Theresa Stern: Welcome to Central Bark, a podcast from Guide Dogs for the Blind. I'm Theresa Stern and I'm your host.

Hello, everyone, and welcome to Central Bark. We have an amazing guest today. Her name is Faith Snapp, which I love that name, by the way. That's the best name ever. But more than that, she's a client of Guide Dogs for the Blind. She's also a leader in FFA, and, this is amazing, a future veterinarian. So welcome, Faith. We're so excited to have you here at Central Bark.

Faith Snapp: Yes, I'm so excited to be here. This is great.

Theresa Stern: Awesome. Faith, can you tell us just a little bit about yourself, sort of how you came to Guide Dogs and maybe introduce us to your sweet guide dog?

Faith Snapp: Yeah, absolutely. When I was in high school, I actually first learned about Guide Dogs for the Blind at a convention for Texas FFA. There was a booth there and there was puppy raisers and leaders there, and I ended up getting a pamphlet. And it was so funny because when I first learned about the school, I thought that I wanted to be a puppy raiser. I never really thought about the fact that I qualified for a guide dog. So it was kind of a funny thing. But I was like, "Oh my gosh, the school is amazing. I need to learn more about Guide Dogs for the Blind."

I was 15 at the time, so I was a freshman in high school and I was so curious. So I just looked at the website and I looked at the pamphlet and I literally... I was obsessed. I researched so many things. I was like, "Oh my gosh." Well, I started reading and I was like, "Wait, I might... Could actually apply for a dog."

Well, on the website, it said it was encouraged to be 18 or older. So I was like, "I don't know. I'm kind of nervous, I'm still young." And then I was like, "You know what? The worst they can say is no." So I was like, "I'm going to send in my application," all this stuff. So I filled it out and then I asked my parents if I could send it in. So I already had it prepared.

And I sent it in and I got a phone call a few days later and the GDB workers were like, "Oh my gosh, we'd like to do a phone interview with you." And I was like, "Okay." And I was like, "Just to confirm, you do know I'm only 15, right?" And they were like, "Yes." But they were like, "We're still intrigued." And I was like, "Okay."

Anyway, we ended up doing the phone call and then moved on to the home visit. And I'd say probably around six or seven months later, I found out I was accepted for a dog. So I received Prim, my guide dog, and she's a female black lab. I received her, I believe it was January 3rd, 2017. So we've been a team now for seven years, which is absolutely crazy.

Theresa Stern: That is so crazy. It goes so fast.

Faith Snapp: Yeah, it does. And I'm just like, "Oh my gosh." She'll be 10 this year and I just cannot believe it. But yeah, she's fantastic.

And it's funny how my time in FFA actually led to me getting her, because that was such a big part of my life. And I feel like growing up, raising livestock and stuff also prepared me to have a guide dog, which is crazy. But it just all kind of combined itself. So yeah, that's kind of my journey of getting Prim.

Theresa Stern: Yeah. So you've been visually impaired all your life, and then you came to us through FFA. That is just so crazy. I love that. We were going to find you no matter where. We had-

Faith Snapp: Yes, ma'am.

Theresa Stern: It was meant to be, it was destiny. Oh, that's so awesome. Very cool.

So you mentioned FFA. Why don't you tell folks a little bit, and FFA used to be Future Farmers of America, and I think now they just say FFA.

Faith Snapp: Yes.

Theresa Stern: But tell us a little bit about the organization and about your leadership role in that organization.

Faith Snapp: Yeah, absolutely. The FFA's basically a leadership organization for junior and high school students. And they have various opportunities for speaking events, competitions, doing skills, showing animals. You name it, you can pretty much do it in FFA.

And there's three different sections that they kind of focus on. They have career development events which kind of prepare you for after high school. They have leadership development events which kind of shape you as a leader, get you out there, also can help with the future. And then they have supervised agricultural experiences, and that's where you get into your own projects, like showing animals or even cooking or just really anything in the agricultural realm can fall into that. And we get to log minutes and do all these things.

But beyond that, there's also officer opportunities as well. And I was extremely blessed to receive officer positions on many levels in FFA. I served as a chapter officer, district officer, area officer, and then most recently a state officer my freshman year.

Theresa Stern: Wow. Congratulations.

Faith Snapp: I was so blessed and I will never forget those memories. But it was crazy because I think going through those things prepared me, not only for college and stuff, but post-grad school too, now that I'm in vet school and everything.

But yeah, the biggest leadership role I guess I did in FFA was I served as a state officer for Texas FFA, which was a big deal. And I dedicated a whole year to traveling and teaching students and doing community service. It was just magical. I absolutely loved it.

Theresa Stern: Wow. Well, I'm impressed you had time for all that going through college and everything else.

Faith Snapp: It was a lot.

Theresa Stern: Yeah. Now, I've seen a video with you with a horse. So do you work a lot with horses? Is that kind of your specialty?

Faith Snapp: Growing up, my family actually owned stables. We owned about 16 horses and we had a barn and we would host riding camps during the summers and then lessons throughout the years. So I grew up around them and they became very special to me because whenever I was riding my horses, I looked just like everybody else.

Theresa Stern: Exactly, yes.

Faith Snapp: They were my eyes, right?

Theresa Stern: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Faith Snapp: So I just loved it. And the more time I spent with them, the more I was like, "Maybe I want to go and do a career where I could work with them more and things like that." So when I got to high school and middle school, I started showing horses moreso and competing with them.

And then when I got to college, I actually moved my horse up to college with me. He lived up there with me and he was a great stress relief. I'd spend a lot of time at the barn with him and doing that kind of thing.

When I got my first job working at a vet clinic, I actually worked for an equine vet. So all of my veterinary hours have come from horses as well. So yeah, they've been a very constant piece of my life and my journey, so yeah.

Theresa Stern: That's amazing. I'm a big lover of horses myself. I find them to be so peaceful and calming and just amazing. And like you said, as a person who's blind or visually impaired, when I get up on that horse, I can walk anywhere. And it's a partnership working with a guide dog, and that's-

Faith Snapp: Absolutely.

Theresa Stern: ... that sort of partnership thing that I think is so fulfilling.

Faith Snapp: Yes, ma'am, absolutely. It's amazing. Sometimes I just can't believe how much animals can impact your life, whether it be on that level or with a guide dog or anything. They teach us so much.

Theresa Stern: Right, right. Well, and I love your attitude. You have such a like, "Well, I'm just going to do it," attitude, which I think is a testament probably to your parents that were super open to you doing everything else that a kid with full vision would do. And then just your own positive outlook on life, and I think that's why you are looking into, you're in veterinary school, something that you would never think of a person with a visual impairment being able to do or being accepted. So tell us a little bit about your journey to going to vet school.

Faith Snapp: Yeah. I will say it has been a crazy journey getting there, definitely. When I got to college, actually, I honestly didn't know I wanted to be a vet. I had thought about it, but I was like, "No, I don't know if that's for me. I still want to work with animals," but I didn't know if it was possible. That was the real thing.

And I went through and I had an amazing mentor in college, and he was like, "Faith, if you want to be a vet, you can absolutely do it." And I was like, "Okay." I was like, "I guess I'm going to switch my major and go for it."

So I switched to pre-vet and I started taking all the classes for it. And then that following summer of my freshman year of college, I was like, "Okay, I need to find a place to work." That proved to be pretty difficult. Whenever I was looking into places, they were very hesitant, which I can't blame them, it is-

Theresa Stern: Right.

Faith Snapp: It's different, right? They don't understand.

Theresa Stern: Right, they're not used to that. Right?

Faith Snapp: Exactly.

Theresa Stern: And they have their own expectations. Yeah.

Faith Snapp: Yes. Yep. So I was like, "Okay, I'm going to give grace and I'm going to move on and I'm going to find somewhere that's going to take me."

So I kept looking and I kept looking, and the vet that actually treated my own horses was like, "Hey, if you ever want vet hours, you just give me a call." And I was like, "Okay." So I did, I took a chance and I started working for the clinic that he was at. And I spent two summers and two Christmas breaks there.

And they were wonderful to me. They took time to explain things to me, they labeled things in the clinic for me. It was just like it blew my mind. I was so thankful.

So when we would go treat horses and stuff, we would go on farm calls. So we would ride in the truck and then go to people's houses and treat their horses, so that was also a unique experience as well and I really, really enjoyed it. So I guess after getting all of my vet hours and graduating or getting all of my horse work done, I was like, "Okay, I guess it's time to apply to vet school." And there's a very small amount of people who get in their first try.

Theresa Stern: Oh my gosh, it is really competitive.

Faith Snapp: It is, and I was like, "You know what? I'm just going to do the best I can and we're going to see where this goes." So I spent I don't even know how many hours on that application putting everything I've ever done in it with animals or leadership or even just life, all kinds of stuff. So built up my application and I submitted it, and I ended up only applying to schools in Texas. I wanted to stay here if I could.

Anyway, I sent my application in and I got the secondary application, and then I got an interview and I was like, "Okay, this is getting real."

Theresa Stern: Yeah. No kidding.

Faith Snapp: It's crazy. So I went and did my interview and it was a really cool experience. The school I met, I can't thank them enough for all of the experiences I've had with them.

But anyway, I guess it was February 5th when I got the call that I had been accepted. When I answered, I was like, "Are you sure you have the right person?" I was so shocked. And they were like, "Yes, we're sure." And I was like, "Oh my gosh."

So I found out I got in February, and yeah, it has just been crazy ever since, dealing with all of it. There's been great times, there's been hard times, so I'm just taking it one day at a time.

Theresa Stern: Yeah. Yeah. Well, and I think just listening to your story and you're so positive and how could they say no? But also I think, and I don't think that employers always think about this, someone who has a visual impairment has learned to be creative in the way we do things, right? So we sort of bring that to the party with us and it becomes like, "Oh, okay." There's advantages, having to figure out how to do stuff with disability that people don't necessarily always recognize. Though I'm sure they're just as excited to have you as well because they probably learned a lot from you.

So what do you find the most challenging in your studies? And what's most rewarding for you?

Faith Snapp: I would say the most challenging thing for me, one, trying to figure out how to study because it's so much information, you have to train your brain to think differently. So I'd say that's probably one of the hardest things, not necessarily in school, but on the outside, I guess, is just proving to people that I can do it. I am capable of being a veterinarian with visual impairment.

So I do have to explain myself a lot, but I don't mind doing that. I see it as an education opportunity and as a time for me to grow as well. So I'm like, "Okay, this is what I'm going to have to do." And I'm sure I will have to do that for the whole time I'm in my career.

Theresa Stern: [inaudible 00:13:26], yeah.

Faith Snapp: But that's okay. That's okay. That's part of it, right? But yeah, I'd say the most rewarding part of it though is to work with veterinarians from all over the world. They are just incredible. The connections you make, wow, it has opened my eyes a lot. And I have made the best friends I could ever ask for. And everyone has just been beyond supportive of me, especially in the program and everywhere else. So yeah, it's been really rewarding so far.

Theresa Stern: That's fantastic. Yeah, no, I think, and something I always think about with veterinarians, people who go to medical school to treat humans have to learn one body system. But people that go to be veterinarians, you have to learn about all kinds of different animals and body systems.

Faith Snapp: Yeah, you have to learn that, and your patients can't tell you what's wrong and yeah, it's a lot.

Theresa Stern: Yeah. Yeah, so I would think for you, with all the work that you've done with animals throughout your life, and especially with your guide dog, Prim, you do start to get sort of a feeling, I guess for animals and sort of an intuition maybe. Do you feel like that?

Faith Snapp: Absolutely. Yeah, it's so interesting because I feel like I've had to learn animals in a different way than most people because normally, when there's a problem, you're just going to look at them and see what's going on. And for me, it's more of like, okay, what am I learning from this animal by how they're acting or their body language? I just have to be so in tune with them that I almost feel like I can tell if they're off quicker. So it's just different, different for everyone. But yeah, it's interesting how that intuition comes into play.

Theresa Stern: Very cool. Well, speaking of veterinarians and we've got some amazing veterinarians at Guide Dogs for the Blind, obviously. What's your future? Would you be thinking of working for GDB, hint hint, in the future? Or what kinds of positions would you be interested once you sort of get all the school behind you?

Faith Snapp: There's so many things I have considered, and GDB is definitely one of them. I think from my experience right now, I'm really interested in horses. But along with that, I think it would be so neat to work with service dogs, whether that's with just Guide Dogs for the Blind or in a different setting as well, because I feel like there's not a lot of vets that can say they know what it's like to be a service dog handler. So if I could bridge that gap, that's a dream. That's a dream of mine.

So yeah, I've definitely considered possibly reaching out to GDB or other places as well. Just gain experience in that realm because it is so special. It is just incredible and yeah, absolutely.

Theresa Stern: I think that's going to be part of it too, is just trying different things out and see what's going to really call to you and stuff. But I think anybody would be super lucky to have you.

And I think also, as a guide dog user, Faith, I think you understand so much of being a veterinarian, I would think, or from talking to veterinarians, is really working with the person, right? That's the animal's human. Yeah, and I think as a person like you who've had close relationships with animals, I think you'll be great in terms of working with the people. How do you feel about working with people who usually, when you're bringing a dog to the vet, it could be for a physical, but it could be because something traumatic has happened, and how do you feel about that?

Faith Snapp: Honestly, I love working with people. That was one of the reasons I chose this path, because I knew I would get to combine working with animals and people so well. I think that I almost understand on a different level when people come in with their dog that's, whatever it's going through, whether it's traumatic or physical or they've been diagnosed with something, whatever that is, I feel like I almost understand on a deeper level because I know how much Prim means to me, and I know that it's not just a dog. They mean so much to their owners.

So if I can be the person that can not only be there for the person, but give the dog the best care possible or whatever animal they're bringing in, then that is my goal. I love helping people, so I'm hoping, whenever I graduate and everything else, that I'm able to be the doctor I need to be for all my clients.

Theresa Stern: I have every faith in you that you will be. Now, how many more years of school do you have to do? It's a long program, isn't it?

Faith Snapp: Yes. So it's a four-year program, and I just started my first year, so I'll have three more years after this, and then hopefully I'll be treating patients, so yeah.

Theresa Stern: That's amazing. Well, Faith, we have a little surprise for you today that Danielle is going to queue up.

Faith Snapp: Oh my goodness.

Dr. Kate Kuzmin...: Hi, Faith. This is Dr. Kate Kuzminski, medical director at GDB. I wanted to congratulate you and Prim on starting vet school at Texas Tech. You are starting an incredible chapter of your life. It'll be super hard at times, but it'll also be really, really interesting. You'll never get bored. I wish you all the best in your schooling and in your profession. It's an incredible career, and I'm sure you'll do really fantastic things. Go Red Raiders.

Speaker 4: Congratulations, Faith, on starting vet school, huge achievement. As you'll soon find out, veterinary school is hard, with long hours and little time for yourself, but it is so, so worth it. You will learn so much. You will learn, of course, about medicine and science, about diseases and how to treat them. And despite all of this, you'll quite often still be disappointed by how much we still don't know. The more you learn, the more you're going to want to dig deeper and find more knowledge.

But more importantly, you'll learn about animals and people and their immense ability to bond. You'll learn about yourself and your ability to be empathetic and kind. Your heart will grow so much. This is a wonderful profession, and I'm so happy that you'll soon be part of it. I wish you the best, and congratulations again.

Theresa Stern: There you go. So from our veterinarians to our future veterinarians.

Faith Snapp: Aw. Well, thank y'all so much. That is so sweet.

Theresa Stern: So you've got some mentors right here at GDB, as you go through this, so that's awesome. Faith, I want to thank you so much. You've just inspired me, and hopefully other people who are listening, to go for it. Have a positive attitude, go for what's calling you, and just live your life the way you want to live it. I think you just really are the personification of that. Thank you for being you, and I wish you all the very, very best.

Faith Snapp: Aw. Well, thank you so much, and thank you for having me. This has been such a great opportunity. Oh my gosh, there's so many people that have poured into me, and I hope I can do the same.

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