

Tom and Zeppelin, & a Love of Work

Tom has been blind since birth. Born prematurely, he was placed in an incubator and the oxygen levels burned both of his retinas.

Tom was raised the same as his sighted siblings, except for his schooling at the New York State School for the Blind (NYSSB) in Batavia, New York. His other senses compensated for his lack of sight, and he once ducked and missed a shoe that his brother had thrown at him because he could hear it coming!

During his early life, Tom relied on a cane for travel. He worked for the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI) after completing his schooling and looked into finding a guide dog when he moved on to working in the hotel business. He received his first of four guide dogs, a golden retriever, in 1992.

"Travel is so much faster with a dog," Tom said. "We are trained with them, but the handler needs to work their dog and keep up their skills."

While multitasking at the front desk at the hotel, Tom was approached by a law firm about coming to work for them. When his job at the hotel came to an end four years ago, Tom called law firm Brenna Boyce about their offer and was hired as the Client Services Manager. He keeps busy as their receptionist, calendar organizer, and phone system administrator.



Tom doesn't consider his blindness to be a disability, and uses old and new technology at Brenna Boyce. He takes notes in Braille, uses his iPhone as a communication tool, and has a computer equipped with a voice system.



This past spring Tom was placed with Zeppelin, his fourth guide dog. Zepp is Tom's third dog from Freedom Guide Dogs and interestingly was placed by trainer Jeff, who had also placed him with that first golden retriever way back in 1992!

Zepp has lots of energy, but it's controlled by being busy. Tom and Zepp are out in public a lot. They take the bus to work every day, cross busy streets, ride paratransit and Uber, and keep busy with clients at work. And Zepp gets playtime before work.

"You can tell he's smart," Tom laughs. "I fell asleep in my chair and I felt nudging on my feet. Zepp had picked up my shoe and was trying to put it on my foot. He wanted to go outside!" Tom continued, "He also makes me stand on the porch to wait for our ride when it's raining because he doesn't want to get wet."

It seems that Zepp and Tom share a sense of humor. While Tom can often be heard telling the partners at Brenna Boyce that their ties are crooked, Zepp is quietly under the desk playing with his leash. He has mischievously nibbled away at two and he now has a bone to pass the time.



Zepp arrived just in time for the 100th anniversary celebration of the alumni association for NYSSB. Tom is the current Vice President of Programming for the alumni and spearheaded a celebration that was attended by five Freedom clients, including friends Alberta with Yahna and Mike with Lloyd. Tom commented, "It was Zepp's first major outing and I was concerned that he was new to his job, but he made the conference so much easier for me. I can tell he was raised well and he has a great work ethic."

While many folks can't wait to retire, Tom can't wait to go to work everyday. He loves it, and so does Zepp. With the same work ethic and sense of humor, this team will be great together! ♥



Zepp as a puppy in training


You can raise a pup to be a fabulous guide dog for someone who needs them! Puppy raisers give pups love, teach them basic obedience, and socialize them in all kinds of situations. For more information contact alison@freedomguidedogs.org.

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