

SOPHIE'S DAILY DIARY

DAY 1

"THE ESCAPE ARTIST"

I knew something was up this morning because mum and dad were packing all our things into cases and bags. Around 10 o'clock, everything was put in the car, and after filling the car with petrol at the Tesco Garage, our journey began.

After about 20 minutes, I could have sworn my nose picked up certain smells that I knew from my puppy days. At the same time, I heard mum and dad say "Pontypool," the place where I was puppy walked! It wasn't a very long drive, and after about another 30 minutes, we arrived at the Doubletree by Hilton hotel in the Bradley Stoke area of north Bristol. This is where dad and me will be staying for 10 nights for our training class. Of course, this is to train dad, not me! I know what I'm doing, it's dad who needs the rough edges knocking off, all those naughty little habits he picked up over the past several years with Max, his last guide dog.

It wasn't long before my colleague and best friend Henry and me were canoodling under the table! One by one, everybody arrived, and our class was complete. As well as dad and me, there is Henry's new mum auntie Lisa from Pontypool, and Radar with his new dad, uncle Ben from Frome. Our two trainers for this class are auntie Keita who trained Henry and me, and auntie Emma who trained Radar.

When mum had finished her dinner, we said our goodbyes, and had our introductory talk about what we'll be doing here, when we'll be doing it, and all those sorts of things. Once that was done, we had to learn our way around the hotel, but not before we were given our brand spanking new white harnesses! Until now, we only wore a brown training harness, but now we look like true professionals!

It was soon our teatime and the chance of a nice little rest. We then had to guide our new owners to the restaurant for their food. On the way there, I spotted an open door, and Curiosity got the better of me! I decided to go in to have a look! Dad very quickly knew we weren't where we were supposed to be, got me out of the room, and back on our way to the restaurant. Not only did I remember which table to go to, I could even remember which chair dad had been sat on! That really impressed him! Henry,

Radar, and me all soon decided it was time for lots of canoodling, but we were quickly told to “pack it in!” These humans can be so boring!

Once their eating and drinking was over and done with, it was time to go back to our rooms. Dad thought he'd better take me to the doggy loo first, which I was very grateful for! After I'd powdered my nose, dad opened the gate slightly, just enough to get me out of the pen. I was so quick that I slipped past him and did a runner back into the corridor! I was running up and down like a looney and barking like an idiot! Before dad could close the outer door, I zoomed past him out into the hotel's very large garden! No matter what he did, I was not going to come back to him! He was not at all happy, and the only thing he could do was to phone auntie Keita. She was there with us like greased lightning because there's an area of the garden where I could get out onto a busy road! Thankfully, I didn't go to that area. She soon clipped my lead onto my collar and took me back to dad. I just wanted to play, that's all, but they were both very unhappy with me. Dad said I will probably be remembered as the escape artist from this class! Auntie Keita seems to think I have a lot of pent up energy that needs getting rid of, so I'll be having a free run tomorrow afternoon! I can't wait!

DAY 2

“A GAME OF FOOTBALL”

First thing this morning after breakfast was a harness walk with dad. There were lots of obstacles for me to work around, like oddly placed lampposts, huge hedges that had been left to grow out over the pavement, and cars parked on pavements ... to name just a few. Despite all of this, it was a very successful walk. We did have a slight problem though. When auntie Keita told dad to ask me to “find the car,” I did. The thing was, it wasn’t auntie Keita’s car, it was auntie Emma’s car! To be fair, they’re identical, except for the registration numbers. At first, auntie Keita didn’t have a clue why her keys wouldn’t open her car! It wasn’t until she looked at the registration number that she realised what the problem was!

Auntie Keita then took us to Little Stoke so that I could have my free run that I was promised, and I didn’t even have to wait until this afternoon! We were there for what felt like ages, and I was having great fun! I paddled in the Brook, found a nice branch to carry around, and best of all, there was a group of children who were having a game of football. Before they knew what was going on, I ran over and stole their ball! Auntie Keita wasn’t too impressed with me, because she found it very hard to get me to come back to her! See? It’s not just dad I mess around! She finally caught me, took the ball off me, and gave it back to the children. She was mortified, because she saw big teeth marks in their ball! She offered to give the children some money so they could buy a new one, but they didn’t want any money!

After that, we headed back to the hotel where we met up with auntie Glenda Webb, the dog welfare lady. Dad hasn’t seen her in several years, so they really enjoyed a good catch up, and did some paperwork. She told dad lots of things about me, the names of my mum, dad, and littermates, any health issues I’d had, and other things.

After lunch, dad brushed and combed me with auntie Glenda supervising him. I felt awesome! We then had a little rest before our second walk of the day, which was the same as the one we did this morning, except we did it in reverse. I don’t mean we walked backwards, we did the same route but in the opposite direction. Some of those overhanging bushes and trees caused more problems this way, because I could walk under them, but dad would find them with his left arm, or if he wasn’t careful, they could poke him in the eye, so I really needed to have my wits about me.

We've now been having a little chill in the room until it's time for me to have my tea! I'm recharging my batteries so that I'll be able to have enough energy to canoodle with Henry and Radar under the table again!

Late this evening, dad was just about to put me in the spending pen when his finger slipped off my collar. Well, I just couldn't resist it and shot off into the hotel garden like I did last night! It didn't matter what dad did or said, I was not coming back! He had no idea where I was, so it was another quick phone call to auntie Keita for help. So, she suggested he went back to our room to get a packet of treats to try and bribe me back in. He began calling me while rustling the packet very loudly. That did the trick, and I shot back to him like a rocket, which told dad that food is definitely my weak point!

DAY 3

“A BAD REPUTATION”

I think today was all about wearing Henry and me out so there would be no energy left in either of us! We think the reason is that we're enjoying each other's company under the table way too much! Well, what's a girl to do when her best friend is on class with her? I've known Henry for absolutely ages! Auntie Kirsty did our basic training at Leamington, and then auntie Keita did our advanced training in Bristol. Auntie Lisa thinks Henry may be getting a bit jealous because I'm also showing interest in Radar. Perhaps they've got a point? At this rate I might be giving myself a bad reputation.

Anyway, there were two very Long walks today. The first was in a place called Clifton where there's a very famous bridge, but we didn't get the chance to walk over it. We were in the centre of town, being put through our paces. There were so many things to negotiate, but cars on pavements wasn't one of them! There were narrow gaps, very wide roads to cross, tricky bits of pavement where I needed to wiggle my way through to avoid all sorts of things, and a lady who didn't seem to think it was a problem bringing her scrambling barking little dog within sniffing distance of me. The train station was a huge distraction for me! It has two separate entrances, both of which I tried dragging dad through! I heard a whisper that we're going to have a train ride or two tomorrow, so that's something to really look forward to!

Our destination on this walk was Starbucks, not that us dogs got anything! We had to make do with a drink of water when we got back to the hotel! There were lots of talking by the humans, but we just lay on the floor and let them get on with it ... well, with the exception of a commando crawl or three to each other! We had someone else with us today, auntie Caroline Abraham, who used to be with Guide Dogs Cymru, but now she's got a different job with Guide Dogs. Dad hasn't seen her for over seven years. She was the lady who qualified him with Max, his German Shepherd guide dog. It was ever so nice for them to be able to have a catch up.

After lunch, it was another hectic walk for Henry and me. This time, it was on a long straight stretch, but there was a lot of very loud traffic noise which made dad feel quite tired. Something else that made him feel tired was the speed I was walking! But he was able to steady me down a bit to make it more manageable. He said I had given him a really good workout this afternoon!

When we got back to the hotel, I totally crashed out in our room. But Henry and Radar were taken for a free run. Fair's fair, I got a free run yesterday, but they didn't. To be

honest, I felt a little bit jealous, not because they had a free run, but because they had each other to play with. I only had myself ... well and a football I suppose! I think I really needed that sleep this afternoon, because before I knew it, it was my teatime!

Dad had a message on his phone from a different auntie Sue, Sue Nicholson, who does the same job as auntie Glenda Who we saw yesterday, except she works in Wales. She said she was going to call in on her way home to see dad and auntie Lisa, because at some point after Henry and me have qualified, we'll be transferred into her care. That sleep this afternoon recharged my batteries nicely, because while we were in the restaurant this evening with auntie Sue, I had a burst of energy and cheekiness, or as dad called it, "stupidity." I got myself all tangled up in the plush net curtains behind dad's chair! It took him ages to free me, but he finally managed it. I then kept pawing at his leg and mouthing his arm while he was trying to eat his food. He tried everything to get me to lie down quietly, but I run him ragged! It went on for so long that his fish and chips went cold! Auntie Sue, who offered dad no help at all to get me out of the net curtains, said: "She's definitely got you wrapped around her little paw hasn't she?"

DAY 4

“THE BIG GIRL’S BLOUSE”

As promised, we went on a train twice today! Just like yesterday, we headed off to Clifton, and got a train ride to the next station at Redlands. Henry didn’t come on the train with Radar and me because he is nervous of trains ... the big girl’s blouse. Oops, sorry Henry! So, while Radar and me had our train ride and a good walk around Redlands, Henry and auntie Lisa waited for us back in Starbucks.

It was an exhausting walk in one part, because we had to go up quite a steep hill. Dad said it gave him another good workout! As we got towards the top of the hill, dad could tell by my body language that I’d seen something, and that I was showing a great deal of interest in it. Auntie Keita told him that it was a cat sat on top of a recycling bin and we had to walk right past it. When dad told me to “leave it” and go “straight on,” that’s exactly what I did! He was so proud of me! I love it when dad tells me what a clever girl I am! There were also a bicycle and some oddly positioned bollards, but I put on my best little wiggle and got us through it all, with lots more praise from dad! I can take his praise all day every day! It was ever so tight in places, and dad said his right arm couldn’t have been more than a gnat’s whisker away from some things!

We were soon back at Starbucks where dad and I had a rest while Henry and Radar went off to do a little more work. Auntie Emma popped back briefly to ask dad if he had any spare treats because they didn’t have any, and they wanted to train Radar to do something or other. So, dad gave her every last treat he had in his pocket! There wasn’t one single treat left for me! Not one! Dad didn’t mind and was happy that he’d been able to help. I suppose I didn’t mind either, although I think I’d probably prefer to share my treats with Henry!

When they got back to us, auntie Emma asked dad if anyone had spoken to him. He said that no one had as far as he knew. She thought that was rather odd given the fact that I was on the floor right next to him. Then dad said the reason could have been because once he’d finished his coffee, he’d put his arm on the table, then his head on his arm. He’d also trailed his other arm down to give me nice relaxing fusses and was fondling my ear. He said they may have thought he was asleep.

We then headed back to the hotel for lunch, which was followed by a walk around a retail park for Henry and me. We had to walk all around the inside of an enormous Tesco superstore, going up and down the aisles, doing all sorts of obedience, and getting auntie Lisa and dad use to giving us the “heal” command. After that, we worked

around the retail park until we came to Pets at Home. As we got to the doors, someone came out at full speed while pushing their shopping trolley straight at us! Dad then found out that I have an impressive braking system as I came to a grinding halt! Auntie Keita and dad were ever so impressed with how I handled it, and I got even more praise and fusses for doing such a great job of keeping us safe.

An afternoon nap was definitely on the cards when we got back to the hotel, and once again, just like yesterday, it was my teatime before I knew it! We've all had another nice relaxing evening, but we know we have a lot more hard work to do tomorrow!

DAY 5

“YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS!”

Today didn't get off to such a good start, but it wasn't my fault. Well, it wasn't anybody's fault. Dad and me had quite a lazy morning, and were the last to have a harness walk. By the time we went out, dad was having pain in his right knee and left foot. That's not a nice combination, but I just knew that something wasn't right, and I didn't understand what it was, or how to react to it. So, the first ten minutes or so of our walk was rather scrappy to say the least. It began getting better after a while, and by the time we went for my free run, dad was in no pain at all. I had a fantastic time on my free run, and got very muddy, but I managed to wash most of it off in a nice clean stream, which also meant I got extremely wet!

After our lunch break, which included Radar stealing one of his dad's bread rolls off the table, it was time for a couple of sessions of working around obstacles. The first part was done on a long concrete path in the hotel grounds, where aunties Emma and Keita had set up some obstacles for us all to work around. Auntie Emma said there's usually one dog on each class that tries to avoid them by walking along the grass verge. Auntie Keita had a sneaky suspicion on our class it was likely to be me. She was absolutely right! Dad had to work hard to keep me off the grass and find the way through the obstacle course. When I realised what I had to do, I did a really good job! On the way back through the course, dad asked me to do something which totally confused me! Dad was told that the look I gave him was priceless! He has started calling me Sophie McEnroe because the expression on my face looked like I was saying: "You cannot be serious!"

When Henry was having his last go at this, auntie Keita was so in grossed in what he and auntie Lisa were doing that she completely forgot about the obstacle which had been put flat on the floor, and she tripped right over it! Maybe she needs to take more water with it!

The obstacles then got packed into the cars, and we headed out to do a walk around a housing estate. Every few minutes, either auntie Emma or auntie Keita were putting an obstacle in our way, so that we had to really think about how to get around it safely. We all did ever so well and got lots of praise!

That's all our work done for today, but we've got a nice weekend to look forward to, including another free run for me tomorrow morning!

DAY 6

“THAT’S WHAT YOU THINK!”

Dad told me today was going to be a nice, quiet, relaxing sort of day. ‘That’s what you think’ was going through my mind! He was looking forward to a quiet hour in our room after breakfast, but I had other ideas. As he sat in the armchair, I began to shove my rope at him to get him to play tug-of-war! Dad is doing really well at picking up things like this, sometimes he can be a quick learner! Anyway, we had a great game, I was pulling so hard that dad thought his arm was going to come out of his shoulder! Once I’d had enough of tug-of-war, I had a moment of madness going round and round in circles at high speed chasing my tail!

Dad and me didn’t have a harness walk today, but Radar and Henry did. Their walk was along the marina at Portishead. It’s a nice long walk, with lots of distractions for us dogs, like seagulls, pigeons, other dogs, and the sights, smells and sounds of the sea. While Radar and Henry were having their walk, dad and me were sat in Costa. Dad had two Bakewell tarts because he said they were half the size of the ones he has back home at Deja Brew. I don’t think it was that at all, I think he was being greedy!

When we all got back to the hotel, it was time for me to have another free run! I had no colleagues to keep me company today, but I did find a couple of dogs to have a good burn out with! It was great fun, and I came back all soggy, but not as soggy as I was yesterday. My coat has now dried and come up all Beautiful and soft. It’s supposed to be a nice relaxing evening for me and dad, but I’m sure I’ll be able to persuade him to have another Game or three of tug-of-war!

DAY 7

“LITTLE RED AND GREEN MEN”

Today got off to a great start for dad and me with a harness walk around Westbury-on-Trym. Auntie Keita expected a really good walk out of me this morning because it's an area I know ever so well, and I didn't disappoint her!

There were some tricky bits I had to work through, including lots of cars parked on the pavement, but I was able to keep dad on the pavement because there was just enough room for us to squeeze past. There was also a stupidly positioned lamppost, but I got dad passed that with no problem.

Something dad finds extremely useful are controlled crossings, which is where there are traffic lights, loud bleeps, and little red and green men on boxes which tell people when it's safe to cross. The crossings we used today also have revolving cones on the bottom of the box, which are for deafblind people to know when the little green man has lit up, so they also know it is safe to cross. There was a problem on one of them though, because when the little green man lit up, there were no bleeps to be heard, and the revolving cone wasn't working! It was just as well auntie Keita was with us because she could let dad know when it was safe for us to cross.

Part way around the route, I spotted the Grupo Lounge, which is a very Familia coffee shop that I used to go in with auntie Keita. I was so excited that I nearly dragged dad straight through the door! He managed to steady me down a little, but I really wanted to take dad in there! So, dad asked auntie Keita if she'd like a coffee. There's no prize for guessing what her answer was!

After our enjoyable 10 minute break, we completed our 30 minute walk. When we got back to the hotel, auntie Keita, auntie Lisa and uncle Ben Took Henry and Radar for their free run. Dad gave me a good brush and comb to make sure I was fit for visitors. He thought he'd better make himself fit for visitors as well, so he put a big chunk of carrot in my Kong to keep me occupied while he had a shower.

At around 12:45p.m., there was a knock on our door. I got ever so excited because my mum had come to visit me! She also brought auntie Liz from Coventry to meet me! I went completely nutty and couldn't make up my mind who I wanted to go to first! Mum and auntie Liz brought me and dad a few pressies, A top up supply of treats for me, as well as a peculiar type of ball which I absolutely loved but tore apart

in about 10 minutes! They also brought me my very own squeezy jar of Marmite so that dad can put little dabs of it on my Nylobone. Dad was really pleased with his pressie as well, a lovely box of fudge. He said he's not going to share it with me, so I'm going to refuse to share my Marmite with him!

Mum then spotted something rather peculiar on the floor. It was quite obvious that my shredding instincts had kicked in, and she soon worked out that it was one of dad's slippers that I had totally wrecked! In my defence, we aren't talking about proper slippers! These are slippers that the hotel people put inside bath robes and hang them on the back of bathroom doors. They are most odd, and as dad didn't find them at all comfy, I didn't see a problem in shredding one of them. I wasn't told off, mum just cleaned it up and carried on as if nothing had happened. There are more of them in the bathroom, and I would love to know if dad is going to use them. If he does, there is a good chance I might be able to shred up another one! I have a funny feeling that dad will leave them well alone, just to be on the safe side. This means dad will have to walk barefoot around the room, trying his best to avoid things like my Nylobone and other toys he could tread on.

Mum and auntie Liz really enjoyed their lunch here today, the food is gorgeous, not that us dogs get the chance to try any of it. It was a lovely couple of hours with them, and we were both sad to see them go. Never mind, mum will soon be back to take us home. In the meantime, we have 3 and-a-half more days of harness walks to do, which we're really looking forward to!

DAY 8

“WOMEN DRIVERS!”

Well, today was mixed to say the least! First thing after breakfast, we all headed out to do traffic work and off-kerb obstacles. We also had the company of a really nice man named Simon who used to work for the RSPCA, but is now working for Guide Dogs. He was following us around to see how things are done, and we think he was really impressed with us!

We took it in turns to work all the way up a long road, then crossed over and came all the way back down the other side. Then we turned around and did the same route the opposite way around. It sounds straight forward, but it wasn't. Auntie Keita and Uncle Simon were walking around keeping an eye on us, while auntie Emma was driving her car at us from all directions! It's true, but it isn't as bad as it sounds!

There were three different things auntie Emma did to us. The first is what is called far traffic. This is where I begin crossing over the road with dad, and she drives the car towards us from our left on the furthest side of the road. My job is to make sure dad doesn't walk into her car or that she doesn't hit us. The second is called near traffic, which is where she drives her car towards us from our right on the same side of the road as us. We stand at the kerb waiting to cross, and when she gets close to us, dad gives me the “forward” command, and my job is to disobey him to keep us safe. The third was where she drove the car straight across the pavement in front of us into a driveway. Again, it is my job to react very quickly, and stop dead in my tracks to keep us safe. I did it correctly every time, and got lots of praise and fusses! Dad said he felt like yelling “women drivers!” at the top of his voice, but I'm ever so pleased he didn't!

If that wasn't bad enough, there were also lots of obstacles that were deliberately put along the route, so the pavement would be totally blocked. This means we have to walk briefly into the road to get past them, and then back onto the pavement as soon as it's clear. A car had also been parked entirely on the pavement, which meant we had to stay out in the road even longer to get around it. Sometimes it can make our job difficult, but we've all been trained to handle it safely.

After lunch, we went to an enormous shopping Centre called Cribbs Causeway at Henbury. It has very shiny slippery floors, which can make it a bit difficult to walk on. So, it's especially important for dad to make sure that I'm not walking too fast, because if I suddenly need to stop, dad could quite easily slip, or even do an impersonation of Bambi! He didn't look like Bambi today, but he told me that sometime we might go to

St. David's Shopping Centre in Cardiff, and their floors are almost identical. So, I live in hope that one day I'll get to see him doing a spectacular Bambi impersonation!

Dad couldn't Believe how big Cribbs Causeway is, and he told auntie Keita that he felt quite lost in there. He said it was very disorientating, and that he almost felt like he was going to meet himself coming in the opposite direction! Dad is very pleased that he only has to work places like this when he's on class, and that it isn't a regular part of everyday life for him.

Our destination on this walk was the café in John Lewis, but we had to walk through Boots and Marks & Spencer to get there, and we had to use some lifts as well. On the way out, auntie Keita started laughing, because I tried to take dad into Costa! She told him that she'd taken me in there several times when I was doing my training with her, so I remembered it as a place I had been before.

We're now back at the hotel again, and as always, I'm looking forward to a nice sleep until it's my teatime!

DAY 9

“SMELLING OF ROSES”

Today started off with me being told for the umpteenth time that trying to play tug-of-war with dad when he's sat on the loo is really not a good idea! He didn't even seem very happy when I dropped my soggy piece of rope in his pants! So, I left him to it, and went off to have a manic 5 minutes of chasing my tail around the room.

Dad told me that this morning we were going to do the same sort of things as yesterday morning, traffic and off-kerb obstacles in Charlton Gardens. Auntie Keita, auntie Lisa, uncle Ben and dad all agreed that we did even better than we had yesterday! So this morning was thought to have been a great success! While auntie Lisa and Henry had their walk, I enjoyed a chomp on a nice smokie bone in the back of auntie Keita's car.

After lunch, we went to Westbury-on-Trym so that Henry and Radar could do the same route as I did with dad last Sunday morning. The idea was that dad and me sat in the rather nice Hunters Café while the others did the route. Then when they got back, it was our turn. We had done about half of the route when auntie Keita started getting the feeling that I had some pent up energy that I really needed to get rid of. So, she very kindly changed our route, and we went through a really nice park where I met a couple of dogs I played with. It was super, I loved every minute of it!

Poor Henry didn't get a free-run today, but Radar did this morning because Uncle Ben took him to a field behind where auntie Keita lives. While they were there, Radar rolled in something really grotty! Thankfully, uncle Ben had some ponk removing shampoo, so you could say that Radar came up smelling of roses just in time to go out again this afternoon. We're all back in the hotel now, and eagerly waiting for teatime!

DAY 10

“ALMOST THERE”

This was the last full day of training for us in Bristol, and once again it was quite varied. In the morning, we went to Broadmead to do a walk around a large place that included pedestrianised shopping areas. Before we got anywhere near that, Henry and me were taken to a nice patch of grass to make sure we were both comfy. Dad was desperate for the loo himself and was wondering whether he would make it! So many things were slowing us down, and he was getting very anxious, but thankfully he did make it in time. We also had a very nice lady from Guide Dogs named Liz following us on this walk, who was making sure that everything was going well with our training, and she seemed really happy with what she saw.

When dad and me went for our walk, there was a man flying his drone! I was looking at it and was wondering what on earth it was! Auntie Keita asked the man if he'd mind keeping it away from us, because she didn't want me getting frightened by it or even hit by it. To be fair, the man was very helpful and kept it away from us. We were actually the last to go for a walk yet again, but because dad's bladder had been playing up, he didn't have a coffee while we were waiting for auntie Lisa and Henry to have their walk.

This afternoon we went for a free run, and this time Henry and I were able to go together. We both like sticks, and we found a few that we could run around with.

Late this evening, we all did a night walk. This was important for uncle Ben and auntie Lisa because they have some residual sight. Dad doesn't have any sight at all so it was no different for him. The trainers have a list of things they need to tick off to say we've done them, and this was one of them. It was a fairly easy walk with the exception of a car parked on the pavement, and the back end of a van poking right out over the pavement from a driveway. I got past the car without a problem, but when I came to the van, I wasn't quite so sure. So, dad kept me nice and calm and encouraged me to "find the way," and we got past it without a problem. What I didn't know was that the man whose van it was had been stood around the other side of it. So, when I spotted him, I decided that I wanted him to give me some fusses! I definitely love making friends with people!

A phrase I heard a lot today was "almost there," which really confused me, because we were often just sat down and not going anywhere! Dad, auntie Lisa and uncle Ben have really enjoyed each other's company the past ten days, and so have we three dogs! While we were laying down under the table, we heard them talking about a

possible reunion next February! That means Henry and me get to do lots more canoodling! I can hardly wait!

DAY 11

“A DAY OF MIXED FEELINGS”

Today was very much a day of mixed feelings. I was excited because I was going to see mum again, but she'd be taking us home ready to start working on my routes around town and settling back in at home. Before that, we had to say bye to all the lovely staff at the DoubleTree by Hilton hotel, and to Radar and uncle Ben who were leaving much earlier than us and missing out on our final class walk. And of course, I wanted to try and find some time for Henry and me to do some final canoodling.

Auntie Lisa chose the route we'd done around Clifton for our walk this morning. On the whole, the weather had been really nice for us the past 10 days, but today was totally different! It was raining very heavily to put it mildly, or as dad put it, “absolutely chucking it down.” All of us got soaked through to the skin! I couldn't help but wonder if uncle Ben had checked the weather forecast and then chickened out!

Dad struggles when there is lots of rain, because of all the loud slushy and splashy noises that the traffic is making. So, it's very difficult for him to hear properly. But he said it was still a good experience. Despite getting soaking wet, we all enjoyed our walk, and Henry and me had a great time overtaking each other whenever we could.

We didn't go into Starbucks this morning, because auntie Lisa and dad needed to get back to the hotel to pack the last few things, as they had to check out of their rooms by 12p.m. I felt sad seeing Henry going home with his mum, but mum and auntie Lisa have promised we can soon have some free runs together in Pontypool Park, which is something very special for us to look forward to!

It's been a chilled and quiet evening at home, except when dad and me had a few games of tug-of-war. We have lots of harness walks to do starting tomorrow, in fact, we still have a few more weeks of training before we become a qualified partnership.

DAY 12

“I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT!”

Our first full day back home started off with a great game of tug-of-war with dad! I think I might have totally wore him out! Auntie Keita called in at 9:30a.m., and dad and me did a harness walk down into town.

Everything was going well, and dad was really pleased with how I remembered what I needed to do. They introduced me to the Convenience Store on the Foundry Bridge which also has a Post Office, and dad got some money out while we were there.

I had a few little problems getting to the controlled crossing correctly though, so we had to work that little bit a few times until I got it right. We then headed down through town, and I was struggling a bit on the bobbly crossing points outside the Coffee Bean and the Rolling Mill pub. They've been worn quite flat, so we're finding it difficult to know exactly where to stop. Dad has emailed the council to see if they can replace them, and he has already had a reply from them saying that they'll be replaced soon. Dad and auntie Keita were very happy to hear that, and it's definitely going to help us.

Around the corner at the bottom of Church Street is another crossing point, which we will sometimes be using to get to the bus stop, the dentist, and best of all Scooby's pet shop! I heard dad telling auntie Keita that he only had a few treats left in his pocket, so I thought we may head over to Scooby's to top up on my supply. But she told him she had plenty in her pocket so there was no need for us to go there. I couldn't believe it! Then she decided to go to Iceland instead! How boring is that! We didn't even get any shopping, we just had a quick chat and then headed straight back out again.

We then began heading back home, but I stopped at the crossing and looked longingly over to my left in the direction of Scooby's, but they took no notice! As we headed back up Church Street, I thought by now they must be gasping for a coffee, so I paused at Deja Brew just in case, but no joy. I even paused outside the Coffee Bean, but they didn't want to go in there either! I was not a happy bunny at going to town for what seemed to be absolutely no reason at all! The very least they could have done was to have a coffee! Dad said it felt like someone had unplugged me, because my speed had dropped to that of a tortoise! Instead of telling me off, his gentle encouragement and being nice to me worked a treat, and we once again began to enjoy our walk.

I'm absolutely exhausted now! Thankfully, we have a full weekend off, so there's nothing to do except have lots of rest, play tug-of-war with dad, maybe go for a free run in Newport, and perhaps a nice leisurely stroll around Cwmtillery Lakes. Actually, I really like the idea of a nice peaceful weekend!

DAY 13

“OH DEAR, WHAT A DAY!”

Over the weekend, we had two full days off, so today, Monday, is actually our 13th day of training. This morning started off much as usual with breakfast at 7a.m., and a snuggle next to dad while he sorted out some things on his laptop.

Just after 9:30, there was a phone call from auntie Keita. I knew it was her because I could hear her faint voice! The odd thing is she usually comes to our front door, so I was very confused about that. Anyway, dad told me we were going for a walk to town, but what I didn't know was that auntie Keita was going to be following us from a distance in her car. Sneaky or what? We guide dogs aren't stupid though, we can sense when things aren't how they're supposed to be. It wasn't very long before I saw her! There she was, lurking in her car watching us!

I soon had to deal with a vehicle that had been parked on the pavement, and they hadn't left enough room for us to squeeze past it. So, like I've been trained to do, I took dad to the curb to go around it on the road. Dad gave me the “right” command so that I could double-check to see if there was enough room. There wasn't, so I took him back to the curb. He then gave me the “forward” command, and I guided him rather neatly around it and back onto the pavement, getting lots of praise from dad for doing a really good job!

As we headed down past the school playing fields, I began pulling quite excitedly, and dad was wondering whether there was a dog coming towards us. Of course, I couldn't tell him, but my body language told him quite a bit! It was actually a lady with her dog walking ahead of us. She was doing silly things though, like slowing down until we caught up with them, and then moving off quickly so that they were ahead of us, which made me pull again to try and catch up with them. Then they'd slow down, and we'd catch up with them, and so on! In the end, she crossed over the road until we'd gone past them. It made me wonder why she didn't do that in the first place.

Just a little further along the road where the buses park for the school children, there was another lady who also had a dog. I didn't pull to get to that dog, so dad had no idea that there was anything ahead of us. Suddenly, her dog starts jumping at me and trying to get me to play, which had me spinning round in circles! While poor dad was doing everything he could to get me back under control, she said to dad: “I've got a dog here.” Dad didn't say it, but he thought to himself: “I would never have guessed...”

The lady decided she had better move out of our way so that I could get on with my work, which dad very much appreciated.

It was also around this time that the heavens opened, hurling rain at us from all directions! It didn't take long before both dad and me were absolutely drenched! We hadn't even got to town yet, and we had to walk back home as well! Everything else went sort of OK. Dad got his money from the Post Office, and a gentleman in there wanted to say hello to me but was getting me all worked up. So, dad had to try and get me under control yet again!

The walk back home wasn't at all bad, well, except for me bumping dad's right arm into a lamppost! Oh dear, what a day! He asked me to turn around, we walked back a bit and then turned around again, and I had to get him past it preferably without bumping him into it. Thankfully, for dad at least, I did it correctly, and he gave me lots of praise. I could have sworn I heard him muttering something about 'getting it right the first time is far better than the second time.' Oh well.

I really enjoyed having a rub down with a towel when we got home, it made it all so worthwhile! Auntie Keita came in to have a little chat with us, and she thought under the circumstances we had done exceptionally well! That really pleased us! She is now happy for us to practice that route as much as we want, just to the Post Office and back home again, or just one way to meet mum at the Post Office to do things in town, or do things in town with mum and then walk dad home from the Post Office. It's our first little bit of freedom!

This afternoon, mum had an appointment at the hospital in Ebbw Vale, and dad asked auntie Keita if it was OK to teach me the route from the bus stop to the hospital, and from the hospital to the other bus stop. We even went to the hospital café twice so I can get used to that area as well. Mum has another appointment there on Thursday, so we'll get the chance to go over that route again.

We're now having a relaxing evening in front of the TV with mum, and dad and me are really looking forward to doing a brand new route with auntie Keita in the morning!

DAY 14

“EVERY LITTLE HELPS”

Today was brilliant! Auntie Keita drove us to the top end of town, parked up, and we then did a huge loop route down to Tesco and back up into town. This totally fascinated me because most of the route is somewhere I'd never been before, and I love going to supermarkets! It took dad and auntie Keita a little while to figure out the best place for us to cross the street at the top of town, but once it was sorted, all went smoothly.

It's quite a good walk to Tesco, mostly downhill to the library, across the road and then downhill again to the store. Dad was really impressed with how I coped, it felt to him like I had been there before, but honestly, I hadn't! The way the path goes takes us about three-quarters of the way around Tesco to get to their front door, but I didn't mind that at all. I even seemed to know to turn left to go to the Customer Services desk. That really impressed dad!

We didn't get any shopping there, even though mum asked dad to pick up a loaf of bread. He'd completely forgotten about it! When we left Tesco, we back tracked as far as the library, the last part being steep. We then made our way down the side and around the back of the library, then up quite a steep lane which comes out at the side of the bus stops in town. Dad said it's always given him a good workout when he has to walk all the way up from Tesco. I think auntie Keita knew exactly what he meant by the time we'd finished. We did a quick reminder for me of which bus stop is which, and then headed to the best café in town, Deja Brew.

As we walked through the door, we heard a chorus of: “Oh he's got his new dog!” This was followed by everyone falling in love with me and asking us lots of questions. Auntie Keita had a latté, and dad had a coffee and Bakewell tart. I had a quick look, and I'm quite sure it's the same size as the ones he had in Portishead the other week. I knew he was just being greedy!

Once dad and auntie Keita were suitably refuelled, we headed back up to the car to finish our new loop route. We did something a little different today though. After leaving the café, we had to stop at those flattened bobbly paving slabs by the Rolling Mill pub and the Coffee Bean. To help me get the idea of stopping exactly at those points, auntie Keita did some clicker training. So, as soon as I get to the paving slab, she clicks her clicker, I have to stop, and then dad has to immediately give me a treat. I did some clicker training with auntie Keita some time ago, so when she was demonstrating it to dad, I couldn't understand why I didn't get a treat every time she clicked it! But

when we used it properly when I reached those crossing points with dad, he was very quick in giving me my treat. It's only a little thing to help me remember exactly where I need to stop to keep us safe, but every little helps.

Dad and auntie Keita were both really pleased with my work today, and a bonus was it stayed dry. Another bonus was a lovely stroll around Cwmtillery Lakes this afternoon with mum and dad, which I always enjoy! It did rain a bit when we went around the Lakes, but it didn't spoil it for us at all. We're now settled down in front of the TV again, and are waiting to see what tomorrow will bring.

DAY 15

“I MIGHT GO ON STRIKE!”

It was a slightly later start than usual today because auntie Keita had been held up on a phone call. She decided to keep it short this morning, so we drove to town so I could concentrate on the town centre. I worked to the flattened bobbly paving well, and got lots of praise and treats.

Auntie Keita asked us to go as far as Scooby's pet shop to see if I could remember where it was. It's a pet shop, I'm a dog, of course I can remember where it is! Dad said it'd be a good idea to top up my supply of working treats to make sure I don't run out. I think he's concerned that I might go on strike!

Auntie Keita also wanted to work that end of town because there are some tricky spots where I need to wiggle my way around some awkwardly placed posts. We also had to work to the flattened bobbly bits on the way back to the car. It was raining so hard, and we got absolutely drenched. Dad thought I'd started to lose interest because I didn't do as good on the bobbly paving as I had earlier. I was just trying to tell them I wanted to go into the other pet shop in town as well. No chance!

Mum then met us at Deja Brew for a spot of lunch, and auntie Sue Griffiths was ever so happy that she could catch up on some Sophie cwtches. She hasn't had many with me recently because we've just been popping in and out. She also got me a nice bowl of water which I really enjoyed.

After lunch, we went back home in the car with mum, and when we got indoors, I had a smashing surprise! Mum had bought me a pressie! She seems to like buying me things! This one is a squeaky Kong ball. I absolutely love it! I don't think dad's quite so happy about it, and is hoping that I'll manage to de-squeak it sooner rather than later!

DAY 16

“HERE, THERE, AND EVERYWHERE”

Today, we went here, there, and everywhere ... or more specifically, Abergavenny, Ebbw Vale, and Newport. Things didn't start off as planned because dad wasn't feeling well, so we didn't get to see auntie Keita. She told dad that it wouldn't hurt me to have a day off, and to concentrate on getting me registered at the vet, and to give me a free run. That sounded good to me!

So, after a nice lazy morning, we got in the car and made our way to Abbey Vets in Abergavenny where we met a lovely man who had a fully qualified guide dog named Magic. I got into a little bit of trouble for winding Magic up to play, but the few moments of playing we had was worth it. Auntie Amanda, the vet lady, fell in love with me, but she also had a chat with mum and dad, warning them that I'm the sort of dog that will put weight on far too easily. They weighed me, and I was 28.3 kilos, which is bang on target for me, so there's no need for me to go on a diet!

After getting my worm and flea treatments, we headed off to Ebbw Vale hospital where mum had an appointment with auntie Debbie who looks after the inside of mum's head. She'd seen a photo of me, but much preferred meeting me in the fur! While we were there, mum and dad walked me to and from the bus stops and the hospital. Next time I'll be doing it in harness so that I know how to get dad there if he has an appointment that mum can't take him to. Or we could even surprise mum and meet her there after one of her appointments.

For me, the next part of the day was definitely the best! We drove to Tredegar Park in Newport for my free-run! Mum saw me run towards an overweight chocolate coloured Labrador, whose owner was throwing him treats. The dog didn't seem at all interested in the treats, so I thought I would help him out and go and Hoover them up. Mum and dad weren't at all happy with me for doing that, and as you can imagine, my recall was totally non-existent!

As we went further into the park, I did a double take, because it looked like I was running towards myself! It was another dog that looked identical to me, and we had great fun chasing each other around. A bit later, we met up with a gorgeous 16 month-old Staffordshire Bull-Terrier, and he was ever so much fun to play with! We had a really good work out! That helped to get rid of my pent up energy! Even the weather was kind to us while we were in the park which made it more enjoyable.

DAY 17

“PINK DING-A-LINGS”

Dad still wasn't feeling very well this morning, but he texted auntie Keita to say that he did feel up to doing some work around our town centre. So, first of all, we drove to the multi-storey car park, and we then worked up through town where I was able to do some more practice on the flattened bobbly paving.

Our destination was the Cwm Calon Doctor's Surgery, where I had been once before, but I had only been walked there on my lead, I hadn't worked there in my harness. We used the lift to get up to the first floor, which is always good practice for me. While we were there, I was allowed to have a little look around the waiting room, and I enjoyed saying hello to some of the patients.

We then made our way back through town, but instead of going to the car park, we went into Iceland where we had a nice chat with a gentleman who was signing up people to help the Dogs Trust. He told us how much he'd love to do the same thing for Guide Dogs. Unfortunately, the people who do it for Guide Dogs are not allowed to have any working guide dogs or puppies at walk with them. It's such a shame because if they could, they'd get a lot more people signing up.

Auntie Keita then dropped us home before she headed off to Pontypool to do some training with auntie Lisa and my best friend Henry. Uncle Tim the postman had put some small packages through our letter box while we were out, and one of them started making a strange tinkling sort of noise! Dad didn't know that mum had ordered me some new little bells for my collar so that dad knows where I am around the house. They help to stop him from walking into me or treading on me. These ones are pretty little pink ding-a-lings which are supposed to be for cats. Although I don't mind wearing the bigger dog ones in the park when I'm having a free run, I really don't like wearing them around the house.

Mum then took dad and me back to the doctors because he had an appointment to find out what's wrong with his chest. Apparently, he has a viral respiratory infection, and because he's got asthma as well, it makes it particularly bad for him. The nice Indian doctor lady absolutely loved me and told us that her sons wanted to get a dog. The only thing she was concerned about was that they wouldn't look after it as they said they would, and that it would be left up to her instead. She wrote out a prescription for dad, and then after a spot of lunch in Deja Brew, we went over to get dad's pills from Pritchard's the chemist.

As usual, the rest of the day has been spent chilling at home. We won't be seeing auntie Keita until Monday, so over the weekend she wants us to do some more solo walks to town. Let's hope the weather will be kind to us, and that dad will be starting to feel fit enough to do it.

DAY 18

“OUR FIRST SOLO WALK”

Mum was taking my auntie Sue shopping this afternoon, so when dad checked the weather forecast and found out it was going to be very nice, he decided we would do our first solo walk to town. So far, Auntie Keita has only signed us off to go as far as the Post Office, so dad arranged to meet uncle Chris there, then he would let dad tag onto his elbow and guide us down through town to a pub so we could have a drink and chat for a while. We ended up at the Commercial Hotel, because dad said he hadn't been there for quite a long time. Uncle Chris was so busy talking to dad that he wasn't concentrating on guiding him, and walked him straight into a bollard! Now, guide dogs, long canes and sighted guides are there to keep blind people safe. Dad is perfectly capable of walking himself into bollards, he really doesn't need our help! Thankfully, there was no damage done to the Bollard.

When we got to the pub, the gentleman who was sat next to us told dad that he had helped him when Max had accidentally tripped him off the kerb last summer. So, dad ended up talking to him as well. The TV was on and there was a game of rugby being played, it was Scotland against Wales. After we had been there about ten minutes, Wales scored, and there was an almighty cheer from everybody in the pub. I wasn't too put off by this, but I did sit up and look around to see what the noise was all about. Dad said not to worry too much because Wales probably wouldn't score any more points. But they did! And they won! After a few more loud cheers, I realised it wasn't anything to get excited about, so I just laid down or made friends with people who came over to say hello to me. Now that was much more interesting!

Uncle Chris then guided us to the bus stop, and dad and me headed home. To make things easier for me, dad has now decided to get off the bus at the next stop to the one he usually uses. That way I don't have to try getting him past several wheelie bins that block our pavement week in week out. One of the neighbours further up our street had parked their car entirely on the pavement, which meant I had to take dad out into the road to get past it. A lot of blind people complain about pavement parking, but at the end of the day, it's all part and parcel of what we've been trained to do to keep our blind mums and dads safe.

It was a very nice afternoon out for us, our first solo walk together with no guide dog trainer keeping an eye on us! Dad was very proud of me, and that makes me feel proud of myself as well! To finish off the evening, mum put about five nice big chunks of carrot in my Kong, and I have had great fun trying to get them out so I can eat them! I wonder what we'll be getting up to tomorrow?

DAY 19

“AND THEY SAY THEY LOVE ME!”

A little while after mum fed me this morning, dad got up, but he felt the need to curl up on the sofa for a nap. So, I decided to let him get some extra rest, and I think he was really pleased about that. We did have a few little games a bit later on in the morning, but nothing too energetic for him.

Most Sundays, mum and dad take auntie Sue out for lunch, usually to Berry's Bar. So, when it was time for mum to fetch her in the car, dad noticed that the weather wasn't at all bad, and decided that we would do another solo walk to the Post Office. Then mum could meet us there and take us the rest of the way in the car. There were just a few spots of rain when we left home, but within about 5 minutes or so, it started coming down heavier. Then it turned from rain to hailstones! They're horrible little things! There were millions of them, and they kept jumping out of the sky at us, and some of them stung us! I really don't like those at all! But I carried on and guided dad safely to the Post Office, where mum was already waiting for us.

It was fairly quiet in Berry's today. There was a football match on the TV, but it was two German teams, and as there were very few people in, there were no loud shouts like there were yesterday. I really enjoyed commando crawling underneath auntie Sue's chair so that I could keep an eye on everyone behind the bar, as well as those going in and out of the kitchen.

Sunday is one of dad's favourite days, because once lunch is over, mum takes him to a pub called the Hobby Horse at Brynmawr. Mum told me they have two real ales on each Sunday, and dad really enjoys tasting them. We didn't stay very long today because it was getting close to my teatime. We had just enough time for dad to enjoy a pint of each, and mum and dad both had a small tub of Pringles. They didn't even drop one accidentally on purpose! And they say they love me!

DAY 20

“AM I DREAMING?”

Well, today has been an all-round great day! It started off with another visit from auntie Keita, and a harness walk down through town, giving me the chance to work to those flat bobbly bits, a breather in Deja Brew, and a bus ride home. When I was just about to guide dad onto the bus, auntie Keita told him that there was a fair size gap between the curb and the step of the bus. So, dad said in a loud voice: “If there’s a big gap that must mean Ian is driving!” Dad actually knew that Ian Hadley was driving our route today, so as he stepped onto the bus, he also said: “Oh sorry Ian, I didn’t see you there...” That had the other passengers laughing. Mum has told me I need to get used to this type of banter between uncle Ian and dad! Mum says that uncle Ian usually comes back with some sort of comment, but he may have felt a little unsure today because we had auntie Keita with us.

Anyway, getting back to my work, auntie Keita has signed us off on an additional bit of route through town. I think the episode with the Bollard on Saturday had something to do with it! So now dad and I can go to the Coffee Bean and to Deja Brew on our own whenever we want. If we go to the Coffee Bean, we can either walk back home or go further down through town to get the bus home. But if we go to Deja Brew, she only wants us to get the bus home at the moment. This is because if we walk home from Deja Brew, we have to work over the flattened bobbly bits. For some reason or other, I’m still not quite as good at stopping on them going up through town as I am coming the other way. As she thinks it could cause us a safety issue, she has not signed us off in that direction yet.

I had a well-earned rest when we got home and had to wait in for my food delivery. Mum was having a lie down and gave dad strict instructions that when my food arrived, he was to make sure that she got up as she wanted to take me for a free run. As we were travelling towards Newport, mum suddenly said that the traffic was going to be absolutely dreadful at this time of day, so she decided to change direction and go to Pontypool Park instead. Before mum had a chance to find anywhere to park the car, I went totally nutty! I couldn’t believe my eyes! Is this really happening? Am I dreaming? No! It was for real! Dad and mum started chatting about it and realised that when I was being brought up as a guide dog puppy, I’d most likely spent quite a bit of time here in this very park! A quick message to my puppy raiser mummy Karon soon gave them the answer to the question! They were absolutely right! In fact, I lived not far from the park and know it exceptionally well! Apparently, dad and mum quite often go to meetings in Pontypool, so it looks like this park could once again be on my list of regular places to visit! I’m one very happy girl!

DAY 21

“THE MORE THE MERRIER!”

The plan today was to rest and play at home. Mum had gone to Swansea for a Paws for a Chat get-together, which I'm not allowed to go to yet. The weather was wet and miserable, so staying at home seemed like a good idea. But after a couple of games of tug-of-war, dad checked the weather and found it wasn't as bad as it was supposed to be. So, we had a change of plan and decided to take a walk to town.

At first, dad was planning on going to Deja Brew, but when we were halfway there, he decided that as we are going there with mum tomorrow, it would make a nice change to go to the Coffee Bean. Dad had a big portion of ice slice, which I felt sure was big enough to share with me! Yeah right! I tried nudging his arm several times to remind him I was there, but he took no notice of me at all! The greedy whatnot! While there, I had the chance to get lots of fusses and cuddles with auntie Carole Tetley. She had heard a lot about me from my Facebook posts but had never met me in the fur. I got the feeling that she really loved me! The more the merrier!

When we left the Coffee Bean, dad said that we'd carry on down through town and get the bus home, which made it more enjoyable for me. When we got home, mum still wasn't back from Swansea, and dad said it would be quite a few hours before she got back. So, the next few hours were a mixture of naps and games, and dad got a couple of things sorted out on his laptop.

There was another change of plan when mum got home. Her idea was to have a shower and a nice cosy evening in front of the TV. But when dad was talking to her on the phone, he put the idea in her mind of going to Berry's Bar, and so that is where we went. It was lovely and quiet there, and I had some cuddles with auntie Kelly. You can never get enough of fusses and cuddles!

We watched some TV when we got home, not that dad saw much of it as he fell asleep on the sofa. Later, I spotted mum putting one of my towels in a plastic bag ready to take out with us tomorrow. That makes me think that there could well be another free run for me! I hope that is one plan that doesn't get changed!

DAY 22

“NOT EVEN A CRUMB!”

Today we had a bus ride to the hospital in Ebbw Vale. Mum had an appointment with auntie Debbie the head lady, which gave us the opportunity to practice the route with mum watching, so she knows I can safely get dad there if he needs to go and she can't take him. Dad and I waited for mum in the café part. Dad had buttered toast and a cup of tea. Me? I only got a bowl of water. I'm sure I would have liked toast, but dad didn't drop any, not even a crumb!

I made people laugh twice. The first time I put one front paw on dad's knee and the other on his shoulder, and washed his ear. Not long after when mum was back with us, the doorbell sound came from both their phones. I leapt up and eagerly looked left and right, and then had a puzzled expression on my face. Mum explained to the people nearby that the sound was our doorbell and I usually run to the front door, but I didn't know what to do as we weren't at home. They all laughed and said: “Aww bless her!”

I showed mum that I knew the way to the other bus stop for when we're going home, and we had another lovely bus ride. When we got off the bus, we didn't go home but went to Deja Brew so they could have a spot of lunch. I got fusses with auntie Sue Griffiths and her niece Bethan. I also got to meet auntie Angela Phipps' new rescue dog Poppy, who is a Cocker Spaniel, and we got on really well.

We then went to Tredegar Park in Newport, where I had a great time running along the muddy riverbank, and even went in for a nice paddle. Mum then gave me a good rubdown with a towel to make me look “respectable” as she calls it because she wanted to go to Asda. I got a lovely surprise when we got there, because mum also went to Pets at Home and bought me another toy, an indestructible yellow rubber tyre!

DAY 23

“THE CHOICE IS OURS”

This morning, we saw auntie Keita for the 2nd and last time this week. She wanted us to do the route down to Tesco, then right up through town to give me some more practice on the flattened bobbly paving bits. I worked them much better today which pleased dad and auntie Keita.

We had a bit of a problem by the second one, because a lady that knows dad started shouting across the street to him. Dad was doing everything he could to keep me working properly, but she carried on shouting and coming across the street toward us. She wasn't being nasty, she was just ever so excited to see dad with his new dog! Auntie Keita and dad tried explaining that I'm still in training and must concentrate on what I'm doing. But she was insistent on asking questions and giving me a fuss even though she was asked not to. Distracting a working guide dog is really not a good idea, it can be dangerous! At the moment, I've got a sign on my harness handle that asks people not to distract me when I'm working. Most people don't even see it, because they're not looking at my harness handle, they're looking at my face.

We eventually managed to start off again, and worked up as far as the controlled crossing on the end of the Foundry Bridge. We then backtracked a little, crossed over the street and went down to Pritchard's Chemist that mum and dad use regularly. Auntie Keita was very happy with our work this morning, and we finished by walking down to Deja Brew to meet up with mum.

Auntie Keita has now signed us off in both directions through town. So now we can walk down to town and get a bus home, catch the bus to town and walk home, or even walk to town and walk back home. The choice is ours. She has still not signed us off to go to Iceland, Scooby's Pet Shop, or Tesco, but that will come soon. She said that once we're qualified, we can begin adding little bits to our existing routes, like up to Berry's Bar, and to Budget Vets so that dad can keep a regular check on my weight, which will save mum having to drive us all the way to Abbey Vets in Abergavenny.

The rest of the day has been quiet, except when I got excited about my big brother Paul coming up to fetch his mail, and we had a play. Then two builders turned up to fix mum and dad's kitchen roof which the wind nearly ripped off last week. I also got very excited when the Amazon delivery man turned up with my new toy! It's a wobbly treat dispenser, and it's brilliant! Mum and dad let me try it out a couple of times, once with some of my kibble, and the other time with some nice pieces of carrot.

I just heard mum and dad chatting about what's going to be happening tomorrow, and it sounds like I'm going to be having a harness walk in the morning and a free run in the afternoon! I just can't wait!

DAY 24

“UTTERLY AND TOTALLY DISGUSTING!”

Today started off much nicer than usual. About an hour after my breaky, Kate brought up some recycling from their basement flat to put out ready for collection. She is my big brother Paul's wife. She very kindly spent some time playing with me before going back down the flat for her much needed mug of coffee.

Dad was exceptionally tired this morning and spent most of it sleeping on the settee. I must have been tired as well as I also slept most of it away. I was starting to think I wasn't going to get a harness walk, but just after mid-day dad came to life and we went to Deja Brew for a walk and then got the bus back home. Mum told dad she planned on taking me for a free run in Newport at some point after 2 o'clock, so dad made sure we were back in plenty of time.

I had a great time in Tredegar Park, enjoying a good run around with a stick or three, I went squidging along the very muddy bank of the river, had a play with a couple of dog pals, and, believe it or not, I even managed to find a discarded baby's nappy to have a good chomp on. For some reason or other, mum and dad seemed to think this was utterly and totally disgusting! Mum was desperately trying to get me to drop it, but I paid no attention to her until I decided I'd had enough. It seems I'm not the first of dad's guide dogs to munch on such an item! It looks like I will have to find something far more disgusting that will make me even worse than dad's 2nd guide dog Isaac!

DAY 25

“OO THAT’S MINE!”

It was another quiet and lazy morning today, and we were looking forward to going to town this afternoon to meet a nice man named Paul, who dad has known for quite a while. As the weather was horrendous, dad decided that we’d stay home instead. Mum had to go out to take auntie Sue shopping, and she said the wind had blown so many things all over the place that we did the right thing by staying home.

Dad and me played a few games of tug-of-war, and I had a great time with my Kong treat dispenser, with a mixture of my kibble and some chopped up carrot, and dad also smudged some Marmite on my Nylabone. While I was enjoying all that, dad was listening to rugby on the radio and had a can of Guinness.

When mum got home, I got told off for sticking my nose in her shopping bags! I always do that in case there is something in there for me. As soon as she turned her back, I put my nose in there again, because I was sure there was something in there for me! So, the second time I spotted something! Straight away I thought: “Oo that’s mine!” Mum noticed that I’d nicked something from her bag but wasn’t sure what it was. Dad caught me, and found I had a whole juicy carrot in my mouth! Mum and dad burst out laughing! They knew I was right, it really was for me! Mum quickly put the other carrot away, but they decided that as I’d been so clever in finding my own little bit of shopping, that I could carry on and finish eating it! They were ever so pleased that I’d only found a couple of carrots and not the kreme doughnuts!

DAY 26

“A LOVELY SUNNY SUNDAY”

It was yet another quiet morning today, except for a game or two of tug-of-war with dad. As it's Sunday, that means fetching auntie Sue to take her for lunch again. This week dad and me were able to walk to the bottom end of Church Street, which is where mum met us in the car and took us the rest of the way. I don't think it'll be too long until I'll be able to take dad all the way to Berry's Bar on my own.

The weather today was nice and dry. In fact, it was a lovely sunny Sunday. Dad and I had an enjoyable walk down to town. There were very few people about. There was a dog that distracted me which made me miss one of the flattened bobbly paving bits, but dad had my speed down slow because he knew it was coming up. So, when I walked right over it, he asked me to stop and go back several steps and try again. This time I got it right and very nearly didn't get a treat!

Dad was a little put out by a nice man who came to say hello to me at Berry's Bar. Dad was trying to eat his food when the Man came over to give me fusses. Mind you, he didn't ask if he could fuss me. A part of my training includes lying down quietly under the table when dad is having his food. The man showing me a lot of attention got me all excited, which meant I had a telling off! I was told to “sit,” then told to “lie down,” and then told to “stay.” It's hard for dad to eat his food if I'm spinning round in circles and getting all excitable. The man didn't say anything, but he seemed a bit disgruntled. At the end of the day, we're working dogs, and we need to try and remember how we're expected to behave in public.

After we dropped auntie Sue home, we went for another drive up to the Hobby Horse pub so that dad could enjoy a real ale. This week they had one called Brass Monkey. Dad said it didn't feel that cold to him. Whatever that means, I've not got a clue!

Well, I suppose I'd better get some shut eye because dad has been planning to do two walks tomorrow while mum is at an appointment in Cardiff. It's also the start of our final week of training with auntie Keita.

DAY 27

“HE DIDN’T REALLY MEAN IT”

Not long after mum had headed off to Cardiff for her appointment, dad and me got a bus to town for a change so that we could walk home and get some more practice on the flattened bobbly paving. Before that though, we popped briefly into Deja Brew. It was very busy in there this morning, so Mr and Mrs Henley were asked if they minded if we sat on the opposite side of the table to them. Mrs Henley said: “We don’t mind as long as Jon behaves himself.” I wonder what she meant by that? I’m told it’s more of that banter stuff, but I’m not so sure!

When we made our way home, I stopped spot on the first bobbly paving which dad was really impressed with. I only got one treat though, surely if he was that impressed, I should have had at least two! A few people blocked the next bobbly paving, but they moved out of our way so I could stop dad in the right place and got another treat.

I worked really well all the way home, and dad told me that I’d earned my free run today! So, this afternoon, the plan was that I’d walk dad to town to meet up with mum, and then she’d take us all to the park.

That was the plan, but it all fell apart because mum’s appointment finished much later than normal, which meant there wasn’t enough time for my free run! When dad told me, I felt sure he didn’t really mean it, but he did! So, we still met mum in town, but dad packed my tea and we all had something to eat at Berry’s Bar. What I didn’t know was before mum met us, she had gone to Scooby’s Pet Shop and got me two smoked shanks! I’ve had a great time this evening chomping away on one of them! Thanks mum, they’re fantastic! I hope my promised free run tomorrow is equally as fantastic!

DAY 28

“IT’S JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS”

Today wasn't at all what I'd expected. The reason is that mum was unwell overnight, and she's still unwell now. Poor mum! That meant that I didn't get my free run today either. It's not mum's fault, she can't help it, it's just one of those things.

Most of today has been playing with my toys, chomping on a lovely smokie bone, and bashing my Kong wobbler which is great fun. This afternoon, mum asked us to go to town to get a few things for her poorly tummy. We were really pleased that the routes auntie Keita signed us off on included shops where we could get what mum needed.

First of all, we went to the Post Office, because there's also a convenience store in the same place and they sold some things that mum wanted. The next stop was Boots the Chemist to get some tummy medicine for mum. I've not been in Boots before, and although dad knew roughly where it was, I wasn't totally sure where he wanted to go, so he asked a passing lady, and she very kindly helped us. The odd thing is that while we were in there, I looked all around and couldn't see one solitary pair of boots! As we had about 25 minutes until the bus, we popped into Deja Brew for a drink. I think dad spends so much time in there that they ought to put a bed in there for him!

So, on the whole, it's been a quiet day, but I did at least get a harness walk and it really helped mum out. I'm still having a bit of a problem getting dad to the right part of the controlled crossing when we are heading down into town, so he's going to ask auntie Keita if we can concentrate on that when she comes to see us tomorrow.

DAY 29

“TWO MORE NEW PLACES”

Today was yet another day of things not happening as expected! Dad had a text early this morning from auntie Keita saying that she wasn't feeling well and so wouldn't be able to come out to us as planned. So, dad decided we'd walk to town and bus home this morning and then bus to town and walk home this afternoon. This meant I went to two more new places on my route, places I've only walked past until today.

This morning's walk went well, except for a bit of dog distraction, but dad made me stand still until the barking scrabbling dog had gone past us before carrying on. I also tried getting dad to go to Tesco, but he wouldn't do it because auntie Keita hasn't signed us off on that route yet.

Mum asked us to get some bread while we were out, so dad thought we'd get it from Greggs. Dad used his nose to sniff out where it was, then asked me to find the door which I did with no problem at all. We also went into Deja Brew for the umpteenth time for a drink before getting the bus home.

This afternoon, dad told mum he was going to take me to the Rolling Mill pub for a pint of Guinness, and then I'd have the chance to work up through town again. I found all the crossing points with no problem at all which pleased dad. But on the last one, by the Post Office, a lady had parked right across in front of it. Some young people were nearby who very kindly offered dad and me some help, and the lady also moved her car back out of the way, both of which made my job much easier.

I had a lovely evening back home because mum was feeling a bit better and spent some time with me while she had her food and watched the TV. That really pleased me! I've hardly seen her the past two days as she's been ill in bed, and I'm not allowed to go upstairs. Mum is hoping to be feeling even better tomorrow, so that could mean I might get that free run I've been waiting for! Tomorrow morning is supposed to be our qualification walk, so I really hope everyone's going to be feeling OK for that!

DAY 30

“QUALIFICATION DAY”

Today is Thursday 21st March, and it's hard to believe that dad and me have reached our qualification day already! Thankfully, auntie Keita was with us and feeling better, and uncle Marcus from Guide Dogs Cymru came to check us out and decide if we fully qualified or not. When auntie Keita told us the date of our qualification walk, dad straight away thought, “Oh no! Bin day!” But the route I do with dad to town is different to the one Max often used to do, so it means much fewer bins to have to get past.

Within seconds of leaving home, we had bins and a car blocking the pavement, and a dog barking its head off at me on the opposite side of our street, all at the same time! But I strutted my stuff and we got safely past it all. Just around the corner, we found a council truck parked entirely on the pavement with its noisy engine running. Mum calls this type of truck a smelly nelly. Auntie Keita knew it was going to cause us problems because dad wouldn't be able to hear any traffic over the noise of its loud engine, and we didn't know how long they were going to be there. So, she had a nice word with the driver and he drove off, but not before his air brakes made a sharp loud hissing noise at me and made me jump out of my fur! Auntie Keita told dad some weeks ago that air brakes make me jump, but this was the first time it had ever happened when dad was with me. He just reassured me that everything was okay, calmed me down, and we continued on our way.

Everything was fairly straight-forward until we got into the top end of town, when I saw a colleague crossing over towards us. It was Inez with his mum Alison. I got way too excited, and ended up with my front paws right up in the air! They were still about 10 feet away from us at the time. Dad grabbed my collar and got my paws back on the ground, but I was still very excited, so dad kept tight hold of me until they had gone past us. I still need to brush up on my skills for finding the crossing to go into town, but at least I did far better with it today. I heard uncle Marcus and auntie Keita say that it'll get even better with a bit more practice and less distractions.

Once we'd crossed over and were going down past the top block of shops, someone suddenly came very quickly out of a shop doorway in front of us, so I had to slam my brakes on! A couple of doors further along is the Coffee Bean. They always have a table outside which I'm used to guiding dad around. But they'd also had a delivery, so there were boxes all over the pavement, and there was also a mobility scooter parked there. I made my way through it, inch by inch, being very careful not to bump dad into any of it. And I did it! I also got onto the flattened bobbly crossing! That was really hard work! The only other thing that happened was I had to slow down because people

were stood there talking, totally oblivious to me trying to guide dad along the pavement. To be fair, they were very apologetic when they realised.

Our destination was Deja Brew ... of all places. They had reserved a table for us, including mum. When we got to the door, a lady was very kindly holding it open for me, but dad doesn't give me a treat for finding the door if it's not closed, I have to show him where the handle is. She was politely asked if she could close the door and was told the reason why. I then found the handle for dad, and got a well-deserved fuss and a head rub, and best of all a treat!

Auntie Keita and Uncle Marcus were really happy with how dad and me handled so many things on that walk, and after a chat with dad about one or two things, dad signed his name on a piece of paper, and handed over his 50 pence, and we became a proper guide dog partnership! Mum even gave dad a big kiss ... in public too! Thankfully, auntie Keita and uncle Marcus just shook his hand!

We stayed there for a little while before heading off to Newport for me to have a much needed free run! I found a few dogs to run around with, and a few sticks to carry and chomp on. I also had a good old roll around and got myself well and truly muddy. As a celebration for our qualification, I found a lovely big pile of poo to roll in and ground it deep into my neck! It's like **Chanel No. 5 of the dog world!** Get used to it mum!