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The Peregrinations of a Post Graduate Law Student and Legal Professional with a Guide Dog

By; Gary C. Norman, Esq. L.L.M. Candidate Spring 2011

Unlike the fanciful hope of [Ms. Keller](#), an author and civil rights activist, to see for one day, I find myself with the practical and laudable, but yet unrealized, hope that law students and attorneys with sensory disabilities will enjoy robust, meaningful opportunities.

The differing interactions I recently encountered to my guide dog Pilot and I demonstrate the extent to which a range of actors in our civic society view a person with a vision disability as well as the respect they should be afforded as a professional.

On the afternoon of September 24, 2010, a cafeteria worker at my workplace purposely delayed my order over that of others who came later in line. He falsely purported that, my guide dog shed hair offensively when I am, or when I have been, in line. That same day, a staff person at Union Station, who coordinates taxicabs, discussed with a sighted person to my right that taxis would not transport Pilot and me. In large urban centers, such as the District, guide dog handlers, even attorneys who can adroitly argue for their rights, frequently encounter [access denials with taxicabs](#). Notably, a bevy of women who stood behind me in line, who heard me advocate my rights to the director, proffered assistance, declaring that his actions violated the law.

Yes. They were in fact correct. [Title III](#) of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, provides protections against discrimination of people with disabilities, including those partnered with service animals, in such public venues as Union Station. The Department of Justice promulgated updated [regulations](#) to the ADA in September 2010, which address, among other issues, the definition and access related issues of assistance dogs. In sum, the right of students and professionals with disabilities to collaborate with an assistance dog, including in modes of transportation such as taxicabs, is a critical facet of diversity. Through a partnership with an assistance dog, myriad blind attorneys believe they can fully participate in the workplace and on the public square.

At a recent board dinner meeting of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Section of the Maryland State Bar Association, one of my colleagues expressed that diversity constitutes an intellectually accepted concept but diversity is not always an outcome that members of the profession actualizes. He did not seemingly cognize the furry face representing diversity on the board that was reposing under the table. While bar associations and law schools are assuredly at work in fostering a diverse legal profession, a diverse academia and profession, including a diverse pool of law students and professionals with disabilities, is unfortunately not at the [level](#) one would desire.

For instance, students with vision disabilities encounter such issues as a [fair and accessible LSAT](#) as well as equal access to study, exam, and class materials, and lawyers with vision

disabilities continue to report they are unemployed or underemployed. The [American Bar Association](#) is at work in addressing this issue by, among other means, forums for dialogue. There is, however, room for progress.

All in all, my encounters with the cafeteria worker and the taxicab coordinator reflect a lack of respect for persons with disabilities. There's been progress, but there are still more possibilities for solidifying disability as a component of diversity.

Posted by The Modern American at [12:43 PM](#)