

## **“It’s ok, we are one entity”**

**By Reyna Cervantes**



“Reyna and Ava”

**I**n any given day while walking with Ava, my hearing dog, I’ll be asked questions as to her breed; “Is that dog part greyhound and collie?” Or “what kind of dog is that?” I’ll smile and try to educate them on smooth collies. She is a conversation piece. Ava and I often get our names mixed up, I’ll just say “It’s ok, we are one entity”. Ava is a part of my everyday routine, she goes everywhere with me, work, school, the gym, running, shopping, movies, or to go have a drink with my friends (yes, she is definitely becoming one of the girls).

It often shocks people when they find out that Ava is “my dog” and not a “dog in training.” I am told that I do not look like I have a disability, and after all these years I am not sure how to respond to that comment...except for “what am I suppose to look like?” Because I cannot hear, does that mean I should not have ears?! As useless as my ears are, I like them right where they are, on my head. Ava’s ears are positioned so perfectly on top of her head and move to the sounds that surround me on a daily basis. They are what I refer to as my little radars. She is always listening and alerts me to the sounds I need to be aware of. As we walk, she nudges my hand to get my attention. Watching her body language is also a big help.

I have a new sense of security having her around. We have built a bond that is insurmountable. She follows me everywhere even without the leash while at home. She also has to know what I am doing. While I am in class, she often stares at me which always brings a smile to my face. It is definitely an unconditional love; she asks for nothing, but to be with me at all times. Something I could never put a value to.

I had no idea what it meant for a dog and its owner to be similar, but now I know. Ava and I have so many similarities; my peers say she’s so human. Her lifting of her eyebrows, the three wrinkles in her forehead, she even gets up for a drink of water with me in the middle of the night, and she loves to sunbathe in the California sun as I do.

She is my new traveling partner. We have visited Las Vegas, NV, Boston, MA, Houston, TX, and Washing State, with more to come. This has been the greatest thing to happen to me. She lies at my feet on the plane and most people comment on how they didn’t know there was even a dog on the plane. They will say she is better behaved than most children. Ava has also become my study partner, during finals she snuggles up to me as I read the tedious articles and prepare for the following day. She also joins me during my counseling sessions with my clients at the psychology clinic. She lies at my feet while I work with my clients who suffer from psychological disorders. Not only is she my new best friend, but she has given me something that no one else can, confidence. Even my mother admits that there is just something there that no one but Ava can provide for me. When I am having a tough day, Ava always seems to make it better.

It’s been a year now that Ava has been in my life full-time and I don’t know what I would do without her. Ava has definitely made it easier for people to approach me. Most people seem almost intimidated by me because I am different. I am still not sure why that is, especially since I am the one who faces many different challenges throughout the day. Not everyone is empathetic to my situation, nor do they seem to want to understand. However there are others out there who are open to asking questions and often apologize for asking questions. I tell them “Don’t be sorry, I’d rather you ask than to stare at me.” I hope that those who read this article know that having a service dog is a wonderful thing and for those who have difficulties on a daily basis a service dog makes those lives a little bit easier. I also hope that this educates people about service dogs and that there are many types who help many different people. Ava is a tremendous help and I am so grateful to Denise and those who help at Brigadoon Youth & Service Dog Programs.