

In Memoriam—Cora Alison Porteous Dolan '83

She lost her eyesight, but saw possibilities everywhere

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At age three, Cora Alison Dolan—always known as Alison—put on a brown dress and set off alone on a one-mile walk to the local school. Found by her frantic mother a few hundred yards from her destination, Dolan announced that she just wanted to be a Brownie like her older sister.

It was the first sign of her inquisitive and adventurous personality, but definitely not the last, says her sister, Susan Sisti. A childhood diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes didn't

prevent her from taking on challenges that ranged from a college parachute jump to a demanding career in the Central Intelligence Agency. And although the disease took Dolan's eyesight in the late 1990s, she continued to meet every challenge with grace and humor, right up to her death on January 3. She and her husband, Larry Dolan, traveled extensively, camped and skied, and enjoyed riding their tandem bicycle. At a regatta in Chicago, Dolan competed with a handicapped sailor who steered with his arm strapped to the tiller. She worked the jib sheets and he was her eyes.

Dolan's blindness ended her 10-year career with the CIA and additional complications from the diabetes necessitated a kidney and pancreas transplant. After the surgery, she trained with her first guide dog, Colleen, earned a master's degree, and formed a consulting company to educate people about living with disabilities. Colleen by her side, she became a popular speaker, giving motivational talks to businesses and schools.

A lover of horses, Dolan also became the first visually impaired therapeutic riding instructor in the U.S. to be certified by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association. She also co-founded a therapeutic and adaptive riding program, Alisons' Whispers, that provided opportunities for people with autism, multiple sclerosis, and those with special needs.

Grateful for the ways in which Colleen—and her successor, Winnie—had helped her achieve so much in life, Dolan served as an ambassador for Guiding Eyes for the Blind in Yorktown Heights, NY. Sharing her story with volunteers who raise guide dogs and donors who support the organization, she was a dynamic speaker. "When she spoke, everyone paid attention," Larry says.

Although she was born and raised in the New York area, mourners at a celebration of Dolan's life recalled her dry New England humor—a legacy from the Massachusetts grandparents she loved to visit, her sister says. Sisti recalls one time, after Dolan lost her eyesight, that she was in a store when another shopper asked, "Do you realize you have two different shoes on?"

"Yes," she replied. "And I have a matching pair at home."

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