



# THE WRITE DOG

**DOG WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, INC.**

Founded 1935

August 2005



DWAA member Bash Dibra (right) receives congratulations from Mayor Michael Bloomberg at Gracie Mansion during the *Honoring Volunteerism in New York City* event. Bash has become New York City's own "Pet Laureate", and was acknowledged for his efforts at "promoting responsible pet ownership in the many events that he has created in the New York City Parks." Bash is an animal behaviorist, pet expert, trainer to the stars, and best selling author of six books "Teach Your Dog to Behave", "Dog Training by Bash", "DogSpeak", "CatSpeak", "Your Dream Dog: A Guide to Choosing the Right Breed" and his latest book StarPet "How to Make Your Pet a Star," as well as a video/DVD "Teach Your Dog to Behave."

## ***President's Column***

*Ranny Green*

Unless you've been on another planet the last two years, you've undoubtedly read about plagiarism and distorted circulation figures at some of America's most revered daily newspapers.

As a 43-year professional journalist I cringe whenever I read about such an incident. I learned long ago: Never say never or it will come back and kick you in the butt.

Well, I'm here to tell you I thought it would never happen at the Seattle Times, a newspaper for which I have been a staffer 33 years. Our newsroom was in shock a year ago when one of our esteemed business columnists admitted plagiarizing content in a major story and resigned.

This prompted a wide-sweeping re-examination of The Times' standards, which must, as the newspaper's new Code of Ethics stipulates, be "above reproach."

When I assumed the presidency of DWAA in March I floated the idea of a Code of Ethics for this organization with several members. Why not? Isn't this the premier group of dog writers in the United States? If so, could it stand the same scrutiny and ethics guidelines a major newspaper staff imposes upon itself?

While I wished I could answer yes, I came away convinced that I couldn't. As The Seattle Times' Code of Ethics says, "A newspaper is no ordinary business. Our special role in society rises on the pillars of the First Amendment. We inform and protect the public without fear or favor, and must guard against the appearance of fear or favor. Our reputation, and our very existence, relies on public trust."

While most major newspapers operate on that premise, DWAA— as an umbrella group of writers, artists, photographers, all of who are basically independent contractors when it comes to affiliation — cannot.

That means ethics falls on each of us individually. We have ourselves to face in the mirror each morning. Is the story we're working on totally correct? Is it *all* my own work? Is every quote totally in context and attributed?

As they say, your byline and 25 cents — inflation has taken that up to \$2 or \$3 on some fronts — will buy you a cup of coffee. Take my word for it: Few readers remember bylines. They'll remember the story, might even remember the name of the dog featured, but the writer's identity, well, forget it.

At a large newspaper we have the luxury of a lead editor and usually two copy editors reading and when needed re-crafting a piece under tight deadline to give it more impact and smoother reading.

Granted, not all DWAA members have that luxury, but that's no reason we cannot subject ourselves to the highest standards possible. Before your piece hits print – whether it's in a local or national club newsletter or small-town or major metro newspaper, run it past someone you trust who is familiar with the subject. Maybe, his or her fresh pair of eyes will catch something that will cause you later embarrassment if it's incorrect. We are usually our own worst copy editors, simply because we've looked at the piece too often and too long.

When most people make mistakes in a letter or an article, probably a handful of readers will know it. When a journalist at a major newspaper does, upwards of 1 to 2 million might see it.

While accuracy is critical, honesty is equally important when it comes to priorities. Honesty's boundaries are widespread and within that mix are conflict of interest or impropriety of accepting a gift or free travel from an individual or company who may serve to gain from your writing later.

Some of you are probably thinking where is this guy coming from? Everyone offers free samples, meals and sometimes even transportation and hotel payment.

Certainly, if you are doing a thorough and legitimate review of a product or group of products that would be acceptable by almost anyone's set of rules. But to simply accept an item without any intent to review it is totally unethical by most major newspapers' standards.

So what do we do at The Times when they are sent to us unsolicited? Many are returned immediately to the manufacturer or public-relations firm that mailed them. Others are donated to local charities.

Again, it comes down what's right and what's wrong.

Here are several items from the new Seattle Times Code of Ethics that you might find of interest:

- Staff members should not use their connections with The Times to receive any benefit or to their advantage in commercial transactions or for other personal gain.
- Often family members and personal friends have appropriate ties to businesses, groups or activities that are in the news. Times staff members should talk about these ties with their supervisors to avoid appearances of bias.

- Our profession demands impartiality as well as the appearance of impartiality. Public political activity puts that at risk, and is discouraged. Free trips are prohibited except in the most rare of circumstances, and then only with the approval, as appropriate, of the editor, managing editor or editorial-page editor. The Times will pay all expenses – transportation, lodging, meals and incidentals – involved in travel for news coverage or background information. If airlines or cruise firms won't accept payment, such trips will not be taken.
- Staff members may not use their Times connections to solicit trips or special press rates or press fares from airlines or other transport or from travel organizations, hotels, agencies and domestic or foreign governments.
- Reporters, photographers and editors assigned to cover sports, art, political or professional events may accept free access to these events for the sole purpose of covering a story or writing a review. It is improper for staff members who are not on assignment to attend events as nonpaying spectators or accept free meals provided by sports, political, arts or other news source organizations.

The temptation is there often. While writing a pet column for The Times, I turned down two free trips to Europe and countless ones about this country, offered by pet-industry firms. Sure, it would have been nice to see another part of the country or world on someone else's nickel, but when writing a story or column afterward, it's not easy to be objective when critiquing a company's product after it paid all costs of the trip.

Many publications have no ethics policies in place, but usually require employees to check with the publisher or editor before accepting a major offering. That's totally unsatisfactory.

As a writer, your credibility and personal reputation are on the line daily. The instinct to be first with the story is inbred. But if the piece isn't totally fact-checked and balanced, it should be held for rewrite and more editing. The public doesn't tend to remember if you were first, but it won't let you forget if you were wrong.

Today, there is an element of distrust toward the media, as reflected by a Gallup poll in June that showed that only 28 percent of those responding had confidence in either television news or newspapers.

That should be a wakeup call for all of us – whether we're writing or broadcasting for print media, television or radio. Or whether we're writing for 200 or 2 million, we owe it to the readers – and ourselves – to get it right and act with dignity and professionalism.

## Writing Advice from Horace

By Jim Spencer

I thought of DWAA when I read the following advice from Homer, who as you know has long had a reputation as a big-time writer.

*“Saepe stilum verte, bonum libellum scripturus.”*

Translation: Invert the stilus often when you're about to write a good booklet (or more coherently but less literally, by turning the stilus often, you'll write a good booklet.) What magic thing can one do with an inverted stilus? Erase! Wonderful advice!

If you're thinking of contacting Horace about “stilus-ing” about better writing, forget it. Try as I may, I can't find an address, phone number, website, or e-mail address for him. I think he may even be dead. What a pity! Nevertheless, you can still use this one little gem in the newsletter, for his copyright has run out on it, so it's in the public domain.

(Note from Newsletter Goddess: Jim, you crack me up! You think he might be dead...I had to look this up: Horace was an ancient Roman poet who insisted that poetry should offer both pleasure and instruction, which is just what dog writers aim for.)

## Tips for Freelancers

By Phyllis DeGioia

Your Newsletter Goddess has spent some significant time freelancing over the past three years proofreading elementary school math textbooks for fun and profit. Okay, forget the fun, I was an English major and I don't do math (I am formally *not* allowed to do answer checking, which would be embarrassing if it didn't have such a blatantly realistic basis). I will say depositing the checks are a lot of fun. Anyway, by listening to the woman who signs my invoices talk to other freelancers who are not in the office, I have learned much about how freelancers can be lifesavers or major annoyances who nearly ruin a project.

*Be respectful of the manager's time, Part A.* First and foremost: when you call the office, do not chat about non-work things for more than a couple of minutes. Editors and managers are very busy, and they often use a large number of freelancers at the same time. If all of the freelancers chat about their weekends, that takes too much of the editor's time. It takes too much of his or her time. Be pleasant and personable, but don't go into overdrive with personal discussions that have no bearing on the project. The woman I work for is, in my opinion, nice to a fault: she will stop and talk and answer freelancer's questions at length, no matter how busy she is, no matter that she works 17 hours a day plus weekends.

*Understand the project before you start the fine work.* This is all part and parcel of “don't bother the manager excessively.” Better that you take some of the manager's time now instead of in the middle of the project, showing that you don't have a clue.

*Be respectful of the manager's time, Part B.* Your manager does not have time to answer four calls a day from you. Save up all your questions for one call or an e-mail instead of sending multiple e-mails or calling several times a day. Your goal is to be helpful, not to be an annoyance that makes you more trouble than you're worth no matter how good your work is. This goes for questions about the project, questions about invoices, questions about format and grammar. Do not interrupt for tiny stuff.

That said...*Finish your work.* You can swing too far in the “do not interrupt” area if you decide that rather than bother your manager, you will just leave a note with a question and ask your manager to fill it in. You are being paid to do the work, not to leave blanks. Better that you fill it in with something that’s not on target than leave a hole and assume someone else should fill it in.

*Look at your work before you turn it in.* This principle will always apply. Before you turn it in, look it over. The extra time will be well spent. You’ll catch typos, grammar mistakes, holes, things you should or should not have written.

*Be legible.* As a proofreader, I cannot stress this enough. Most DWAA members undoubtedly turn work in on an electronic document, so your handwriting doesn’t apply. But in the world of publishing there are still many situations where your handwriting counts significantly. In those situations, do not scrawl like a doctor’s signature and expect that the composition people will be able to read it correctly. You must still be neat in electronic documents even though reading your handwriting is not a concern.

*Be a professional at all times.* One year, in the middle of a horrendous project, a freelancer called the office on a Saturday to quit and say she wasn’t “able” to finish the work she’d been assigned. The freelancer was just going to walk away because she didn’t like the work and found it confusing. She had no idea that my manager was in the office most Saturdays and ended up with my manager answering the phone. So: be an adult. Be a professional. Do not back out of what you have agreed to do unless you have some really good reason, like you were just paralyzed in a car accident and will not be able to work for a year. Do not just walk away, do not burn bridges. Trust me, word gets around an industry and because of that one mistake, there will be other jobs you will lose in the future. Do not be late with your work because you have company. And don’t pull childish stuff like calling on a Saturday to quit in the middle of a project.

*Getting more work later.* If you want to continue working with this manager and company, say so, but do not say so 25 times in 3 weeks. If you keep calling the manager over the next two years to ask if there’s any work for you, and the manager keeps saying “not at this time,” take the hint and grasp the sad fact that they don’t like your work and don’t want to hire you again. After you’ve expressed interest, if you want to work for them again, do not be a pest.

## **2005 DWAA Writing Competition**

In the July issue, Terry Albert outlined this year’s writing competition, the rules, the timing, the categories, and the special awards. Remember, the work must have been published between September 1, 2004 and August 31, 2005. Entries must be postmarked by September 30.

Either refer to the July issue for specific details, or go to [www.dwaa.org](http://www.dwaa.org) for details. If you have questions, email the contest chair Terry Albert at [terryalbert@cox.net](mailto:terryalbert@cox.net).

## 2005 CWA Conference Co-Sponsored by DWAA See you in San Francisco!

The Cat Writers Association Inc.'s 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference will be held in Foster City, California (just south of San Francisco) on Friday November 18 to Sunday November 20, 2005. Please see last month's issue for details, or go to [www.catwriters.org](http://www.catwriters.org). Highlights will include writing seminars, editor/agent appointments; an autograph party for attending authors, the Cat Fanciers' Association International Cat Show, and a field trip to the world famous San Francisco SPCA. Of course there will be sequins and splash at the banquet, which is always a highlight of the occasion.

Don't forget the **DWAA meeting** Thursday, November 17, at 7 p.m.

### Therapy Hunter

*by Gail C. Parker*

Some of you may already know that I write a pet therapy column for the Irish Setter Club of America's Memo magazine. It started out just as my sharing stories of my Irish Setters' adventures in pet therapy. Soon, I was meeting other people (via the online SettersL list) who also had Irish Setters that were involved in pet therapy. One of these Irish is Hunter-Champion Rainwood Liaison. Hunter and his person, Kim Kleinschmidt, found about his talent quite by accident while visiting the family of an autistic boy named Marc. Marc is helped by a state certified worker so that he may be able to go to school and be a productive member of society. He was doing well but, once Hunter got involved real progress was made. Autistic children get overwrought or over-excited and respond well to "squishing"-where someone sandwiches them between a sofa or floor and themselves. Marc, it was discovered, reacts much better to this part of his lessons when Hunter does the squishing. The amazing part is that Hunter understands when he is supposed to do it and knows how! This is with no training in working with children like Marc.

Hunter is good with Marc and such a help with his progress, that the therapist asked Kim if she would bring Hunter to the sessions and let him use her dog. She waits upstairs and Hunter is on his own with the worker and Marc.

This has been going on for some months now. Their latest achievement has been getting Marc to eat meat. Kim told me that autistic children suffer from "sensory overload." "Eating meat is extremely difficult for them," she added. He has fought it all his young life. Marc is nine years old. Because of the diet he limits himself to, he could be lacking in necessary nutrition. Enter Hunter. Marc refused even a small bite of hot dog (sorry folks, I'm with Marc on that one! :-)) so Hunter reached over and helped himself. No self-respecting Setter would let good food go to waste. Marc thought that was neat. He wanted to feed Hunter some hot dog. The therapist called for Kim to ask her if it was all right for Hunter to have the hot dog. So they offered Marc a deal-for every two bites he took, he could give Hunter one bite of hot dog. It worked!! They were small bites but Marc ate. Soon, he wasn't even gagging on the hot dog, he was so excited to be feeding Hunter. When his mother arrived home, Marc exclaimed: "Mom I LIKE hot dogs!!" She almost cried when she heard that.

Do you think Hunter knew what he was doing? After the things Kim has told me about this dog's amazing work with Marc in the past, I would not be a bit surprised.

## **Please Contact the DWAA Secretary If You Are Listed**

Will the following people please get in touch with the Secretary ASAP:

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Beverly Ruszel Cene  
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Gini Denninger  
Dana Goff  
Alan Gomberg  
Kenneth Marden  
Billie McFadden  
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Eamon Riley  
Kathy Rock  
Robin Schwartz  
Jeannette Shields  
Joe Stahlkuppe  
Julia Szabo  
Dr. Louis Vine  
Kathy Dannel Vitcak  
William Wegman

If any member knows of the whereabouts of any of these DWAA members please ask them to contact me: Pat Santi, Secretary, [Rhydowen@aol.com](mailto:Rhydowen@aol.com). 610-384-2436

## **New Nominating Committee**

David Frei, Mordecai Siegal, and Pat Santi are members of the new nominating committee. This committee has been approved by the Board.

## **Roster Changes**

*Changes:*

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## Book Reviews

*By your Newsletter Goddess*

**Having Fun with Agility**, Margaret H. Bonham, Wiley/Howell Book House, \$14.99

One of the best aspects of any book about agility is the photographs of dogs in action: ears flying, tails high, racing to beat the clock and their own person record. The sport's excitement can be seen easily in any photos. The only problem here is that there aren't enough photos, and too many of the same dogs are seen repeatedly. But they sure are cute!

Since the book is about having fun with agility, it's written for beginners and casual fanciers. Bonham explains the basics of the sport, how each piece of equipment is used and how it should be approached, beginning training, and how to design a course. She also has fun herself giving ideas on how to have an agility party, including invitations and recipes for dog treats. The first of the three parts is about learning agility, the second is about having fun and playing games and enjoying yourselves, and the third is about health and nutrition.

**Good Dogkeeping: Today's Guide to Caring for Your Best Friend**, Diane Morgan, T.F.H., \$16.95

What a great book! This is a smart, basic book about taking care of a dog, but it doesn't just include what to feed, behavior issues, training and how to exercise and groom. It also covers traveling, safety, first aid, breed-specific legislation, suing your veterinarian (sad but sometimes appropriate). Some chapters are titled "Keeping Your Dog's Temper" (aggression); Keep a Dog with a Disability; a Home Health Check, and Keeping Your Dog Free of Pests (the parasitic kind, not the neighbor's cat), and my favorite title, "Keeping Your Dog Single: The Value of Neutering." She even covers things like skunk remedies that don't work (forget the tomato juice). In addition to having a creative approach, Morgan also writes well. This book is an excellent gift for dog lovers, particularly for new owners or people who haven't had a dog share their lives for a while but also a joy for long-time dog owners.

**Star Pet: How to Make Your Dog a Star**, Bash Dibra, Pocket Books, \$15.00

If you've ever wanted to know about or learn how dogs and cats get into film and advertising, this is the book for you. All those cute dogs and cats that you see on TV commercials, movies, television shows, and print ads had a person who knew how to get them in the business (well, with the exception of the original Benji, who was adopted specifically for a movie). So instead of basic training exercises to teach your dog to do something, here you see it in context of a script. Most training books don't consider showing you how to teach your dog to jump into your arms, open the door, or drop something in a box. Most cat books don't discuss the "jump to the shoulder move." Dibra explains how to train your dog and cat for some of these things, and it's a lot of fun. It's also good for some basic training that everyday folks like you and me can use. Dibra also discusses creating a pet portfolio, pet health insurance, animal-actors' rights, and offers some fun anecdotes on what the business is like.

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