



Trixie the Guide Dog

The crowd cheered and clapped. Clinton's team had won another game of soccer. He was very happy for himself but mainly for the team. He had learned that when you are playing in a team you do what is best for the team. You don't just go off on your own but everything you do in the game is for the team.



It was a happy and contented boy who went home with his parents that afternoon. He had kicked the ball into the goal just minutes before the whistle blew. They won with a score of 3-2. It had been a tough game but in the end they still managed to beat the other team. Clinton really enjoyed sport. Yet it was not everything for him. It was not something that became an obsession for him. His parents had taught him that sport must not become his idol. There are much more important things in life, his father used to say.

Clinton was a very healthy and energetic young boy. He was always happy and full of fun and laughter. He enjoyed life to the full and was often heard singing or whistling.

He also loved flowers and plants and often helped his father in the garden. His father taught him the names of the various plants and explained to him how God not only created everything but also cared for everything He had created.

One Saturday they had been very busy in the garden and at the end of that day Clinton was very tired. That was most unusual for he was never tired. His father and mother sent him off to bed early that evening. "You will be fine in the morning after a good sleep", they said. After his evening prayer he crawled under the blankets and he fell asleep almost immediately.



Before his father and mother went to bed later on that evening they first checked on their young boy as was their custom. When they came to Clinton's bedroom they heard him groan and moan as if he was in pain. He was very hot and his face was all wet from the perspiration. Father and mother looked at each other. "He wouldn't have got a sun stroke in the garden, would he?" mother asked.

"I shouldn't think so", father responded. "He is quite used to being in the sun".

As they were quietly whispering near Clinton's bed he stirred in his sleep and again he moaned. His hand went to his neck and then he woke up.

"My head is so sore", Clinton whispered. "And my neck feels stiff and strange".

"We better go and see a doctor straight away", father said. "I'll get the car out of the garage while you wrap Clinton up and then take him to the car".

Unfortunately the hospital was the only place where you could expect to find a doctor late on Saturday night. Father drove as fast as he could, ignoring all the speed limits. Somehow he realised this was a serious case, perhaps even meningitis. He did not say that to his wife as he did not want her to worry for nothing. But it was best to hurry anyway. But the traffic was unusually slow. When they were about halfway it slowed down even more. The trip to the hospital normally took about twenty minutes but at this rate it could take much longer.

"I hope there hasn't been an accident", father said. "Then we could be stuck in the traffic for hours". His fears were confirmed when after the next bend in the road they saw flashing lights of ambulances and police cars. The traffic had come to a full stop.

"What now?", said mother.

"We must try and get out of this and see if we can perhaps go to the hospital via another road", father answered. But when father tried to turn around he found it was blocked everywhere. He couldn't reverse either.



So there they were, stuck in the middle of the traffic unable to move forward or backward or sideways.

Would they be in time? Or would they be too late?

Mother started to cry softly. She had also started to realise that Clinton was seriously ill and any delay could be disastrous. While they waited mother prayed quietly to the Lord for his protection.

Finally the traffic started to move again. When after two hours they arrived at the hospital father parked the car while mother took Clinton to the emergency department as quickly as possible. After she had explained some of Clinton's symptoms the nurse quickly rushed them through even though there were quite a few people waiting in the waiting room. The doctor was called immediately and he thoroughly examined Clinton. He asked many questions and then took some blood samples to be tested. He told the worried parents that Clinton would have to stay in hospital because he was a very sick boy. The doctor advised them to go home and have some sleep. There was not much more they could do for Clinton now. The doctor and nurses would be doing all kinds of tests with Clinton and they were also going to take a chest X-ray.

The next morning they were both at the hospital quite early. Clinton's father did not want to go to work for he wanted to be with his son. When they arrived the nurse told them that the doctor wanted to see them. She guided them to a small interview room where they could have some privacy. A few minutes later the doctor arrived and told them that Clinton was indeed a very sick boy. He said that at this stage he was almost certain that Clinton had meningitis. "That is a very serious illness", he explained. "Sometimes that can even cause death".

"At the moment Clinton is asleep", the doctor continued. "His head is very sore and we have given him something for the pain. This also makes him very drowsy. He cannot stand the daylight either. So we are keeping the



room dark for him. We have given him antibiotics and we hope that in the next few days he will improve”.

Then the nurse brought the fearful and anxious parents to Clinton’s room. They walked in very cautiously as they didn’t want to wake him up. He was again moaning in his sleep. They were not allowed to stay very long because he needed much rest. So after a while they left. When they came home they prayed to the Lord and asked God to watch over their young boy, to bless the treatment and, if it was His will, to make him better again.



When they came to the hospital the next morning the nurse quietly guided them to the same room where they spoke to the doctor the previous day.

After a while the doctor came in and looked very sombre and serious.

“I am very sorry”, he said, “but unfortunately I have very sad news for you”.

“Clinton hasn’t died has he?”, the anxious mother asked.

“No, he has not, but..... The doctor swallowed. He found it very difficult to pass on this sad message.

“Your son is blind”, he said. “Meningitis sometimes causes blindness and it can often cause death. We have done various tests and we found that your young boy cannot see anything at all. He is totally blind. Mother burst out in tears. She knew Clinton was very ill but she had not expected this at all. Father tried to comfort her and put his arm around her shoulders.

They went to Clinton’s room and found him in a bad state. He had obviously been crying a lot. He heard his parents come into the room and turned his face towards them. Mother rushed to his side and put her arms around him and kissed him. Clinton started crying again and mother could not help herself and also wept bitterly.

Father turned his face to the window.



After a while both parents sat down around Clinton's bed and tried to comfort him. But what could they say to their twelve year old boy? It was difficult to find the right words. To be blind at his age. How terrible! He was so full of life and so full of joy. Now he was in tears and he continued

to cry. He could not even stop. What future was there now for him? What could a blind boy do? He wouldn't be able to read his favourite books. He wouldn't be able to see the beautiful flowers. And he wouldn't be able to play soccer any more. He would be a no hoper. He would be utterly useless.

The parents were speechless in the sight of such deep sadness. Clinton needed to be comforted but the parents also needed comfort. Finally father pulled himself together and took the Bible from the bedside cabinet and then they listened to what God said in the gospel of Matthew: *"Come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"*.

After a couple of weeks Clinton was allowed to come home. Father had taken a day off again so that both parents could go and pick up their son together. It was very difficult for Clinton, who had always been so independent, to now be taken by the hand. His mother guided him through the passages, into the lift and to the car.

Not many words were spoken on the way home.

The next few weeks and months were extremely difficult for Clinton. It was a time of adjustment and much frustration. Sometimes Clinton was most unfair to his parents and often very demanding. He would often be very angry if a chair had accidentally been moved and he bumped his knee. At times he would even scream. Other times he would just quietly sit in a corner doing nothing. After all what else could he do? He worried about the future. What could he do now? He was often very angry. Yes, he was often even angry at God. He knew very well that was not right. But life was so difficult and he even thought at times that life was not worth living. His teacher at school was always very helpful. He listened patiently when



Clinton vented his anger and he explained that the Lord is wise and we don't always understand His plan for our lives.

“It is like the poem of the footprints”, he said. “When we find life the toughest that is when the Lord carries us in His strong arms. He will never leave you”, he said.

One day the teacher came to see Clinton's parents. He explained to them that Clinton was having a very hard time at school, and no doubt at home too.

“What he really needs is some assessment to find out how we can best help him”, he said to the worried parents.

So first they made an appointment with their local doctor who referred them a specialist. After several visits it was suggested they should consider getting a guide dog for Clinton. This will help Clinton getting his confidence back again. It will also help him to become independent.

The following week Father, Mother and Clinton drove all the way to a Guide Dog Training Centre. They had quite a long conversation with the director of the Centre. He asked Clinton many questions. One of the questions was if he was scared of dogs.

“Oh no”, Clinton responded. “I am not scared of dogs at all. As a matter of fact I love dogs very much”.

“Well, that is very good”, the director said. “It would otherwise have been very difficult to work with a guide dog if you are frightened of her”.

Mother asked: “What type of dog do you normally use?”

“We usually use Labradors because they are very intelligent, placid and they learn quickly”, said the director whose name was Mr. Atkinson.

Mr. Atkinson explained that if the puppies are to be good guide dogs they must have good parents.



“The puppies are brought into the training centre when they are about 6 to 8 weeks old. That’s when they have their first taste of training. Volunteer puppy walkers introduce the young pups to the sights, sounds and smells of a world in which they will play such an important part. This will mean taking the puppies on buses and trains, into shops and along busy streets.

Pups born to be guide dogs must be intelligent and good natured. They must not be nervous of crowds or frightened by sudden noises. First they have to learn to walk in a straight line. Then they go back to where they were born and when they are about twelve months old they return to the centre for the next part of its important training. The volunteer walkers are then no longer needed. They will then be walkers for other puppies. You can understand that this is a sad time for the puppy walker for they will never see the puppy again. They had learned to love the puppy and had become quite attached to it. So you can imagine how sad it is to leave the puppy for others to take over the rest of the training. But they are rewarded by the knowledge that they helped raise a dog who will one day act as someone’s eyes”.

Father and Mother as well as Clinton had listened to this long explanation with great interest. Clinton was hoping that they could find a good and friendly dog for him. He was really looking forward to having such a dog which would faithfully guide him to school and then bring him safely home again. He was also looking forward to the companionship of such a lovely Labrador.

“Here at the centre we provide advice and training and we help the people to learn how to move around safely and confidently”, Mr. Atkinson added. Father asked Mr. Atkinson: “How many dogs do you train here at this Training Centre?” “About two or three hundred a year”, Mr. Atkinson



answered. “But the largest training Centre is in England. In that centre they train about 1200 dogs each year.”

Clinton’s parents still had many questions. But after a while they signed some papers and Mr. Atkinson asked one of the workers in the centre to bring one of the guide dogs into the office. It was a beautiful female Labrador and her name was Trixie. Clinton touched her and immediately loved her. He stroked her on the head and Trixie obviously enjoyed it too. ”You obviously like each other”, Mr. Atkinson said. “That is the easy part. Now we need to observe both of you at work for we need to make sure that Trixie is a good match for you. You will need to work together for about one month and then we can finally hand Trixie over to you.

One month was not a long time compared to the rest of his life he would need the help and support of guide dogs. Yes, indeed he would need several dogs during his lifetime. For the working life of the guide dog is about seven years and then they need to be replaced. Sometimes the dog would stay in the family home because everyone in the family is then so attached to it. You can imagine that after seven years it is very difficult to part with her. Therefore many of the dogs that are being trained at the centre are to replace dogs which need to retire from active duties.



Trixie was allowed to come home with them after that month of training together. They had learned to cross busy roads with lots of traffic. Together they had learned to recognise several obstacles such as an awning of a shop window. Trixie would just stop or go around it otherwise Clinton would bump his head against the awning and hurt himself quite badly. They had learned how to board the train or a bus, or to cross a bridge. They had also practised the way to school and the way to the post box in the next street.

Both Clinton and Trixie were enjoying themselves and were becoming quite fond of each other. Trixie was now Clinton’s constant companion.



They went everywhere together. Clinton was totally dependent on his guide dog. He was also very proud of Trixie and each time they came home from a walk to the shop or post box then he would tell her how much he loved her.

Finally after several months Clinton's parents observed a change in him. He was no longer sad and sombre and he was slowly improving. One morning they even heard him sing again. He was fortunate that he had learned so many Psalms for now he could not read them and had to rely on his memory. The teacher at school once told he class that Luther had said:

“When you are happy you sing. When you are not happy you start singing and then it will make you happy”.

He was nearly his usual self again after such a long time of sadness and much frustration.

The last week at school had been very busy and Clinton was very tired. Trixie also seemed very tired which was quite unusual. Trixie normally slept in the same room as Clinton on a mat next to the bed. Clinton woke up in the middle of the night and thought Trixie was making strange noises. Her breathing seemed abnormal. He quietly slipped out of bed and felt Trixie's head. It felt hot and feverish. “Oh no, dogs can't have meningitis, can they?”, Clinton thought. Just the thought of Trixie going blind or even dying made him shiver. He called out to his Father and Mother who came rushing into his room.

“What's the matter?”, asked his Father. “I don't really know”, answered Clinton. Trixie doesn't seem well. He is hot and feverish. After a quick examination Father and Mother both had to agree with Clinton.

What now?

“We better take him to the vet”, Dad said. “I will phone him immediately”.



They quickly wrapped Trixie in a blanket and they went to the “All Creatures Veterinary hospital” altogether in Father’s car. The vet was expecting them already. After a lengthy examination he came to the conclusion that Trixie was indeed very sick.

“Have you noticed any unusual behaviour today?”, asked the vet. “Has Trixie done anything unusual or eaten anything perhaps that could be harmful?”

“I could not think of anything”, Father responded.

But Mother suddenly had an idea. “I have sprinkled some snail pellets around the garden today and I know Trixie has been outside for a while”.

“Well, that is most likely the problem”, the vet concluded.

He quickly went to his medicine cupboard and after a short while found what he was looking for. It was a very small tablet. He rubbed this tablet into the corner of Trixie’s eye.

“In this way it gets into the blood stream so much quicker”, he informed them. Then he quickly dragged the heavy dog outside.

”What is the hurry for?”, asked Dad.

“Because she will be vomiting any moment”, the vet answered. This little tablet is quick acting and she will soon empty her stomach.

He was right. Within one or two minutes Trixie vomited and emptied her stomach.

And what did they see? On the ground they saw the contents of Trixie’s stomach and most of it was a large quantity of green snail pellets.

“You are very fortunate you brought her here so soon for tomorrow morning she would have been dead. I will need to keep her in the veterinary hospital for a night and hopefully she will be OK by tomorrow”, the vet informed them.

“You all go home now and come back tomorrow morning and see how she is going”.

“I am very hopeful that it will work out just fine”, the vet added.



After this reassurance from the vet Father, Mother and Clinton were not so worried any more. So they hugged Trixie and went home again.

They were all quite happy. Clinton especially was glad and thankful that he had woken up in the middle of the night. For, as the vet had said, Trixie would have been dead the following morning if they had not taken her to see the vet.

Next morning they all went to the veterinary hospital and the vet told them the good news. “Trixie had a good sleep and is now nearly back to normal. You can take her home and only come back if you are worried about her”. They all thanked the vet wholeheartedly.

“I am glad I was able to help”, said the vet. “I am especially happy to have saved such a beautiful and special dog”, he said.

“You must be very proud of her”, he said to Clinton.

“I am indeed”, Clinton answered. “I can’t do without her. She is my constant companion and I love her”.

They said goodbye to the vet and drove back home.

Clinton and Trixie were both sitting in the back seat of the vehicle.

Both were extremely happy and content.

Clinton was so glad that he had not lost Trixie.

For that he was very thankful.

Leo Schoof, December 2007

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