



Social Impact Heroes: Why & How Jim Freiss of Mowi Americas Is Helping To Change Our World



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Listen more than you speak. You have one set of eyes with which you view a problem. If there are twenty people all around you, there are twenty more vantage points that you may have missed.

As *part of my series about “individuals and organizations making an important social impact”, I had the pleasure of interviewing **Jim Freiss**.*

Jim Freiss is the Corporate Engineer at Mowi Americas, <https://mowisalmon.us/>, and founder of Puppy Ride Long Island, <https://www.puppyridelongisland.com/>, to honor and remember his late brother John, his guide dog Hero and to support an organization that did so much for him. His work with Puppy Ride Long Island and The Seeing Eye Foundation will continue to help others who are sight impaired like his brother.

Jim Freiss is a seasoned engineer having been in agribusiness for almost 40 year now. He is currently working with Mowi as part of Mowi’s Global Processing

Excellence Team. Jim is a lifelong runner and has been ultra running and long-distance biking for ten years now. He lives in New York with his wife of 38 years and has three grown children and four grandchildren so far.

www.mowisalmon.us

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Can you tell us a story about what brought you to this specific non-profit path?

It all started about a decade ago when my little brother, John, having gradually lost his sight in his 30s, was accepted into a guide dog program. The foundation that he applied to, The Seeing Eye, Inc., offered to match him with a dog to help him with his day-to-day activities, making John's busy life much easier and safer. John was an executive for a multinational German company and traveled a great deal around the world for them. His new companion, Hero, made such a huge difference in his mobility after spending many years with a cane and having to ask many to help him get from point A to point B. Hero changed that as he became John's sighted full-time companion!

John spoke constantly to others about The Seeing Eye and how they changed his life. He would volunteer and advocate in his local community for other people who were blind and really went out of his way to do what he could to promote guide dogs. John and I were very close, his positive energy was contagious.

John died suddenly in early 2018 of an undiagnosed heart defect. This was so hard on all of us and left a big hole in my heart. With his passing, his dog Hero, now retired, came to live with me and my wife. Within weeks, I saw how I could carry on John's advocacy through my support of his passion.

Being an ultra-runner, I decided to dedicate my next event — a few months after his passing, to The Seeing Eye. This really helped me deal with my grief and made me feel close to John. The Event was the Zion 100-mile trail race in Zion Utah. I came up with the phrase “Going the Distance for the Puppies” and it has remained my moto ever since!

In 2019, I developed back issues that required minor surgery but shut down my ultra-running for over a year. So, in 2020, I bought a touring bicycle and decided to ride it solo across New York from New York City to Buffalo. If I couldn't run, I'd bike! This was my second fund raiser and once again I was going the distance for the puppies!

Since 2020, I have attracted good friends who are also endurance athletes to join me on rides from Washington DC to Pittsburgh, from Cincinnati to Cleveland and from Niagara Falls to Long Island, I have also done other solo ultra-running events including a 100 miler in Western Pennsylvania and a 240 mile trail run in Moab Utah. Each year we build momentum in our fund raising and in raising awareness about guide dogs and what they can do when partnered with humans who need their help! This year, we even developed our own web domain to post about our history and upcoming adventures. The new web site is Puppyridelongisland.com.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you founded Puppy Ride and can you tell us about your recent accomplishment in the MOAB 2040 Ultra Marathon to benefit The Seeing Eye?

So many good memories have come out of our efforts to support The Seeing Eye. Since this all started in 2018, we've raised around \$120,000 for the cause. The team has grown and our connection to guide dogs grows as well as the team knows others like John who have benefitted from these amazing animals.

Each event that I do for The Seeing Eye where I "go the distance" I get to be close to my brother and to know that I am representing him in what I am doing. It's powerful and feels right and I can't wait to see where we can take

this thing in the coming years. Each ride or run has brought so many great memories. It's amazing to see how my friends have grown in their commitment and support for what we are doing as well!

Moab 240 was my second event for 2023. The first event was a 600-mile bike ride with seven other riders across the state of New York and Connecticut. Between the two events we raised a record \$44,000 for the foundation! The ride was in August and the run in Moab just took place in October.

Having never run more than 110 miles in a single event, the 240-mile distance was daunting, but I felt doable. I had great support of three of my closest ultra running friends who sacrificed a week of their time to go with me to Utah to help me see this race through. The race took me 110 hours and not only covered 240 miles of trails but required me to climb 31,000 feet over two mountain ranges and to climb over 10,500 feet five times. This tested my mind and body. Sleep deprivation, high altitude (I live at sea level), climbing and distance were all factors. But I got it done with my crew! This kind of event is only partially a physical challenge, the mental challenge may be greater!

It has been said that our mistakes can be our greatest teachers. Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first

starting at Mowi as an engineer and or as founder of Puppy ride? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

I travel constantly with my work, and I have to work hard to find the time for my family and to train regularly for ultra events that make up the Puppy Ride. This means my days can get very long as a result. In years gone by, I would push with a “plan” until I would break down with an injury or become sick from being run down. Not exactly funny but I think what I have learned (and continue to try to learn) is to listen to my body and know that a missed workout or even a missed week of workouts can be beneficial to the “big picture”. I am learning patience that I didn’t have in my 40s and 50s.

Can you describe how you or your organization Puppy Ride and your connection to The Seeing Eye and the MOAB 2040 is making a significant social impact?

As I described above, we have raised a considerable amount of money for The Seeing Eye. Their foundation provides around 250 dogs to the blind each year. The cost to do this is high. Each dog that is ready for service costs in excess of \$70,000 each! So, in our small way we have helped almost two recipients obtain a guide dog. But I think what we are doing goes beyond the money. The fact that I am building a team of people who are like-minded in our pursuit, we are building among all of our friends and businesses an

understanding of what guide dogs can do. I think this has the chance to inspire more people to apply their passion to either this cause or to find another cause to help people around them. I don't know if I have a specific example I can share but I really believe this is an outcome.

Can you tell us a story about a particular individual who was impacted or helped by your cause?

I don't specifically know the people we are helping. I know what my brother got from The Seeing Eye and I want others to experience the same thing. I think that is enough for me and I know my teammates who have joined me on these rides, feel the same.

Are there three things the community/society/politicians can do to help you address the root of the problem you are trying to solve?

Sight is such a gift and those who are blind need a voice. I am focused on the aspect of guide dogs that are not supported by even the best insurance policies. That means guide dogs must come from funds that are philanthropic or from possibly grants from government agencies. There are so many other challenges that the blind face. I just hope to bring awareness to the whole community.

How do you define “Leadership”? Can you explain what you mean or give an example?

Leadership is representing those who you lead. It means listening, mentoring, communicating, building consensus where you can and, in the end, taking decisions decisively and taking responsibility for the decision you make.

I guess this is how I would define ‘good leadership’. A good leader should spend considerable time in executing the mission but also how the mission will be executed in the future when the leader is gone. At my stage in my career, I strive to lead by utilizing the talents of the team and who can and wants to grow and what they need to it.





What are your “5 things I wish someone told me when I first started” and why.

Presume this is the ‘start’ of my career

1 . Make a decision. Study and learn all you can but do not delay once you have the information needed to pick direction. Very few people lose their jobs by making a well thought out decision but many have lost their jobs by inaction

2 . Listen more than you speak. You have one set of eyes with which you view a problem. If there are twenty people all around you, there are twenty more vantage points that you may have missed.

3 . My mantra in running is to 'care' and has been since I was a track runner doing the mile. This means that when things get really tough remind yourself that there was a great deal of preparation that led up to this moment and that to walk away from something difficult you are selling yourself short. For example, if I am feeling very low in a 100 mile race (or on the third lap of a really fast mile) and want to quit, I say to myself 'care'! yes it hurts, yes it is not fun at this moment, but I worked hard and I got myself to this point. Put up with how much it hurts knowing how good it will feel when the line is crossed or the day is done.

You are a person of enormous influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

I think that the idea of giving can be contagious. It feels good to give. Giving is not only cash, it's one's time, it's one's compassion, it's one's talents. I like to think that we can inspire one another by finding something that we can do for others that connects in a meaningful way to our life. Pay it forward I guess. My brother and his passing gave me a gift in this sense.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

This may be a bit off topic but it has always resonated with me! Hunter S. Thompson said ““Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming “Wow! What a Ride!”

Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would like to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this, especially if we tag them. :-)

This is a difficult question. It’s easier to put a list together of those who have passed. That would include some select relatives, a few select statesmen, and definitely a list of writers and musicians.

If I were looking to pick someone's brain who is still with us, I’d say I’d like to have a chat with Barack Obama and or Carl Hiaasen. Would be interesting to meet them together! I think it would be a lively and entertaining lunch!

How can our readers further follow your organizations online?

Our landing page for the organization is on the web at
Puppyridelongisland.com.

Please stop by and learn more about us and if you can, please donate to The Seeing Eye, Inc. or drop us a note and keep in touch with us and our future events! We will be “Going the Distance for the Puppies” hopefully many more times in the coming years!

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This was very meaningful, thank you so much. We wish you only continued success in your great work!

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