reasons I wanted a guide dog was to help navigate the obstacles because my stick can be useless in certain circumstances.

Obstacles can include:

- People standing in the way
- Bags, carts, items from people
- Signs
- Bicycles/Scooters/Cars/Trucks
- Plastic bags/Trash/Discarded Masks (Don't get me started on this)
- Children/Pets/Things not being tended to by adults

The market definitely includes all of these things, but also some additional ones including:

- Random pallets on the ground
- Boxes of items left out to entice customers
- A random dog toy in a box that my guide dog fixated for a solid 2 minutes on
- Food waste
- Whole smoked pigs laying in easy reach of dogs

Basco does a pretty good job of navigating his way through most of these obstacles, but there are a couple that are difficult for him, and by default, me. Basco definitely struggles with items that smell of something delicious. He will hesitate and sniff if someone has left a bag of tasty things on the ground. He gets distracted by boxes of fish, that happen to be at his level (I can't even blame him). When we passed the whole pig, he really had to sniff but kept walking.

People as Obstacles

At least twice, we came across people in a head-on situation where they needed to move, or I did. The first time, Basco wanted to move but I didn't let him because I had a feeling the people would move. The second time, Basco didn't move and neither did the man who was giving me a bit of lip for being in his way.

I asked Alette what she thought was best and she informed me that Basco is trained to basically dodge obstacles. If someone is standing in the way, Basco looks to the right and to the left to see if we can go around it. I asked her if she had ever navigated the market with her eyes closed (she had) because it's a good way to make you sea-sick is if your dog is walking from right to left so much.

In the first encounter, the people understood that I was waiting and they continued on. In the second encounter the man wanted me to move for him. What to do, then? I'm of the belief that while Basco CAN navigate me around these people, he shouldn't have to; they have eyes. I think we will attempt to dodge some things and other things we just patiently wait. It's a difficult choice to make, even when you can see. What do you avoid and what do you just wait for? It's harder still if you're vi/blind.

Up Next: Combining the Market and the Train

Combining the Market and the Train



Training was supposed to be Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. After the Market on Monday, Trains on Tuesday, Market again on Wednesday, I was supposed to practice trams and trains with Basco on Thursday so that we could do both the Market and the train on Friday. Unfortunately, I had been dealing with a cough since a

couple of days after Basco was delivered. It had been 3 weeks and I was done with it. So, Basco went 4 days without much exercise while I visited the doctor, took medicine, and attempted to recover.

Monday Madness Ensues

We decided that we would combine the market and the trains because it is entirely possible that Basco will have to regularly do that same thing. We started by heading to the tram station. Basco was fine in the tram, as expected. When we got to the train station, Basco was obviously anxious, but the beginning started off well. He got a bit distracted by urine in and around the elevator.

As the trains came in, Basco easily went in and out of them. I asked Alette to stay out of his view to make sure he was responding to me and not to her. He performed quite well. Alette asked me how I felt. I'm still dubious. We tried several trains and he did well. It was time to start back.

Tired Basco and the Market

By the time we stepped off the tram and walked toward the Market, Basco was already done for the day. He had built up so much anxiety going to the train that he was having trouble focusing. I sent him through a reset cycle before we started. A reset cycle is simply where I click every time he looks at me and then give him a small treat. As he is able to consistently look at me and ignore the environment around him, I know he's ready to begin.

We walked the regular route through the market and while he was obvious tired and distracted, he did it. We walked back home and Alette asked me how I felt. I know she's worried that I'm still going to reject him. I'm not proud of him and I'm not confident in him. Basco is a very stubborn and headstrong dog. I'm not sure I can rely on him.

Monday Holds More!

Our lesson was done around noon and Basco thought he was done for the day; he wasn't. I needed to be in Leiden around 14:00; which meant that I had just enough time for a quick lunch and then to be on my way. Basco was resting in his crate when I brought the harness out. He just looked at me confused.

We headed to the tram station; he didn't have it in him to be anxious. He was confused and tired. After we got on the tram, there were no seats so we stood. Basco wasn't a fan and got stubborn a couple of times about moving out of the way. When we got to the train, I had a squeaky chicken toy with me. I was hoping it would help get him on the train.

He was obviously anxious as we stood waiting for the train. I got the chicken out, and played with Basco for a little while. When I heard the train coming, I put the chicken in my front pouch pocket. As the train doors opened, Basco acted as if he would reject going in, but I patted my pouch and the chicken squeaked a little. Basco remembered the toy was in there! No hesitation, Basco jumped into the train and waited for me. He found a seat for us right away and looked at me expectantly.

Successful?

Basco and I successfully made it to Leiden. Basco was then in a new environment, at a different house, with a bunch of cats, for several hours while I was busy. He was clearly overstimulated but we still needed to get home. We trudged to the train station and he did as expected. When the train arrived, I didn't have to get the chicken out, he just went in the train and almost dragged me to a seat.

The tram was as expected, the slight problem occurred while walking home. He really just wanted treats every few steps. I wasn't going to stop every 5 paces to tell him he was doing his job. It took some urging, but he made it. Basco and I did it! We traveled alone. It was the first time in more than 2 years that I was able to travel, WITHOUT MY STICK, alone.

Up Next: Basco and the Grocery Store

Basco and the Grocery Store



I don't particularly go to grocery stores often, thanks Covid. I wanted to make sure Basco could navigate grocery stores without having his nose in everything. The tram ride to the grocery was fine, the lift ride up to the entrance was also fine, the

problems began when we went into the shop.

Some things to keep in mind as I write this next part:

- Grocery stores have so much light that I see absolutely nothing. It is a wall of light for me
- Grocery stores are full of enticing smells
- Grocery stores are full of children; which are Basco's favorite thing
- Grocery stores are full of sound; which is difficult for me but also hard for me anyway but even more so because trying to filter and process them is overwhelming

There was an adult with cart and several children as soon as we stepped off the lift. Basco was immediately curious about the child. I got him oriented and we went along. Basco navigated the store just fine and did the commands as he should. I was the problem. It was way too much for me to deal with. The noise alone is why I don't go to the grocery. I was trying to learn new commands, navigate a store I don't know very well, and trying to give treats and respond to Basco.

I failed and not just a little bit; I failed hard. We got through it and headed home, but I was done. This time it wasn't Basco that was overwhelmed and unsure, this time it was me. I still don't know how this will ever work. I need to keep Basco in one hand a basket in the other and still give commands and clicks and rewards. I think, for now, I will stick to online ordering.

Up Next: Basco and the Hospital

Basco and the Hospital



I had concerns about Basco being able to navigate a hospital. My doctors had already told me that Basco was a non-issue. (I think some of them were looking forward to meeting him.) Alette and I agreed that we would meet at the hospital, in Leiden. Basco and I would travel by public transit and meet her there. Once at the hospital we would navigate the entrance, go to a department, try the pharmacy, and then Alette would drive us home.

He's a Pro

I brought the chicken for the train ride; he didn't need it, though he did get to play with it. We took the tram and the train with ease. He helped me get to the bus stop which is always traumatizing because it's a big open space with nothing for me to guide myself with. He navigated me to a big seat on the bus and then navigated me to the hospital entrance. I was genuinely proud of him.

Once inside, Alette found us and we navigated to one of the departments in the hospital. One of my specialists did an impromptu appointment. Basco was a little over-enthusiastic, but he got it together. He did well.

Teaching a New Thing

As we were walking to the impromptu appointment, we walked past elevators. Normally, Basco searches for an elevator and goes straight to it. This hospital was going to be a problem because it has an elevator hall on each floor. The problem: the buttons are all on a center pole, NOT at the lift. Basco wouldn't know unless we taught him.

We started at the pole itself and rewarded him when he bumped it with his nose while we said the new command. We took one step back and gave the command, he went straight to the pole. This was perfect. I trained him, not Alette. I did it. We tried it several more times from longer distances. Alette suggested we go upstairs, by lift, and try on that lift hall. He was perfect. He understood the new command... and I TAUGHT IT TO HIM.

We're Not Done Yet: ZuiderPark awaits

One of the final places Basco needed to navigate was to the large park by where we live; ZuiderPark. After the drive back from the hospital, we had tea/coffee and a small break and then headed off to the park. It was important to me that Basco could handle it because there's a very real possibility that we would go to a doctor appointment and then go to the park later in the day.

When I first moved, a little over a year ago, there were no blind-accessible audio cues for the lights at the intersection to the park. Luckily for me, when the city did work on the intersections, they installed light tickers. It would be easy for me and Basco to get to the park.

He navigated the new route relatively well, but the park was just cram-pack full of interesting and distracting things. There were deer, ducks, dogs, skaters, cyclists, pedestrians, and water.

We started by walking around a bit and letting him get used to the area. Alette had told me that Basco is not a water dog. We got to an area where he could be free and run with Makituk. I let him off the lead: Alette was surprised. Basco bee-lined straight for the pond. I laughed and Alette was shocked. She asked if I wanted him to do that, I don't mind. He's a

Labrador, that means muddy mess when we go to the park. His recall to me was immediate and well done. I had the chicken with me, but he didn't need it. By the time we left, Basco was tired and struggling to listen to commands.

On the walk home, I needed to praise and treat every 10 paces, but he did make it. I just reverted to basics to get him home. This was a good day. He was out for the rest of the day. He hardly got off of his bed. Get used to this, Doggo, because it will ramp up.

Up Next: Basco Stops in the Middle of the Street

Basco Stops in the Middle of the Street



Basco has been doing really well, for the past couple of days. He seems to get really overworked but that appears to encourage him to trust me a bit more. Thursday, we don't have training, so I decided we would go to the park. I had put it off until the afternoon because the training time is always morning and Basco needs to learn that we walk all

times of day.

Coen wanted to walk a different direction and see if the other side of the intersection also had ticky-ticky noises. (What I call the audio-cues from the crosswalk). Previously, I wouldn't go that route because the tiles were horrifically uneven, the intersection didn't have the ticky-ticky, and there's a houseboat where two aggressive dogs live that you have to pass by.

The tiles had been fixed a couple of weeks ago and maybe the ticky-ticky was also fixed. Basco was hesitant with the navigation because it was new, but he did great until we got to the intersection. It turns out, the ticky-ticky was working and we started across toward the park.

Putting us in Danger

The intersection just before the park is a 5-way intersection. It is one of the busiest intersections. Not only do you have regular cars and trucks, but you also have buses, mopeds, cyclists, pedestrians, and a tram line. Each direction of a street is separated by a sort of parkway. Sometimes the divider is wide concrete, other times the divider is grass.

We heard the ticky-ticky and crossed the crosswalk to the mid-section. I could still hear the crosswalk for the next bit so I told Basco to go faster. He knows that command and should speed up. He didn't speed up. Right in the middle of the second crosswalk, he stopped. I don't mean he paused, no, I mean he put his ass in the ground stopped.

Luckily, I had someone with me and he was able to see that I was safe to continue. He had no idea why Basco stopped and neither did I. After the initial disaster, we continued on. Basco was distracted, pulling, overstimulated and frankly, being a pain in my ass. Of course, he was, Alette wasn't there.

We walked the same route as the previous day, but I couldn't let him off the lead, he was too distractable. If another dog came along, he was a problem. We walked the entire area where it was possible for him to relieve himself, but he was too focused on other things. As we were leaving the park, he dug his paws in the ground and refused to move; he had to relieve himself. Right on the main walkway is where Basco made the worst stink ever.

The rest of the way home was fine, without incident. At the time, I had no idea why he stopped in the crosswalk, and I had no idea why he needed to toilet where he did. Looking back at the pattern, he probably had to toilet while on the street, but I forced him to continue on. He got too distracted while in the open area and forgot; which left him needing to go later. This is a problem we will have to work on because he cannot just dead stop in the middle of the street.

Up Next: Final Friday: We sign the papers and discuss things.

We Sign the Papers and Discuss Things



Alette previously had asked me if I had a binder with paperwork in it. I did, it was sent with the forgotten bed for Basco. She told me we would go through the papers and sign them. I was a bit mystified and still am because I don't understand why the paperwork for a guide dog is printed in normal font on normal paper. I will discuss that

in a bit.

Thursday, after Basco stopped in the middle of the street, I used my enlarging machine to read over the paperwork. It took 3 hours and was unpleasant, but I filled much of it out. There was a section that was questions about his behavior, his responses, his personality, etc. I didn't fill that section out.

Thursday Night Contemplation

The day before Basco arrived I received an email with pages and pages of documentation. It included everything from his training to information over his nails. It was so much to read given that he would be dumped in my lap the following morning. He had a whole list of commands he should be able to do as well as traits he should and should not possess. There was also a list of things the school was responsible and a whole huge list of things I was responsible for.

Signing for this dog would mean accepting the flaws of the dog/training, the responsibilities for him (financial and otherwise) with the hope that he would be a friend and a source of freedom for me. It was much to think about. My expectations were higher than the reality.

Responsibilities from the School



The school is supposed to deliver a trained dog, all the stuff you need to take care of said dog, and other things like a harness and identification. The paperwork should include his medical passport, labels indicating he should not be petted because he is working, guide-dog identification should I be asked, and his current insurance information as well as plans available.

There were quite a few things I took issue with, at this point. Basco was not as described in the paperwork (to follow), I did not have all of the information that should have been supplied, they sent a single copy of the paperwork. The paperwork was ridiculous for a number of reasons. They sent the paperwork with a binder but did not punch holes in the paper so it would go in the binder. The paperwork was missing information about animal insurance and a few other things. The paperwork was entirely inaccessible. I expect inaccessible things from random companies. When your company literally makes money from providing tools to disabled people, your contracts should be accessible to those same clients.

Not only was the paperwork incomplete, but the medical records were also incomplete and inaccurate. I had no information as to the last worming or even which product had been used in the first worming. The first veterinarian indicated Basco had an overbite. No other veterinarian indicated such. The first and 3rd veterinarians indicated vaccinations and de-worming, while the 2nd one just put a vaccination stick on it. The last weight in his medical passport was when he was just about a year old.

I did receive more updated medical records, but they were not in his passport; which I find horrifically unprofessional and unorganized. They, too, were printed on normal paper with normal font. Despite the failings of the organization, I really needed to assess Basco and if I thought we could have a future. The first trip we took by ourselves was so liberating. I did not need my stick anymore. I mean he's a whole kit & kaboodle of kerfuffle, but no stick. That being said, there were downsides, here, many downsides.

Assessing Basco for Myself

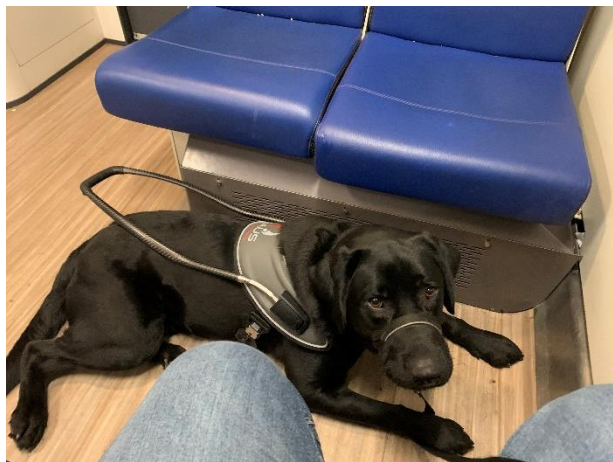


I looked over the information originally sent and compared it to the dog I had sitting a yard away from me. I will respond to each bullet on the line below it.

According to the translated paperwork:

“Skills of the dog without the use of commands. The guide dog is considered to have the following skills without being commanded to do so”

- To function in a concentrated way, without being distracted by people, animals or things, sudden noises, unexpected events (passing traffic, folding umbrellas, sudden music, etc.) and attractive or repulsive odors;
 - This is almost a complete failure. He is 100% distracted by dogs, children, other animals, scooters that randomly start moving, and food/trash on the ground.
- To lead evenly in a straight line, keeping the center of the if possible footpath is followed and the chosen direction is maintained;
 - This is an “ish.” So long as nothing distracts him along the way, he will mostly go straight forward.
- Direct the user directly to the sidewalk and cross it straight;
 - This he does well
- When circumstances require it to adjust its pace;
 - This is another “ish” because I can ask him to adjust pace and he only half listens. Sometimes he slows down when he is supposed to, other times he’s happy for me to twist my ankle in a hole.



- To guide without sniffing, eating off the floor, marking, urinating or to defecate.

- This is also a failure. If there is something on the floor that he finds delicious, he will sniff it and if he can eat it, he will. He sniffs every pole, every doorway, everything. He will also urinate or defecate when he

“needs” to because he didn’t do it when he should have.

- To guide calmly in large crowds and in crowds;
 - He gets anxious and he gets distracted... calm is not the word I would use
- To be shot and fire resistant and not to be overly afraid of thunderstorms;
 - He was good with fireworks
- Do not panic when passing people who frighten the dog;
 - This he does well
- Without being distracted to pass people who excite the dog;
 - This is a complete failure. If someone is excited and wants to pet him, he will completely lose the plot and start jumping on that person and craving their attention... never mind me.
- Can be guided in a group with other (guide) dogs without pulling or to push;
 - This is 100% failure. He barely functions with other dogs around. He wants to be in the lead and he’s more focused on the other dogs than his task.
- When guiding along roads without sidewalks, tight on the right or left side keep walking until the user instructs to switch sides, or until moving on is not possible, or until a sidewalk comes across. The guide dog indicates this by stopping and moving towards the middle of the road



- This he fails with. We walked to a park that only has a road and no sidewalks. He stood right in the middle of the road and when I guided him to hug the left side, he would for a while and then meander back to the middle.

- Stop for all types of ground unevenness over which the user would

tripping, especially curbs (up and down curbs), steps on and off steps paths in parks and buildings, and to include ramps and similar entrances and exits;

- Nope. He does stop for some curbs and some steps, but only if he chooses to or I know it's there and I tell him to search for it.

- Slow down the pace when the ground becomes uneven.

- This he does, if he's not distracted by something else.

- If possible, pass obstacles on the right side;

- He doesn't pass obstacles unless I instruct him to do so and then he'll just choose one side or another.

- If passing the obstacle on the right is not possible, the obstacle to pass well;

- He doesn't pass obstacles unless I instruct him to do so.

- Decrease the tempo if passages are narrow;

- This he does, unless he's distracted and walks me into something because he was paying no attention

- Avoid obstacles on the ground such as loose paving stones, loose lying paving stones, puddles, street dirt, cans, feces, garbage bags, planks, hoses, ropes, wire, cables, children's toys, in short, everything about which the user should can stumble;

- Nope. He will absolutely walk me into a puddle, loose tiles, dirt, cans, trash, feces, bags, hoses, ropes, cables, everything. He has already done it.

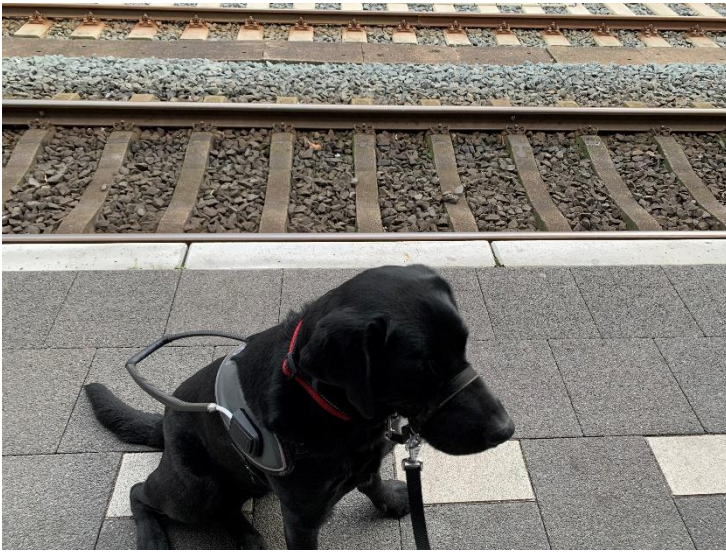
- Avoid low gates and posts and anti-parking tires;
 - We haven't experienced this.
- Be attentive to collisions with obstacles that are at body height of the user, such as elements that protrude from the facade such as letterboxes, shutters, windows that open outwards, etc.;
 - Only if he's paying attention. He has walked me into many mirrors from vans.
- Avoid larger obstacles such as stationary people, trees and/or poles, those standing in the middle of the sidewalk and cars parked on the sidewalk;
 - Sometimes he does. Sometimes he just stops as if he has no idea what to do.
- Do not pass under barriers or barrier tape;
 - We haven't experienced this yet
- Altitude to perceive and avoid obstacles, such as sunshades, over the curbside construction scaffolding, all kinds of ladders, overhanging roofs (e.g., of covered bicycle racks) and parasols;
 - I don't know yet? I haven't walked face first into anything yet.
- Bypass overhanging shrubbery and branches;
 - We haven't been exposed to it, or he just has avoided it
- Avoid shops, terraces, etc. displayed on the sidewalk;
 - Absolute failure. He will walk into any opening and sniff. I have to drag him away. He sniffs everything in his path.
- To be able to safely pass through a revolving door, both the great constant revolving like the hand-operated small revolving doors;
 - Alette warned me that he would walk me into the side if I don't make him go almost past the door first. She wasn't wrong. He will absolutely walk me into the glass.
- When crossing between two parked cars, stand between the cars and await further instructions from the user;
 - Nope, he will absolutely just walk between them



- When crossing the road, be aware of obstacles such as rear-view mirrors of delivery vans trucks;
 - Mostly nope
- Recognize and avoid lifting platforms, moving and construction lifts as dangerous obstacles to avoid;
 - He seems to do okay with this, so long as he doesn't get distracted
- Crossing intersections according to the user's directions but below no diagonal clause, regardless of the type of intersection involved;
 - This he does mostly well
- Get out of confusing and difficult situations with regard to obstacles, such as, for example, traps formed by cars parked at an angle or a fence;
 - Nope, I'll have to lead us out
- If the previous is not possible, stop in front of the obstacle so that the user knows that there is a problem and can take measures himself.
 - Fantastic, right?
- To be guided on a platform at a safe distance from the platform edge; While waiting on a platform, keep a safe distance from the platform edge
 - This he does very well
- To stop for stairs, both down and up, and this for the user to be made clear by e.g., halting with two legs on the first or second step.
 - We had an unexpected situation where I needed to use the stairs, he was quite perfect for it.

Finding the Balance of Things

I waited to fill in the questionnaire with Alette. I knew some of my answers might come across as overly harsh, especially to the trainer. It's important to understand, though, that Basco is not a pet, he is a tool. He needs to function in a certain capacity. Gaus tried to tell me that it's all my fault, but some of the fails happen with or without Alette. It isn't my fault, the dog has a strong personality and decides if he's doing as instructed, or not.



When we did fill out the questionnaire, it was pretty dismal. She asked if I still wanted Basco, I did. I decided, Thursday night, that Basco needed time to settle and also a chance to be a good guide dog. Also, I learned that I really do appreciate not having my stick. I signed the paperwork, but I very much aired my grievances. I'm still going to need to write an email to the school about how things were handled.

Why aren't the contracts and paperwork sent digitally? Most of the vi/blind people I know would prefer that. If you don't want to send it digitally, why not bigger font? Do not promise something that you cannot deliver and then blame your customer.

If Basco isn't following commands properly because I'm using the system poorly, that's on me. If Basco does not meet the criteria (and has never as long as he is with me) listed in the school's own documentation (the criteria outside of commands), that's a problem with the dog or his training, not me.

Gaus told me, when he was giving me an hour and a half long lecture of how it was all my fault, that he had been in the business 20 years. Maybe, he forgot that I did my research before I chose him instead of one of the other schools in the Netherlands. That being said, after 20 years I expect that you

do not send inaccessible, incomplete, inaccurate paperwork to your clients. Telling me that it was my fault and that every guide dog will behave this way is psychologically and emotionally harming. I am your client.

I told Alette that if I was in America and purchasing a guide dog, I would not accept Basco. In the States, most insurance doesn't cover a guide dog. If you want a guide dog, you need to purchase it independently. I would have rejected Basco the first hour he was in my possession. I am fully aware that if I reject Basco, I would need video proof that Basco is a faulty product and even at that I would probably still have to start the process all over again.

The balance, then?



Does Basco have a faulty personality? Yes

Is Basco appropriately trained? No, Alette admitted to not training certain things.

Does Basco do what he is supposed to do? Sometimes, yes, sometimes, no.

If this is my only option without restarting the whole process do I keep him? For now, yes.

For now, the option to keep Basco is better than the option to send him back. Every week, I evaluate how he has behaved for the week. I will, again, weigh the balance of things by the end of February. I have given him until March 10. If he isn't doing as he should by then, then either there is a fault in him, a fault in me, or a fault in the system. Either way, by then I know for certain and have given him the best chance I can.

Up Next: What now? Life continues, Basco learns how to live within it.

What now? Life continues, Basco learns how to live within it.



It's Saturday, I had plans and Basco needed to be my guide dog. Now, is maybe a good time to point out how much effort it is to get out the door as a vi/blind. Before I lost my vision, I could just grab my keys/wallet and go. Before Basco, I was already grumpy because I needed my phone

(directions/voiceover/help), bone-

conduction headset (to hear the phone and also everything else), keys, wallet, stick, public transit card, and something to sanitize my hands.

With Basco, I need to make sure to let him out, though I can't tell if he's gone. I need to put on his gentle leader, his collar, his harness, the bar, and his lead. I need to pack a treat bag and have the clicker ready. I still need keys/phone/headset/wallet/hand sanitizer, and a stick. I'm supposed to take a shorter blind stick with me in case I need to alert people that we are crossing the road. It takes 20-30 minutes to get out the door.

I planned it and we got out the door on time. We made it to the tram station on time and we made it on the tram on time. Unfortunately, because of slow people and Basco being a bit difficult, we missed our train and had to wait another 15 minutes for the next train. He was a bit hesitant to get on the train, but with a toy in front of him, he did it. He struggled to find a seat for me, so we just stood. The trip home was mostly without incident because Basco was tired.

Sunday, we decided to go for a walk. We walked around the regular park and then started toward the bigger park. Unfortunately, there was feces on the ground; which he did not guide me around. Yuck! We took a very long walk around the park and by the time we were leaving, he was exhausted. It was a lovely walk and I can't complain about his behavior. He spent most of the walk distracted by other things, but he didn't walk me into anything.

Up Next: We Aren't Training Anymore. What Does Life Look Like?

We Aren't Training Anymore. What Does Life Look Like?



The whole next week saw a variety of service people in the home. Monday, two guys came buy to replace my countertop and cut holes in my floor. It must have been quite difficult for Basco to be trapped the whole day with that noise. He endured nicely. We also spent the whole day inside because the workers were there the whole day. After they left, I spent most of the evening cleaning and putting things away.

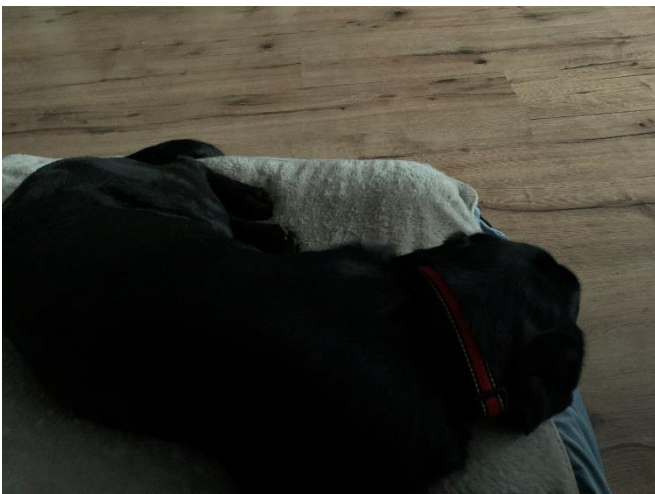
Tuesday, a man came to look at the stove, but luckily that was in the morning. Basco and I went for a walk in the afternoon, and it was lovely.

Wednesday, I had planned to get vaccinated, but I was still coughing. The customer service guy told me I needed a negative test if I was still coughing. So, after receiving groceries, Basco and I went for a walk.

Thursday, some service people came to replace my stove and admittedly Basco didn't get a long walk because I was too excited about my stove.

Friday, I had made an order which needed picked up. Basco and I got ready and went on a little mini-adventure. We took the bus to the store and Basco guided me through the line to pick up our purchases. We, also, took a walk later in the afternoon Friday.

Basco's First Trip to a Doggy Wonderland



Saturday, we had plans again and this time, a friend would pick us up and we would go to a local Feed/Grain/Garden/Animal store. Ranzijn was also Kota's favourite store. One of the last photos I have of Kota when I still had vision was right after I pulled into the parking lot and he bounced his head up and was so

excited. I wondered if Basco would feel the same.

On the way to the tram, someone was standing with their dog in the middle of the sidewalk. They acted like they wanted their dog to greet Basco. I told Basco he was working and to continue on. I think the people just didn't understand. As I was walking into the train station, a large fluffy dog attacked Basco. I got in between the two of them while the other owner just kept saying "here here." Station staff dealt with the report, and we went along our way.

In the train, some woman asked why Basco had his harness. A man told her that Basco is a guide dog and then proceeded to explain what help dogs do. He then asked me why Basco was wearing a muzzle. He isn't wearing a muzzle, I explained, it is a gentle leader which allows me to correct him easier. Maybe, these were all the reasons Basco was so terrible in Ranzijn.

Basco was very difficult to get to navigate. He wanted to smell everything, he was not listening, and he was sniffing people too much. When we got to the dog section, things turned for the worse. Basco really wouldn't stop sniffing at the food, treats, toys. I walked him down the toy aisle and my friend ended up buying him a squeaky toy. Lesson learned, don't take Basco to Ranzijn. There's no guide dog, only a stubborn puppy at the end of the lead.

When we arrived at our destination, Basco was over-enthusiastic. He got into a litterbox, the cat food, and chased the cats. This is not what a trained guide dog should be doing. Eventually, he did settle a bit, but I had to correct him every 2-5 minutes. It makes for an unpleasant experience if I'm needing to focus on him all of the time.

Up Next: Doctors' Offices, Vaccine Halls, Hospital Visits.

Doctors' Offices, Vaccine Halls, Hospital Visits.



Around the time Basco was originally delivered, I developed an ongoing asthma attack/cough. I had already been to the doctor and been tested for covid several times. After the weekend, I not only had a booster vaccine scheduled, but I also had some appointments with various doctors and specialists concerning my cough situation.

I'm lucky enough to have a situation where I can order medical taxi services to and from medically associated appointments. I already knew that Basco does okay-ish in public transport, but I was curious

how he would do with medical taxi services.

Monday, we walked to the family doctor, and Basco had his first real experience in the doctor's office. At the beginning, he seemed alright. When the doctor took me to the examination area to check my lungs, I told Basco to stay. He did not. After knocking her things off of the windowsill, he came to sniff around the exam area. It was horribly embarrassing.

Tuesday, when the medical taxi showed up, Basco did great in the taxi. When we got to the vaccination hall, though, it was a different story. Basco was overwhelmed. He did follow the workers very well, but he jumped on several of them! I was horrified. He is definitely NOT supposed to jump on people. Right after the vaccination, we needed to go to the hospital to see a specialist.

It was clear, Basco was very tired, already. When we got into the second taxi, the driver wanted Basco to stay on the floor, but there wasn't space. I got a little cranky with him and he relented. When we arrived at the hospital, Basco did great. He was overwhelmed, but focused. During the specialist visit, I preempted problems by tying Basco to a sturdy object while I was being examined.

By the time we were on our way home, Basco was exhausted. He laid his head on my lap and slept the whole way home. It was a long day for both of us.

Up Next: What Happens When I'm Exhausted?

What Happens When I'm Exhausted?



The vaccine had the expected results: I was exhausted. Alette asked if I wanted to have a check-up visit on the coming Friday. I wasn't sure how I was going to manage it. The day after the vaccine, I slept the whole day. The next day, (Thursday) wasn't much better. When Friday came, Alette showed up and we had a chat.

I had shared with her how proud of him I was on the previous Tuesday. He had gone through the whole day mostly pretty well. I explained the parts I wasn't happy with such as the jumping on vaccination site staff. After the chat, we decided to take a walk.

During the walk, she noticed that Basco was really pulling me. I told her that he's done that since the beginning. I can't just keep stopping every step to readjust because he doesn't readjust. When he gets tired, he stops pulling. She decided to take over and see if she could get him to stop pulling.



2 minutes into it and the harness broke. This was the 2nd time since we got Basco that the harness had broken. The first time was on the 26th of December and now it had broken again. I had a telescoping blind stick with me, so she walked Basco, and I used the telescoping stick.

I was sad that it broke, but I was relieved it happened with her. I'm a little tired, at this point, of the whole team thinking that I'm always the problem with

Basco.

Alette called the office and after the call, reported that they would send a backup/replacement harness. She told me that if I didn't have a message by Saturday morning to give her a message. Either way, I would have a solution. There would be no utilizing Basco as a guide dog until the harness was fixed. She did compliment me on how well Basco walked on the leash, though.

Up Next: Bad Communication Leads to a Melt Down.

[Bad Communication Leads to a Melt Down.](#)

I had plans for Saturday. I was supposed to be out of the house by 13:00. I didn't hear from anyone from Gaus all morning, despite sending a few



messages. So, rescheduled my plans. I, finally looked at my phone around 17:00. Alette had sent a message after 15:00 wherein she stated that Serge Gaus wanted me to use epoxy glue to fix my harness. I had a meltdown. This was a full-on, dramatic explosion, "come get your f'n dog" meltdown.

How did I get to a point where I would behave that way? I'm not in any way excusing my meltdown, but I will explain a bit of it, here and now.

Ableism: The harmful side-effects of the able-bodied mentality on the not-so-able-bodied.

Ableism is a blanket term that covers a wide variety of behaviors wherein people, without a disability or are generally considered “average”, impose their own needs/wants on to those that are physically or neurologically divergent. What does that really mean? It means that “normal” people think they need to yell, slowly, in their own language at a foreigner because somehow doing so louder will make them understand a foreign language better. It’s when there is no wheelchair ramp, because someone can just lift the person into the facility. It’s when someone is too lazy to walk so, they use the handicapped parking spot and they are not handicapped.

When Serge said that I should fix my own harness, that is not ableism. That’s his belief that I can do it despite my visual impairment. Asking a vi/blind person to fix something with epoxy is dangerous. Epoxy is not particularly safe when you can see. Serge suggested I had an able-bodied person do it for me. Now, we’ve hit the ableism part. When a solution to a problem is not accessible and then becomes only for the able-bodied, leaving the disabled person out of it, we have ableism.

The Meltdown

My meltdown, though, was a combination of the fury I felt from the blatant ableism combined with the lack of communication, this being the 2nd time this same harness had broken, and the reason the harness had broken: Basco was being a complete tool, even with his trainer. I was so very much done fighting with Basco, with Serge, with their stupid equipment that keeps failing. This is not how it is supposed to be. Alette told me they would call me on Monday. Both parties needed to take the weekend to cool off. I was shocked. Excuse me? Your equipment broke. You failed to communicate properly. You, an organization that caters to disabled people, continually exhibit ableism. You provided a guide dog that has the temperament of an angry mule and the behavior of a toddler. You’re the ones that need to cool off?

Up Next: I’m Exposed to Covid

I'm Exposed to Covid



While I was brewing, over the weekend, about the whole harness situation, Alette sent me another text, on Sunday. It turns out, while she was here, her live-in boyfriend was being tested for Covid. He had a positive at-home test (Friday) and scheduled himself for a PCR test on Saturday; which was positive. Alette was informing me that she was going to be tested Monday.

The Emotions

I'm going to be very real and raw, right now; brace yourselves. I had spent 2 years doing everything to avoid being infected by Covid. I had avoided shops, gatherings, restaurants. I spent the entire first year in strict lockdown, only going out to doctor appointments. I wore a mask everywhere and had guests wear masks in my home.

If Alette's boyfriend had symptoms Friday and tested himself, why did she come to my house? Why did she expose me? What made her think that was a good idea? I was already emotional over the Basco/harness situation, now I was devastated with the news that I had been exposed to Covid.

Was it Covid!?

Alette sent me a message telling me she tested positive. I tried making an appointment to get a PCR test. Every location was booked solid until the following Saturday, 8 days after I had been exposed. I ordered self-tests, but they, too, didn't arrive until Saturday.

Gaus tried to have a conversation with me on Monday, I was exhausted. I slept through Tuesday and Wednesday. I never had a fever. I only had the original asthma cough, a headache and was so tired I couldn't sit upright. By the time I was able to test, it was negative. I don't know if I had Covid or was just randomly exhausted.

Up Next: Negative Test, Harness Fixed, We Go??

Negative Test, Harness Fixed, We Go??



The previous Saturday, when I realized I would need to fix Basco's harness myself, I ordered different types of glue to be delivered. After cleaning the parts that needed stripped of the previous glue, I re-glued everything together and it was ready to go by that same Sunday. Sadly, I was already feeling exhausted. I spent

several days just sleeping.

By Saturday, though, I had a negative Covid test, Basco's harness was fixed, and we were ready to go! Sadly, our plans got diverted because, apparently, there was a huge outbreak of Covid, in the Netherlands. The people I wanted to go visit had possibly been exposed to Covid.

Fine, we'll just go do nature things. Let's go to the park!

We would go to ZuiderPark, which isn't far from where I live. Basco was harnessed up, we were with Mak and Coen, there was sunshine! This should be great.

We got 2 steps out of the door and already Basco was yanking my arm off, or trying to. This would not do. I was done trying to whine at others about his behavior. We would fix it ourselves.

Up Next: The Basics, Revisited, for the 642nd Time.

The Basics, Revisited, for the 642nd Time.



When Basco is good, he's very good. When Basco is bad, he's bloody terrible. He is stubborn and difficult. The moment we walked out the door, to head to the park, he immediately started pulling. We walked 2 paces and I turned him around. Coen and Makituk were still walking toward the park. Basco was upset. He wouldn't move.

Forcing Communication

There's an important aspect of working with a dog that humans need to understand: communication. What we humans think of as communication is not necessarily what dogs think of as communication. I can scream all day at Basco, but unless I am communicating WITH him, it does no good.

What did Basco want? Basco wanted to go to the park. Basco wanted to play with his friend. Basco wanted to walk beside his friend. Basco wanted treats. What did I want? I wanted to go to the park. I wanted Basco to walk beside his friend. I wanted to give Basco treats, for behaving well. Hey, look, several of those ideas aligned, so what was the problem? Basco was forgetting that he was working and that I was the one that needed him to work.

When I turned Basco around and told him to walk toward the house, he refused. I didn't budge. I told him to go forward, he refused. I walked 2 paces forward and tugged the leash for him to come along. He had no real choice; I wasn't going to budge. The moment he came forward and stood beside me, he got a treat. We walked 10 paces with him not pulling and I turned us around toward the park and Makituk.



We got maybe 2 paces before he started pulling again. Fine, we'll do it again. We turned around and walked toward the house again. Basco, again, refused. He kept looking back at Makituk. Now, though, he had a problem. He was about 8 paces farther away than he was the first time I turned him around. We walked another 10 paces away from Makituk and the park. This time, I didn't have to tug, and he didn't pull.

We turned around again. This time he made it about 6 paces before he tugged. I immediately turned him around. This time we walked straight for the house. He was visibly upset. We went into the house. I waited about 3 minutes before we went back out again.

We got about 15 paces toward Makituk and the park when Basco pulled again. I sighed and turned him around. We did this about 8 or 9 times until he could walk with me without tugging. He was exhausted and we weren't even to the end of the block.

In order for Basco to understand what I wanted, he had to "hear" me. He had to understand that it was the pulling that caused the negative response and that relaxed walking caused the treats. I didn't yell, I didn't raise my voice and I didn't repeat commands over and over. I wanted to communicate with him; which meant I needed him to understand and he's a dog, he doesn't think the same way.

Continued Communication

It doesn't really matter if your dog is a working dog or a companion dog, you need to have communication with him; it's what gives the appearance that you have control over your dog. I will say something, now, that might spark outrage: you never have control over an animal. You can encourage behavior you want and discourage behavior you don't want. You can control the food/treats and play time.

You cannot control the animal, they are living/breathing individuals that will choose what they want. They choose to do what you want for various reasons: food, fear, enjoyment, fun, etc. Do not every believe, not even for one moment, that you actually control that creature, because he/she will decide when they've had enough.

So how do you continue to have communication with your dog that allows you to both be happy? Stop thinking they're human; they're not. Start thinking about what you want, what they want and how to actually communicate your wants/needs with your dog and how to extrapolate their wants/needs from them.

Their body language and behaviors will tell you most of what you need to know. They can learn your verbal commands, but in reality, your body language is going to speak more to them. Repetitive behavior will speak volumes.

Up Next: Back to Basics Continued

Back to Basics Continued



Basco and I were both tired. We had gone up and down the sidewalk between the end of the block toward the park, and the other end toward the house. He was forlorn because his friend was nowhere in sight, and he just wanted to go play with him.

We walked toward the park, his tail wasn't high, his ears weren't toward me, he knew he had to behave but his head wasn't with it. What could I do? Every 5 paces that he didn't pull, he started to get treats. I told him what a good boy he was.

His ears started to perk up and so did his tail. He was starting to enjoy it, but he wasn't working. He walked me an uneven tile and I made an overexaggerated physical expression as if he had hurt me. He stared at me perplexed. We turned around and when we went to walk past it again, this time he saw it and guided me around it. He got a big reward, this time.

You Have Communication, Now What?

I had him with me, now. I had to try to keep his focus. There would be birds, random stuff on the ground, and other distractions. He already demonstrated he wasn't in the mood to work and that if I wanted him to work, I would have to be more satisfying than whatever the distraction was.

It gets super tiring when I have to try to prevent his poor behavior. It's one thing to do it when you have sight and a completely different monster when you are vi/blind. I can't see birds coming, or trash on the ground, or even how far away another dog might be. I have to listen for the birds, feel for him stiffening to the distraction, smell, every sense I have to foretell what's in my zone and what might distract him.

This isn't what I expected from a guide dog. I expected him to be so much better than this. I wanted him to be better than this. Well, I'm not waiting another 2 years for a dog that I can't guarantee would be better. He is my guide dog and I'm his blind girl. We're in this together, so, we'll just keep doing it until we get it right.

Up Next: The Park, Did We Ever Get There?

The Park, Did We Ever Get There?



After 30 minutes of going back and forth, up and down, him not budging, me not budging and a surreal amount of me refusing to let him "win", we made it to the road that is right by the park. We just needed to get to the curb, cross the road, find the other curb, walk about 5 paces and we would be at the park. This couldn't be that difficult, after everything else right?

Distractions

We got to the curb in front of the road, there was a bicycle there. I asked him to search the curb and he walked me into the bicycle. I sighed, inwardly, and told him he made a mistake. We turned around and tried again. He had seen Makituk. His focus was gone.

He really did not want to turn around and walk away from Makituk. I wasn't budging, he put his head down. We walked away. After we turned the corner, and the park seemed gone forever, I turned him around again. We walked toward the curb. Yet again, he was too focused on Makituk. We turned around and this time we did walk home. We went into the house and waited a good 10 minutes before we went out again. When we went out again, we made it to the curb, and he crossed properly.

While he did see Makituk and they did play, his recall was good, and we had a good walk home. I was exhausted. It shouldn't be this difficult to get my guide dog to do the thing he was trained for.

Up Next: The 60/40 Basco Experience

[The 60/40 Basco Experience](#)



When I was a little girl, my mom would say a limerick, "There was a little girl, who had a little curl, right in the middle of her forehead. When she was good, she was very, very, good. When she was bad, she was horrid." This is the perfect description of Basco.

When Basco is behaving well, he is so good at his job, it's unreal. When Basco is not behaving well, he's one of the worst behaved dogs I've ever met. About 60% of the time, Basco is good and about 40% of the time, he's horrid.

When Basco is doing it well:

- Guides me without walking me into things
- Ears set to listen to me
- Relaxed walking
- Listens
- Recalls immediately
- Looks at me every time there is a distraction (bird, trash, human, dog)
- Crosses my path if I can't pass or if something is about to hit me
- Doesn't bite my fingers when I give him treats
- No hesitation on instruction

When Basco is doing it poorly:

- Walks me into things
- Pulls
- Head going every direction
- No communication
- Does not recall
- Focuses on all distractions
- Walks into me
- Walks away from me
- Stops and refuses to move

So, 60% of the time, when I walk out the door, it's going to be a great day. He's going to be his best guide-dog self, and I'm not going to have bruises. 40% of the time, I'm going to be on the edge of tears and wish I had just brought my stick. I'm hoping that within 6 months we can try to get to 70/30. Maybe, by the end of the year we can be to 80/20?

Up Next: Basco Has to Work for it.

Basco Has to Work for it.



As the new week rolled around, I had a week full of appointments. Basco was going to have to work 5 days of the week. Given his 60/40 situation, I could expect that 3 of those days would be good and 2 would be junk. We would just have to continue on.

Monday: It's a Good Day, Despite Uninformed Hospital Workers

Basco and I took the bus to get to the hospital, on Monday. He was great on the bus, despite some kids being obnoxious. We got off the bus and headed for the hospital. When we got into the hospital, Basco walked like a boss. He had been doing well the whole way and he knew it.

He navigated me to where I needed to go, and we got all signed in. When the woman came to get me for the lung-function test, I told him to follow her. With tail high, he followed. She stopped and told me she wasn't sure if Basco could come with me.

I responded by telling her that he is my guide dog. He goes where I go. If he cannot go, then what would I do? I didn't have a blind stick with me. Who would stay with Basco? He's not a pet, he is technically a blind tool. She told me to wait, she was going to go ask someone.

About 2 minutes later, she returns with the office administrator. The administrator says very loudly (in Dutch), that Basco is clearly a guide dog. He is allowed everywhere I go, excepting the operating theatre. She tells the woman, in a rather condescending tone, that she shouldn't have made a scene about it, and then disappears.

The lady walks me to the room, Basco does exactly as he should and behaves like a proper guide dog. Through the whole lung-function test, Basco just laid and behaved himself. The woman commented on how well he behaved. We headed home; it was a good day.

Wednesday: Another Good Day!

I had an appointment that required me to go by medical taxi, on Wednesday. Basco got into his harness and was ready to go. He was perfect going into the hospital. He knew where we were going, and he walked like a complete boss. When we got to the appointment, my specialist commented on how well he was behaving. As we finished, we walked past some food carts, he didn't even turn his head. We had to wait a while for the return taxi. While we were waiting, someone with an assistance dog came by and that dog was clearly having a rough day. The woman couldn't get her dog under control, her dog was barking and jumping at Basco. Basco laid beside me looking for a treat. The whole ride home he just had his head in my lap.

Thursday: Also, a Good Day!

It was a week of appointments, I expected that by the time Thursday rolled around, he would be horrid. We went by public transit, he was perfect. The day was rainy and terrible. He slipped jumping into the train, but he did it anyway. No one made room for him on the train, and someone screamed, but he just took it in stride. When we got to our destination, he was in complete boss mode, again. He responded to everything really well.

Later, when we got home, we went for a walk. His recall was perfect. He didn't pull. This was the guide-dog I wanted.

Friday: Nope.

We had more doctor appointments to go to on Friday. I, also, planned to go to the market, and to the dog park. Friday morning, Basco already started off by pulling me, sniffing everything on the ground, walking me into a poll, and refusing to listen. He topped it off by shitting on the tram platform.

By the time I tried to take him to the park, his recall was junk. I, actually, ended up leaving him at the park and walking away. Eventually, he came to find me. I held in my anger as I put his harness back on and walked him home. I didn't take him to the market. I didn't trust him; it was a bad day. It would be easier with my stick.

Saturday: 60/40 Situation Made Accurate

I was, originally, planning to take a taxi, on Saturday. Unfortunately, the taxi was over an hour late and I went by public transit. Basco was difficult, sniffed everything, pulled, refused to go left or right. It was horrific. I had to pull him into the tram. Luckily, he did jump into the train, but I couldn't get him to stay focused. He tried to walk me down a flight of stairs, instead of following the directions to go around. While I was at our destination, I had to ask for help letting him out to go potty because he was pulling my arm off. It was dreadful. He wasn't in the person's home more than 30 seconds before he scarfed all the cat food and had his head stuck in a litterbox. I was mortified. I knew Alette would come on Monday. This is exactly the type of thing she needed to know about.

As predicted for the week, Basco was great about 60% of the time and a complete disaster 40% of the time. The days where he's great, he's such a relief to me. When he's horrid, it's getting to the point where it's easier to just take my stick.

Up Next: Updates with Alette

Updates with Alette



The assistant from Gaus had called me the previous week and asked if I could make time for Alette to come for a visit. I was told they would come around the 6-month mark, and the fact that she's come already once with this one scheduled made me a bit wary. Are they concerned that I'm the problem?

Alette arrived but stood outside on the phone for a long time. Basco was anxious, he could tell she was here. We sat down for a cup of tea; Basco was behaving well. She asked me how things were going, to which I told her about the 60/40 thing. She asked me if there was a pattern to it. She was trying to diagnose the situation.

Walking to Zuiderpark & the Market

Alette said she wanted to see us walk together. The last time she was here, Basco was having a bad day and actually broke the harness while she was walking with him. She wanted to see how it was, now. I told her it would be a good day. She looked at me and asked how I knew it would be a good day. The whole time she had been at the house that morning, Basco had been in full communication with me. He responded instantly to me, stayed when I told him, and just generally was focused on me. I told her I understand when we have communication and when we don't. If we have communication, he will be good, if we don't, he will be garbage. She chuckled and said we would see.

We headed out and, as predicted, Basco walked perfectly. His head was high, his tail was high, and he was in boss mode. We walked perfectly to the park. We walked around the deer part (his favourite). I was confident and let him off the lead and without harness. I said, "k bye!" Alette was concerned but I reassured her that he would recall just fine. Basco was having a good day. Sure enough, when I called him, he came back instantly. I gave a high-quality treat and we continued on. We talked about his behavior over the past weeks, etc.

We harnessed back up and began to walk to the Market. She told me there was another dog coming, I told her Basco was fine. We passed that dog without issue. We went to the market, and he navigated like a boss. Alette just kept saying how great he was doing. We weaved in and out of foot traffic. He just sat and looked at me while I made purchases. He was being boss-Basco.

When we got back, Alette said she was so surprised with his behavior and how much better it was from the previous time. I reiterated the 60/40 situation. I told her that I hope we get to 70/30, but it can be that it stays 60/40. She was content but said she wanted to come back and hopefully see one of those bad days. It's a shame, Tuesday was a 40 day.

Up Next: Storms & What it Means for VI/Blind & Guide Dogs

Storms & What it Means for VI/Blind & Guide Dogs



It was February 17, 2022. Dudley, the 3rd official storm to pass through the Netherlands, was in full swing. I had no idea. The night before, there had been some pretty strong wind, but the day had mostly been overcast. As darkness descended over Den Haag, I heard sirens and many car alarms. I was oblivious. I was busy writing content

and playing WoW.

The next day, when we walked to the park, Coen noticed debris scattered everywhere. Someone apparently used to have some sort of pigeon spikes, that had now been strewn across the leash-free dog space. Coen went about picking it all up. We just thought it was rough wind.

I had plans for Saturday and when I checked the weather, I was quite astonished to learn that Storm Eunice would be rumbling through. I changed the plans to Sunday, thinking I would be safe. Hah. Friday night going into Saturday, Eunice wreaked havoc, in The Netherlands. A stadium near my home had most of the roof ripped from it. There were trees down, everywhere. Basco spent most of Friday and Saturday burrowing into his bed and whining. The wind was loud, the sirens and alarms were loud and non-stop. It was noise overload for both of us.

I walked him Saturday, during a lull, but couldn't let him free, there was just too much debris everywhere. It was difficult to walk with him, because I couldn't hear anything thanks to the wind. When I got home, I read about Storm Franklin. It should be passing over the Netherlands, on Monday.

Up Next: The Storm was Early, and I was Caught in it.

The Storm was Early, and I was Caught in it.



PHOTO CREDIT IAMEXPAT.COM

Sunday morning, I checked the weather, I 100% did NOT want to be caught in a storm. I had walked through one, with Coen, the year I lost my vision and was terrified. The weather forecast assured me that the winds would probably start in the evening, but the main storm would be Monday

morning.

Basco and I got prepared to go and set off for our appointment. As we were walking to the tram station, it was very rainy and windy. Those conditions are not pleasant when you can see, when you must rely on all your senses to navigate because you cannot see, the conditions are overwhelming. This was the first time I experienced it without a stick, but with a guide dog instead.

Sensory overload is a thing; Basco and I both experience it. We both struggled to hear with the sound of the wind and the rain, and it wasn't even that bad. The air was cold, which made it harder for me to feel because my hands were freezing, despite the mittens. We did stand in the shelter at the tram station, but the wind and rain got to us anyway.

When Basco tried to jump into the tram, he slipped, it was so wet. He made it on the second try, and we found a place to stand, the seats were full. The walk between the tram and the train station was also windy and rainy. Basco was doing his best and I had to rely on him a bit more than usual. When we arrived at the appointment, I thought what we had endured was manageable and we could do it on the return trip.

Franklin, Late Trains, Dependent on Basco



PHOTO CREDIT NL.TIMES

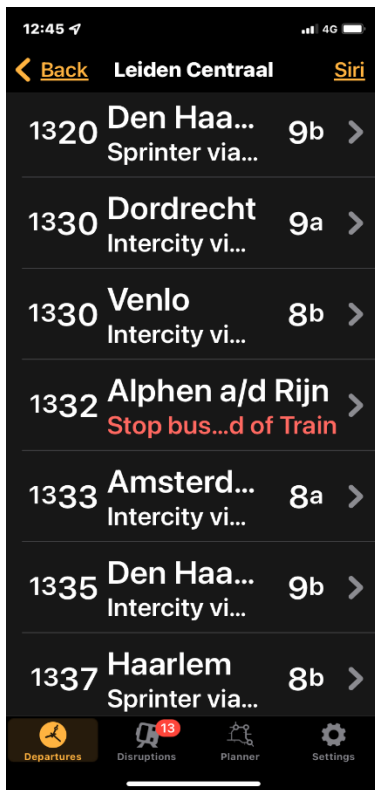
As my appointment finished, I steeled myself for the trip home. I could hear that the wind had picked up. Usually, there's a train every 15 to 20 minutes, so I have to wait 15 minutes, max. When my friend dropped me off at the train station, I hurried to get to

the train, just to hear it leaving the station as Basco and I stepped off the lift. Well, that was disappointing.

I checked my app and David (voice over name) told me the next train, which was scheduled in 15 minutes, was 10 minutes late. Well, that's inconvenient. The wind had really picked up, the rain was whipping through the open platform, and the temperature had dropped significantly. Basco has a smart collar, which not only has LED lighting, I can also track it on my phone so that I can find him if he gets lost. My phone notified me that his collar was running low on charge. Great.

There's an app, here in the Netherlands, that shows which trains are coming on which platforms. David told me my train would be coming on 9a. It was a different platform than I was used to, but I trudged over there. About 5 minutes later, a voice came over the speakers telling us that my train would be on 8a instead. Basco had never navigated to either of these platforms, but we did our best and he was a champ.

He found a seat for me, and I fed him several treats as well as played with him. My phone dinged, what now? The train was delayed again. The wind picked up and I could no longer hear announcements, on the platform. My hands were soaked and cold, Basco was leaning against my legs. My phone dinged again. This time, David told me my train would be on 9b, that's usually the side for the train to Den Haag Central.



Basco and I got up and trudged over there, no one else followed. I was a little worried, but then about 2 minutes after I moved, everyone else did; I assume the sign changed. I checked the train app again and it said there would be my usual train on 8b coming in 4 minutes. The delayed train was on 9b in 5 minutes. I was unsure what to do because the app said my usual train was stopping at my usual stop, but when I had SeeingAI read the sign to me, it did not mention my stop.

I was tired, cold, experiencing sensory overload and now I had to try to pick a train that would get me home. I decided to go with the delayed train because I was certain it would stop at my stop, and I figured everyone else would take the train that was arriving earlier. I was right, everyone else got on the other train. Basco and I got on the train that had been delayed. As it left the station, it hurled past the train that had gotten there earlier. It turns out the train that was delayed had priority to arrive first.

When we arrived at the station, Basco and I had been nice and warm in the train with our own seats, in a warm train car. As we stepped off the train, the wind hit us both in the face, pushing us back into the train a bit. We navigated to the lift, but I think he did it from autopilot, I'm not sure he could actually hear me. The station, itself, was okay, inside. I steeled myself for going outside to walk the short distance to the tram platform. As the doors opened, Basco and I were hit with a blast of cold wind and rain lashing at our faces.

Basco definitely could not hear me, he stood there for a moment while I was yelling the directions. I leaned into the left and he realized what we were doing. He stopped at the curb and waited for me to indicate if we could go. I could see nothing and hear nothing other than lashing wind and rain. I started across, hoping a tram driver would stop if I was in the way.



We got to the other side of the road and walked up the tram platform. There's no app to indicate if the trams are running on time, so I had to use my SeeingAI to read the sign for me, 13 minutes. 13 minutes, in this torrential downpour and havoc-wreaking wind. Sirens and alarms were sounding everywhere. I was so overwhelmed and, honestly, a bit frightened.

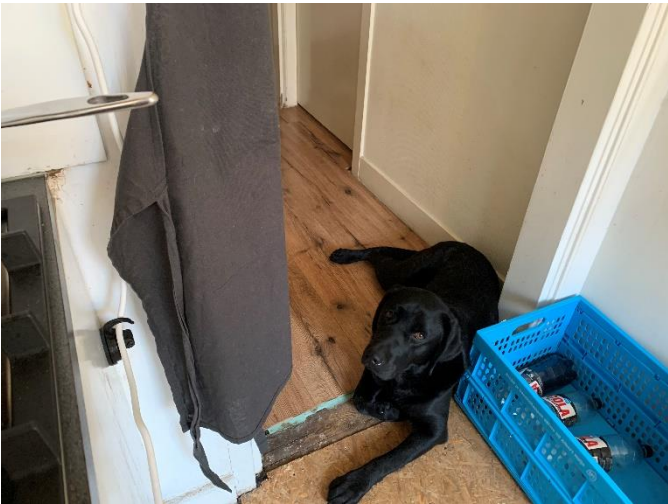
When our tram arrived, I couldn't sense if people were around us and Basco didn't care. He made a path and led me onto the tram. As we arrived at our stop, Basco already knew and was up by the door

ready to go. He slid out of the tram but corrected himself. The wind had really picked up, at this point, and we had to struggle to walk into it. I couldn't hear my voiceover anymore and it was max volume, on my headset. Basco's collar had shut off. It was me & Basco... in a torrent of sound, cold, wet, and dark. He led me home like a pro. He did walk me into some uneven tiles, and I twisted my ankle, but I couldn't be mad. He was doing his best.

As we turned the last corner to home, he really pulled. I knew he wanted to get home, but I couldn't walk any faster. He whined as I struggled to find my keys. We were exhausted, soaked, and both had a severe case of sensory overload. I got all his gear off him and gave him a big dinner. I took a warm shower. I was out of the shower all of 10 minutes before I was asleep. It had been too much. The visit and travel, alone, are enough to tire me. The amount of sensory overload was just too much. We did it, though.

Up Next: Another Busy Week, but not for Basco.

Another Busy Week, but not for Basco.



Alette suggested that I leave Basco behind if he was being difficult. She thought, perhaps, he would be upset that he wasn't getting to go with me. Basco has developed a few bad habits that cause me stress and anxiety when preparing to walk with him.

Food Driven: The Pros & Cons

Basco was trained with food as a reward. He was trained with a clicker and with praise words, but food is his reward. Alette told me that I should use his meal as his treats in order to keep him from getting fat. On days where Basco and I need to go somewhere, I dump the appropriate meal in his treat bag and that's how he gets his meal. His stomach is almost never "full". As a result, he has developed a constant need to scrounge for food, even when he's actually had a regular meal.

PROS:

- Basco will do almost anything if he thinks there is food involved
- Food is such a high reward that it will almost always be higher than any toy or other living thing
- His focus is extraordinarily high when it's his breakfast in the treat bag

CONS:

- He constantly looks for food
- Despite knowing I have the food, he will actively ignore me if he thinks he can find food on his own
- He chews on everything

The Bad Behaviors



As a result of the food-driven and not relationship-driven motivation for Basco, he has developed some behaviors that are really stress-inducing for me. He will not immediately expel, when he is outside. His first actions are always to search for something he can eat. He will search for feces, scraps, trash, anything that he thinks he can eat. He will continue to do this until he is certain I am going to bring him in and then he will try to rapidly expel.

I have tried various ways to inhibit this behavior. I've tried taking him on a leash, where he will just sniff and stare at me. He won't go potty. I've tried offering food for successfully expelling quickly, he's more focused on the food in my hand than

what he needs to do. I've tried distraction, intimidation, everything. The result is that if he doesn't expel in the appropriate place, he will do it on the platform, at the station, IN THE TRAIN. It stresses me out and I refuse to leave the house with him unless I'm certain he's gone, because he has actually defecated on tram platforms, on train station concrete and he tried to pee in the train.

The 2nd bad behavior as a result for the food-driven motivation is the chewing. He has nylabones, a kong full of treats, cow joints, and toys of all sorts. I noticed in his first few weeks that he would chew his food bowl even if his bone was beside him. In early March, he started chewing my furniture. He has chewed my year-old bookcase, my antique chess set, and even a brand new ball for the end of my blind stick. It doesn't happen because he's bored, he isn't. He gets plenty of work and plenty of mental stimulation, he's hungry and trying to chew on anything to ease the feeling of being hungry. The hunger isn't real, though; it's some sort of trauma.

Leaving Basco Behind



Basco brings me so much freedom and happiness. I am starting to like the dog just for who he is, but he is certainly frustrating at times. When he is being good, he is almost perfect. When he is being bad, he is more than I care to handle. The week after Alette's check up was spent with me being sick, so we didn't go anywhere. The week after that, though, I began a lengthy medical cycle. I would need to visit my specialist multiple times in the week and visit other specialists to make sure everything was going as planned. I decided there were criteria for Basco getting to go with me to these appointments:

- He needed to expel before we left
- He needed to get into his harness easily
- He needed to listen to basic things before we went

For the first appointment of the week, I tried 3 times to get Basco to eliminate outside, he wouldn't. I got prepared to go, put Basco in his cage and grabbed my stick. He looked so confused. When I got home from my appointment, he was laying sadly in his crate.

We had the same issue before the next appointment, but Coen was able to get Basco to go outside. He, also, took the time to suit Basco up for me and thus Basco went with me. However, for the next appointment, Basco wouldn't get into his harness, so he got left behind again. I've had a practitioner ask me where Basco is, and I'm not afraid to be honest about the situation.

Up Next: Basco goes from 60/40 to 70/30

Basco goes from 60/40 to 70/30



I'm not sure if it was the time spent together, my medical situation, Basco just learning to be better, or a combination of things, but Basco decided to advance from good behavior 60% of the time to 70% of the time. Maybe, it was leaving him behind a few times, or maybe he could feel how tired I was. Whatever helped him to move forward, I'm glad for. That's really too much of a generalization, though.

Basco's change wasn't just that he was better more often, it was also that he was better with correction. There were times he simply would not listen to me. I can't tell

you how many times I was ready to leave him in the park because he wouldn't return to me until he was good and ready. Somewhere, in April 2022, Basco decided that he was going to listen to me.

I did teach him a few new things and worked with him regularly, but in all fairness, I was also very stressed and tired. There were days where we would work and take the necessary walks but no fun walks. He took it like a champ.

He managed to learn the whole hospital, during this process. I'm certain everyone in the departments I visited know he is. In the taxi and doctors' offices he would always lay quietly. Walking me to where I need to go, he is always so proud of himself and his job.

When I'm not walking him, he often just lays near me. I think he's decided he is staying.

Up Next: Taxi Trauma

Taxi Trauma



My insurance is excellent in providing accessibility options, one of which is taxi service. While I can take public transit for some situations, the taxi service is crucial in other situations. For example, getting to an appointment on time might be difficult if I miss a train because they switched the platform, and I couldn't see that.

Technology these days also makes booking my trip super easy. I can go on a website, fill out my details and BAM I have scheduled my taxi. The booking site for my insurance provided taxi is so complete that I can insert the aids I need, such as a guide person or guide dog, stick, etc. I make sure to put in every single detail, including my appointment time.

The taxi company provided by my insurance is a small company that outsources to independent drivers. These drivers are given the ride details and can accept or reject the ride. The ride information will include how many passengers, if there are aids and what aids, as well as any information on the appointment etc.

Part of the contract for the taxi is that they must show up within 15 minutes on either side of the scheduled time and they are responsible to get me to my appointment on time. Clearly, this isn't always possible, given traffic, etc.

We have had our fair share of excellent drivers and we've had our share of drivers that should have stayed home that day.

Up Next: Taxi Trauma Continued

Taxi Trauma Continued

Mijn reis

Ditzo Verzekeringen

31 maart 2022 om 15.15 uur

Van Simon Smitweg 1, 2353GA Leiderdorp	Naar [Redacted]	Passagiers 1
Rit ID 11347981	Ritstatus Gefactureerd	

Uw hulpmiddelen

Geleide of Sociale hond
x 1

Extra informatie

[Redacted]

Aanvullende informatie:
Ik ben blind. Mijn afspraak is om 14:45 als ik ben laat naar de
ziekenhuis, ben ik ook laat, uit.

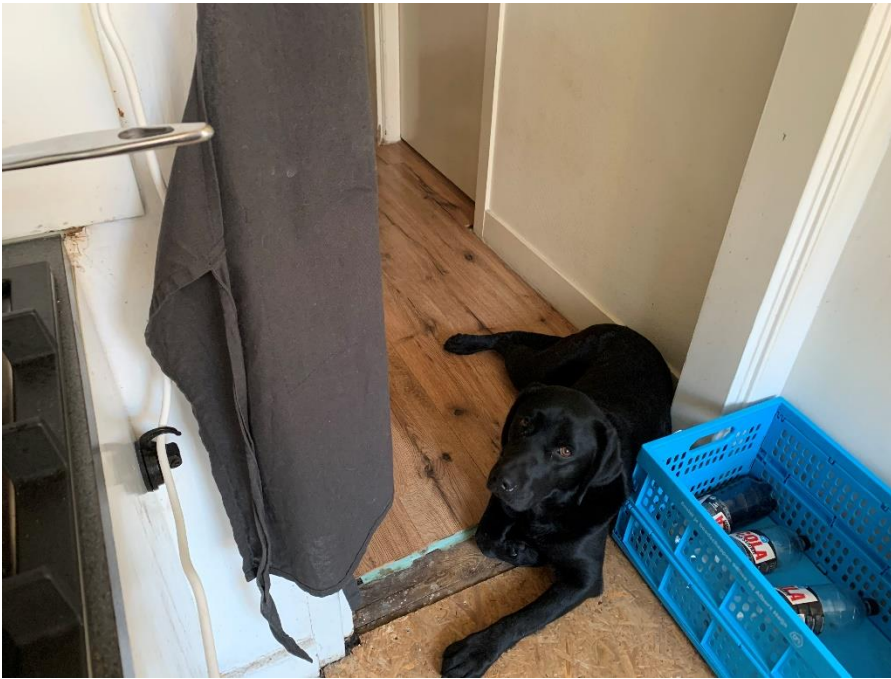
As previously mentioned, we've had some good taxi drivers and some that were less optimal. We had one taxi driver that was an hour and a half late and then wondered why I canceled. We have had some drivers that

thought I needed to walk almost a kilometer to get to their car and we have had some drivers that thought Basco could ride in the trunk.

As I was nearing the peak of my medical cycle, and in extreme pain, I had a taxi driver I will never forget. Remember, I clearly indicate when Basco is coming with me. I, also, clearly indicate that I am blind. The driver calls me and tells me he is outside. Great, you know I'm blind, come get me, I have no idea where you are parked.

I tell him he'll have to come show me where the car is, as I'm blind. He passively aggressively sighs. When I come out, he says "Oh you have a dog." He tells me Basco needs to lay on the floor, which is tiny, or in my lap. Basco is a big lab. He will not fit on my lap and barely fits on the floor, but okay, whatever you want.

When we're both situated in the car, the taxi driver asks me if Basco is really necessary. I answer politely, "Yes, he is a guide dog. He is necessary." I turn my book up in my headset and prepare for the ride. He launches into a monologue about dogs and how vial they are, how terrible they are, how dangerous they are and how he doesn't like them.



I have no idea what to do. I am stuck in his car, with my dog and the drive will be about 35-45 minutes. I tried to politely tell him I understood that some people are just afraid of dogs. He told me he watched a video of a dog ripping a baby's face off. Why would you watch that? Millions of dogs in

the world, one injury and all dogs are horrible. Okay, I get it, but I'm in your car with my guide dog, so maybe don't do this?

As it turns out, he was also my return driver. Not only did I need to hear about dogs and how horrible they are the whole way there, I needed to hear about it the whole way back. He asked me if I could just not take Basco. The whole time he is raging about dogs, my guide dog is laying quietly on the floor. This same guide dog made sure I didn't trip over the curb. He made sure I got through the door safely and he guided me straight to where I needed to go.

No, sir, No. I will not leave my GUIDE DOG behind because you are either too stupid or lazy to read that he would be with me. I strongly considered reporting him to the company, but in some way, I hope I get him again. I hope he has to endure Basco many times.

Up Next: Updates with Alette