



Bravo!

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 We read for you



Dear Diary,

January 9

Mom and Dad are acting really funny. They talk in Portuguese to each other. I understand Spanish and English, but I don't understand Portuguese. They don't want me to know what they're talking about. Whenever I ask, "What's going on?" they get really quiet. Today I caught them trying to hide papers they were filling out.

Dear Diary,

January 12

When the mail came today, Mom and Dad opened one envelope in a hurry. They both grinned and said, "Carmen, we have some great news."

Then the doorbell rang. Our neighbor needed help. Their basement was flooding. I took care of their baby while my mom and dad helped them mop up. Their "great news" had to wait.

Dear Diary,

January 13

Guess what! Here's the "great news." We're getting a puppy — well, sort of! We're going to be "puppy raisers." A puppy raiser is a person who takes care of a puppy for about a year. Why? It's to prepare the puppy to become a guide dog for a blind person.

Remember Dad's sister, Aunt Jane? Well, she's blind, and she has a guide dog named Max. Max goes everywhere with her, making sure she doesn't get hurt. Aunt Jane once told me her life became a hundred percent better when she got Max. They're a real team! They're so close, I think Max can even read Aunt Jane's mind!



Dear Diary,

January 14

A little puppy is too young for guide dog school. It needs to learn how to behave, though. That's where we come in. We'll teach the puppy many useful things. While living with us, our puppy will learn to obey rules. It will get lots of love and learn to get along well with people and other animals.

There are lessons we'll practice at home. There are lessons we'll practice outside, in public. Dad wants me to be ready for hard work. He says I have to be dedicated. I am. Mom wants me to remember we can't keep the dog. I know. I'm still very excited. I think it'll be a great adventure.





Dear Diary,

January 21

We got our puppy yesterday! He's a cute, cuddly ball of fur! He's three months old and his name is Bravo. *Bravo* means "brave" in Spanish.

We get to keep him for a little more than a year. Dad already knows a lot about training puppies, and I will learn soon. We'll also be in touch with other puppy raisers who will help teach us.

I smuggled Bravo into bed with me last night. He's really supposed to sleep on the floor. He has to learn to sleep next to the bed. I promised not to do it again.



Dear Diary,

January 24

I have a very important job. I feed Bravo every day. I make sure he has plenty of fresh water. I spend a lot of time with him after school.

A good guide dog has to be manageable in all kinds of situations. It has to be calm and polite. It has to be very focused, pay close attention, and obey. It even has to know when to disobey! If following a command will harm its owner, the dog is not supposed to do it. In that way, it keeps its owner from being endangered. The dog even has to make decisions.

My family and I will take Bravo to many places and give him many challenges. I think it'll be fun.

Dear Diary,

January 28

I hardly slept at all last night! I was too excited. Today was our first training class. There were people and puppies everywhere! We learned some basic rules:

- Be honest and don't tease—Bravo must trust me. Bravo will learn to trust only if I do what I say I'm going to do.

- Use short commands—if Bravo does the wrong thing, I say "no" to show displeasure. When he does the right thing, I say "yes" or "good boy."

- Give rewards right away—as soon as Bravo does the right thing, I praise him. That way, he understands and learns.





Dear Diary, February 4

Part of our job is to stop bad habits.

Biting is a bad habit. When Bravo nips my hand, I pull back gently on the scruff of his neck. I look him in the eye and tell him "no." Then I put my hand near his mouth again. If he doesn't nip, I praise him. We practice this over and over.

Chewing on things is a bad habit, but puppies need to chew a lot. We want Bravo to chew only on his own toys. He has one that looks like a bone. Mom was smart. She took peanut butter and put it in the cracks of the bone. He loves it! Still, he must stop chewing my slippers!

Jumping up on people is another bad habit. When Bravo does jump up, I gently push him off. I kneel down to pet him only when he doesn't jump. When I'm down there, he can see my facial expression. He knows I am pleased with him.

Bravo is afraid of the stairs. We practiced going down them this morning. I sat on the floor. I put Bravo on the first step. I patted the floor and told him to come down. As soon as he did, I hugged him and said "good boy." Then we did it again. Soon, he did two steps. Then he did three. He rolled down a few times, but he finally got it. It took a lot of coordination because his legs are so short!

Tomorrow, we'll try climbing up.



Dear Diary,

February 18

In class today, we learned the commands "forward," "sit," and "come." Bravo and I learned how to walk together!

A guide dog always walks to the left of its owner. To start walking, I say "forward." If Bravo is pulling too hard on his leash, I stop and make him sit for a few seconds. Then I say "forward" and start to walk again. It will take a while to learn because Bravo's a very playful puppy. He's curious and has lots of energy. I'm not worried, though. He really wants to please us.

A guide dog must learn to come as soon as it's called. This is how I'm teaching Bravo to come.





🔊 I get down on the floor and open my arms wide. I say “come.” As soon as he does, I pet and praise him. If he doesn’t come right away, it’s OK. I just pick him up and bring him to me. Then I praise him as if he came on his own.

🔊 Another important skill is to take and bring things. Later, Bravo will be taught very specific words. Right now, we’re just playing. I roll a ball and tell him to bring it back to me. When he does, I say “let go” or “thank you.” If he doesn’t let it go, I touch the sides of his tongue. This makes him open his mouth. When the ball drops, he gets praised. Then I hold the ball out to him and say “take it.” When he takes it gently, he gets praised.



Dear Diary,

February 25

Today all five of us went for a walk. I held Bravo's leash, while Mom and Dad pushed José's stroller. We crossed busy streets. Bravo has to be comfortable in traffic. He did very well!

There were lots of dogs in the park. Some were small. Some were really big. Bravo was brave and friendly. He played with all the dogs. In puppy class, they said that's called socialization. This big word means learning to get along with others. It's very important for a guide dog.

Soon, Bravo will be ready to go places where dogs don't usually go. He'll wear a special jacket. It will tell people he has a special job to do.

Dear Diary,

March 3

Today Bravo and I went to the public library. I called first to make sure they would let us in. They were happy to see us. It was story hour. The little children were all over Bravo. He was very good with them. He didn't bark or growl. He is so gentle!

Last night, we all went to my favorite restaurant. We called ahead to make sure it was OK with the owner. It was. Bravo was a perfect gentleman! He didn't get in anyone's way. He didn't even whine or beg for food. The owner told us we could bring him again any time!



Dear Diary,

January 1

We have had Bravo for about a year now. He is ready for more challenges. We went on our biggest outing ever. We took a trip with the other puppy raisers from class. Can you believe it? We took twenty-five older puppies to the county fair! We went by bus. What an adventure!

The first challenge was getting on the bus. The steps were very steep. Some of the smaller puppies had trouble. Bravo hopped up the steps with no problem at all. He was great when the bus was moving, too. He rested at my side the whole time. He didn't even get sick.





▮ The park was something else! There was a lot of noise and bright lights from all the rides. Different food smells came from the stands. There were other animals, too! Bravo's first meeting with a cow was so funny. I took a lot of pictures for my scrapbook.

▮ This outing was a good chance for Bravo to be with other puppies and other people. After a few hours at the fair, we did a "puppy swap." We traded dogs with each other. I worked with Sarah's dog, Molly. She took Bravo. That way the puppies get used to working with other people.



Dear Diary,

March 12

I'm very sad today. It's time to say good-bye to Bravo. A little more than a year has passed. He's ready to start his formal training.

He'll stay at The Seeing Eye Institute for four months. He'll learn even more. Then he will meet his real owner. I'm kind of jealous. Mom and Dad understand exactly how I feel. We're all going to miss him.

One thought helps. I know we did a really important thing. Someone's life will be better because of Bravo. I'm so proud of him. I'm also proud of my family and me. The great thing is that we can do it again!

Think and Respond

- 1 How does the writer present the story? How does this presentation affect what you know about the characters?
- 2 Summarize what happens on page 7.
- 3 What is the main idea of this story?
- 4 How do you think the author feels about the training of guide dogs? How can you tell?
- 5 How is Bravo different at the end of the story than he was at the beginning? How is he the same?
- 6 What do you think is the most important training rule Carmen learns? Why?



Research Seeing Eye Dogs Do research on Seeing Eye dogs. Write a paragraph about your findings. Share the paragraph with classmates.



School-Home Connection Share with a family member what you have learned about training guide dogs. Tell about the puppy training in someone's home and about the training a dog receives at The Seeing Eye Institute.