



# Meet the lifesaving pets...

*We know animals do the most wonderful things, but these three ladies say they owe their lives to their incredible pets...*



Gorgeous guide dog Darcy is a lifeline for owner Dianne, who also has epilepsy and diabetes

By Katharine Wootton

**Dianne's story: 'Darcy knew I had epilepsy before I did'**

When Dianne Woodford suddenly lost her sight overnight ten years ago, her life was turned upside down. Having lost her vision as a complication of the Type 1 diabetes she'd had since a teenager, this working mum of three didn't know how she'd cope. That is until she got a guide dog and regained her independence. Now on her second guide dog, Darcy, Dianne says she's a lifeline, not only helping her get around without sight, but also with her recently diagnosed epilepsy.

"Last summer I rang Guide Dogs to say there's something wrong with my dog as she keeps stopping when we're out and won't budge. At the time I didn't realise I had any specific symptoms apart from a headache, but I later realised she was stopping to force me to sit down as she knew I was unwell. And

sure enough, not long after that I was diagnosed with epilepsy," says Dianne.

Now Darcy, who has no specialist training other than her general guide dog training, regularly signals to Dianne about 15 minutes before she's about to have an epileptic fit. This allows Dianne time to press her panic button or, if she's out somewhere, warn bystanders what's about to happen, then find a quiet place before the fit takes place.

**'Family and friends are now happy for me to go out with Darcy as they know she'll help me if anything happens'**

"She helps stop the whole drama and emergency of people wondering what's happening when I'm fitting. Sometimes I can even stop the fit if I find somewhere quiet, have a drink of water and relax once Darcy has signalled to me that something's not right."

Darcy has also been a lifesaver with Dianne's diabetes, waking her up on a number of occasions when Dianne's blood sugar has been too low.



Jackie's cat Lily wakes her up with a pat if she forgets to put on a vital breathing mask

**Jackie's story: 'Lily is my guardian angel'**

For Jackie Kennedy, who has severe sleep apnea, her cat Lily saves her life on an almost nightly basis. Having discovered through tests five years ago that she stops breathing more than 60 times an hour at night, Jackie must wear specialist breathing equipment when she sleeps. And there to make sure she always wears her breathing mask is her little deaf cat, Lily, who will pat Jackie's face to wake her if she ever falls asleep without her breathing machine. "Living on my own I could potentially go to sleep and never wake up again. But Lily watches me constantly to make sure I'm alright and stops me napping on the sofa

without my machinery. She sleeps right next to me and if ever I wake up or take my mask off, she won't settle until I'm safe," says Jackie who also has epilepsy, diabetes and a spinal condition.

Lily, who has no training, also joins forces with Jackie's assistance dog, Kingston, once alerting him that Jackie had collapsed with a diabetic hypo so he could press her panic button and fetch her hypo kit. The pair of them never left her side until the paramedics arrived.

"I can't imagine life without Lily. Even when she's not helping me medically, she's a ray of sunshine. Often I open my eyes and she's there, just purring away," says Jackie, who was a finalist with Lily at last year's Cats Protection awards.

It's little wonder then that Dianne and Darcy recently received the Guide Dogs' Beyond the Call of Duty Award, recognising their unique partnership. "Family and friends are now happy for me to go out with Darcy as they know she'll help me if anything happens. I trust her wholly as a guide dog but then she's there for my other medical issues, which she's just decided to take on off her own back. She's so proud to work and has really given me my life back."



Proud Dianne with Darcy and This Morning doctors Zoe Williams and Ranj Singh at the Guide Dogs Annual Awards



Tilly brings love, joy and companionship to her owner, Gloria

**Gloria's story: 'She has brought me so much comfort'**

When Gloria Tuffey was handed a tiny ball of fluff in Cyprus 15 years ago, little did she realise what a difference this dog would make to her life.

Tilly has been a PAT dog, bringing joy to people in care homes and children's wards, as well as helping Gloria through both bereavement and diabetes.

"When my husband died she brought me so much comfort, even jumping on the bed - which she never did before - to sleep on his side of the bed beside me."

Then one night, she became a true hero when she woke Gloria up, pawing at the bed. "I didn't know what she was doing so I offered her food but she wanted none of it so I decided to make a tea and test my blood sugar levels at which point I realised they'd become dangerously low. From there I was able to take a tablet to get my sugars up, but if she hadn't pawed at me I don't think I would have ever woken up.

"She wasn't trained to do this but she just knew something was wrong. She's such a joy to me every day."

