

The Human-Canine Connection

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RUFFDRAFTS

the DOG WRITERS ASSOCIATION of AMERICA

FALL 2021





Ruff Drafts

Send all material to Merrie Meyers
rdeditor@dogwriters.org

ISSUE DEADLINES

Spring, April 2
Summer, July 3
Fall, October 2
Winter, January 1

OFFICERS

THERESE BACKOWSKI

PRESIDENT

theresebackowski1@gmail.com

SUSAN WILLETT

VICE PRESIDENT

susan@lifewithdogsandcats.com

MARSHA M. PUGH

TREASURER

marsha_pugh01@comcast.net

EMELISE BAUGHMAN

SECRETARY

emelseb@yahoo.com

CAROL BRYANT

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

fidoseofreality@gmail.com

IDA W. ESTEP, ESQ.

LEGAL COUNSEL

iwestep@earthlink.net

BOARD MEMBERS

LISA BEGIN-KRUYSMAN

lbkauthor@gmail.com

CAROLINE COILE, PH.D.

ccoile@windstream.net

PAT CRUZ

lacruz928@optonline.net

JOEL GAVRIELE GOLD

dr.joelgold@gmail.com

KAREN HARBERT

aelwydcwc@aol.com

JILL SCHILP

jillschilp@gmail.com

LAURIE C. WILLIAMS, CPDT-KA, CDTI

lauriecwilliamsk0@gmail.com

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Facebook: Lisa Begin-Kruysman,
Shelly Bueche

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WEBMASTER

Chris Roy

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

I

'M WORRIED.

As most of you know, we were forced to cancel the writing contest. I don't believe that has ever occurred in the history of this group. Here's what happened... after enduring a long search for a chairperson, two wonderful people volunteered to act as co-chairs. They were magnificent, organized and enthusiastic. Unfortunately, both had to resign due to no fault of their own, or ours. That put us behind schedule...way behind.

The Writing Contest is a monumental amount of work. It requires lots of time and many committee volunteers and judges to function. And so, my search for a chair began anew. Eventually, a gift came from above and a knowledgeable and talented person accepted the position. With the chairperson position finally filled, and though we

have many loyal members who always judge, that just wasn't enough. We were nearly out of time to recruit the 49 or so more judges needed for the contest. Obviously, we cannot accept entry fees and not judge submissions with honesty and integrity. We can't hold the contest if we don't have enough people to judge. Now, that chairperson resigned, so we are back to the beginning. We need a chairperson or co-chairs as well as judges and there is a stipend. Now you may understand why I am worried.

We need to have this contest. It's part of our core mission. Our club constitution states, "The objects of the Association shall be:

- (a) To promote the interests of dogs through news and informational channels.
- (b) To provide a medium for the exchange of ideas, methods, and professional courtesies among its members.
- (c) To promote a high standard of ethics in the writing, collecting, and disseminating of dog news.
- (d) To promote and support an Annual Writing Competition. (Adopted 2004)

We all lead busy lives, but we really need more member involvement. Perhaps you didn't understand how the contest works or how much your help is needed. In fact, some members even asked what their dues would be used for this year, since there wouldn't be a contest! Our dues only pay for things like the website maintenance, graphic design for this newsletter and other everyday expenses. There is no way that our dues could ever cover the cost of the writing contest. We work hard to recruit contest sponsors to cover the cost of the recognition and prizes. There are many audited treasurer's reports available should you want to read them. In the interest of transparency, we also publish the treasurer's report in Ruff Drafts annually.

It is time for each of us to consider why we joined this organization, and decide just how and where we can contribute. Judging the writing contest is simple. One has only to read and fill in a sheet with a couple of numbers.

If you can help with next year's contest, or, if you have questions, please contact me at theresebackowski@gmail.com. Your opinion and ideas are important to me. I am available for questions, comments or suggestions.

Therese Backowski

Therese Backowski

DWAA President



Therese Backowski
and her dogs, Lucy
(L) and Hank

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Fall 2021

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Meet the Authors of the DWAA

An ongoing feature presenting
some of our talented authors



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

D

EAR FELLOW WRITERS,

The theme of this issue of Ruff Drafts is the Human Canine-Connection. Many of you have shared how you developed these bonds with your dogs. As a dog owner, I've always been the one to decide when a dog was right for me. Never has a dog chosen me. Not, at least, until this summer. As you can see from my photo, we added to our pack.

It started simply enough. A neighbor asked if my dog, Sunny, 14, might want a buddy to hang out with. Her family had been caring for Danny Boy, her father's 11-year-old Bichon, since he and his wife passed away several years prior. I didn't think Sunny would be interested. He'd finally come into his own, three years after his companion passed away. He has playmates, but no dog that's around full time.

Danny's situation was challenging. Since his elderly owners passed away, he'd been shuttled between the homes of various family members. Danny has mobility issues. His back left leg is weaker than his right, so he waddles or hops to get from place to place.

With the pandemic winding down, his current caregiver, my neighbor's niece, had to go back to teaching in the classroom, and her toddler was using Danny to "pullup" as she began to crawl and walk. He was getting attention, but not the kind he deserved. As a result, Danny spent his days curled up in his bed, watching rather than doing.

I didn't think Sunny would want to expand our twosome, but I agreed to foster Danny until Bichon rescue could find him a "forever" home. Meanwhile, Danny had other ideas.

After a couple of days, Sunny was barking at Danny with every move he made. I called my neighbor and said the dogs needed a time out. She agreed to let Danny hangout with her two female dogs overnight. I was planning to go out for the evening, so, before I left, I carried Danny down to her house. It's not a far walk, but in the few days he'd been with us, he'd not been able to cover the distance during our daily walks.

On my way out for the evening, I drove past my neighbor's house. Danny was standing stiffly at her gate. It broke my heart. When I got to my

destination, I texted her. "It broke my heart to see him just standing there." "Yes, I know he's out there, waiting for you," she responded. "But, not to worry, if he doesn't come inside on his own, I'll bring him inside before nightfall."

The next morning, as I was standing on my deck, sipping coffee, my neighbor brought her dogs, and Danny, outside to relieve themselves. Danny busied himself but kept looking back towards my neighbor's house. As soon as she turned to go inside, he started waddling up the road. Every minute or so, he looked back, as if he was making sure his "escape" wasn't detected. I continued watching his ascent. After about 10 minutes, Danny reached my house. By the time he got to my walkway, it was obvious that Danny decided he was moving in. He announced his arrival himself at my gate. "I'm home," he barked.

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Merrie Meyers
with Sunny (l)
and Danny (r)





In Memoriam

Mary Bloom

Editor's Note: There is no way to accurately estimate Mary Bloom's impact on the individuals she met, photographed, worked with and advocated for. Bloom, 81, passed away peacefully, in Poughkeepsie, NY, on Tuesday, September 28, 2021. Thank you to the numerous members who submitted information about her.

S

HE WAS A PHOTOGRAPHER extraordinaire. She focused her photography on the bond between people and animals with special emphasis on dogs, both the fancied and the forgotten.

Early in her career she was the only woman to photograph controversial Seal hunts off the coast of Newfoundland and the Orkney Islands in northern Scotland.

As a staff photographer for the Westminster Kennel Club, beginning in 1995, she was known for being able to coax just winners into that one-in-a-million shot. And she would not be denied that camera angle; artfully maneuvering around other members of the press to position herself in the ring.

In 2002, and 2010, she received DWAA's Distinguished Service Award which recognizes the person who by excellence in photography, exemplary conduct, public communication and professional excellence, best promotes the interest and knowledge of dogs. She was the 2014 inductee into DWAA's Hall of Fame for her lifetime achievement in photography specializing in dogs and their importance in our lives.

Her additional contributions to animal welfare include 35 years of involvement and support for the ASCPA-NYC and the Long Island, NY, North Shore Animal League.

In addition to her canine contributions, Bloom spent two decades as photographer-in-residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the largest Gothic cathedral in the world, located in N.Y.C. There she documented important environmental and religious activities as well as the arts for the Cathedral archives and publications department. This work took her all over the world to cover Global Forums on the Environment.

Her devotion to the animal world inspired two children's books by children's book author and illustrator Alike, titled *At Mary Bloom's* and *Overnight at Mary Bloom's*.

A few days after her passing, Mary's family shared these comments on her Facebook page:

"There was a beautiful sunset that evening in the Hudson River Valley with all the colors of the rainbow. As Mary said, she was 'packed and ready.'

"She lived an extraordinary life. She had no fear, and once said when she's afraid of something,

RY R



she runs toward it. We hope that her work endures. We know that the unlimited number of stories among all of us who knew or met her will.

“Mary chose Take the Lead to accept any memorial donations in her name. <https://www.takethelead.org/product/donation/>

“With lots of love and gratitude, Mary’s family”

Tributes were published in traditional and social media, including the AKC Gazette and the New York Times, as well as on DWAA’s Facebook page. She was a cherished member of our organization and will be sorely missed. ■

BLOOM BLOOM

▲
Mary Bloom and
her Cardigan Pie,
Photo credit: Tina
Bromberg



KATE J. KULIGOWSKI

Altruistic Acts

A

S AN ALBUQUERQUE TRANSPLANT from a cloudy, humid, Michigan city, Carrie basked in the Duke City's spectacular azure skies and their clean dry mountain air. But she considered this bonus to be diminished by its residents' disrespect for the life of animals. Because of lenient, unenforceable or non-existent animal ordinances, the streets throughout this city were littered with abandoned or lost dogs and cats in various stages of hunger, disease and abuse. She spent many of her days off using intuition to guide her to those areas where her could assist one of the city's many throw-aways. An avid follower of "Eldad of Hope for Paws Animal Rescue," Carrie was up-to-date on proven emergency and rescue techniques.

On a windy day in January of 2021, she stopped to gas-up at a service station and spotted the carcass of an un-collared orange tabby in the trashed and weeded vacant lot to the east. As she used her spade from her trunk to bury the poor creature, a horrified onlooker, who failed to understand, asked, "Why in the world do you want to take the time to handle (even with gloves) and bury that thing? Ugh!"

▲
Duke with Sissy
pre-surgery. Photo
by Sindy Black.

Carrie's explanation was simple. "It shows respect for a deceased animal to remove it so that it's body doesn't continue to be subject to further violation. The finality of a departed animal can affect many of us who deeply care about their lives. If it is a pet, I use my iPhone to capture its image and tags (if existing) and email it with its burial location to Albuquerque Animal Welfare Department (AAWD). It is kinder for owners of lost pets to be aware of what happened to their pet rather than continue to worry."

Continuing her drive home, Carrie's Prius encountered a traffic tie-up on a foothills state road. Her impatient glances revealed cars parked on the shoulder and a group of people gathered near an SUV whose passenger door was open. Drivers of stopped vehicles noted that a pit bull terrier had run into the heavily traveled road and been hit, even though the driver of the SUV had immediately applied his brakes. Both the Albuquerque Police Department and AAWD had been phoned. Her further inquiries about rescue experience among the onlookers was met with silent but concerned faces; it seemed nobody knew

how to help further. Quickly Carrie gathered some rescue tools (a blanket, lead and welder's mittens) from her SOS box and approached the crowd. Eyes closed, head laying on the inside of the SUV door lay the young, black unmoving canine, hip and leg bleeding.

After slipping the lead around its neck, she asked one of the men to hold the dog's head. Then, she handed the welder's mitts to another man and instructed him to slowly lift the dog while Carrie and a third man slid the blanket under the dog making a sling, enabling them to carry him to her car, gently placing him in the back seat. She was grateful that this crowd had not just passed by this accident but taken the time to stop and help. They are heroes, she thought.

Planning to take this injured pup to the nearest emergency veterinarian clinic, Carrie closed the back door and slid into the driver's seat just as an AAWD officer pulled his truck next to her. He asked that she follow him to the city's Eastside shelter, three miles due west, so that a staff member would check for a chip to locate the dog's owner. Luckily, this dog's savvy owner had taken the life-saving measure of chipping him. His name was Duke. Her name was Cindy. Easily reached by phone, this lovely blond was nearby, driving through her neighborhood, searching for her escaped dog. Cindy's joy at hearing he was found and with AAWD was short-lived when she learned of his condition. After meeting Carrie and the officer in the Eastside parking lot, Cindy drove Duke to the nearest veterinary emergency clinic, which offered only palliative treatment (exam, x-rays, prescription) exceeding \$900. Duke meant the world to her family. She was forced to use her mother's credit card.

That vet advised that euthanasia would probably be the humane choice for Duke. Emotionally distraught, Cindy, a recent German transplant, needed help and asked her new acquaintance Carrie if she knew of alternative treatments for Duke.

After contacting others in the area canine rescue network, Carrie passed on what she learned.

"Dr. Danois Salas, highly respected veterinarian and owner of TLC Animal Clinic is reputed to have exceptional orthopedic surgical skills and a tender spot for animal owners in need of financial arrangements/ discounts. Also, he is a Fear-free Certified Professional, which speaks to his dedica-

tion to humane treatment and assures you that he will your pet with respect."

Sindy arranged for a consultation with Dr. Salas. His use of x-rays provided a pictorial explanation as to why Duke would require surgery on both hips. Termed as FHO (femoral head oterectomy), the procedures (to be performed two months apart) involved removing the head and neck of both femurs. Over time "false joints" (scar tissue) would develop to act as cushions. In spite of Dr. Salas' generously discounted expenses, Cindy's meager bank account could not afford their hit. An enterprising Carrie came to rescue once again, helping Sindy set up a GoFundMe website which successfully raised enough for both surgeries.

Although pandemic guidelines kept the two from meeting in person, communication between the two women concerning Duke's health continued as they waited for January 15, the date of his first surgery. Because Carrie had become so important in the lives of Cindy's family, Sindy thought it important to share her story of Duke with Carrie.

"I first met our Duke because of my uncontrollable soft spot for new puppies...not to own as I am the employed, single mom of two busy boys and three finicky but loveable felines. However, I am unable to resist puppies: their snuggly dependence and sweet-smelling puppy breath.

"Several of us had accepted the invite to the home of our coworker Hannah to revel in the antics of her recently born seven black pit bull puppies, whom she was offering for sale. Their squirmy little bodies pulled with fervor on the tits of their mother Evie without the slightest idea of the joy and companionship they would soon bring to their new fortunate families. While the group oohed and aahed, I found my interest wandering to a dark corner in the adjoining room where an adult black pittya was scrunched up, trying to be invisible. Letting my curiosity and concern for canines in trouble get the best of me, I slowly made my way to his hidey-hole. His cautious glance revealed that he was not too sure of me or my intentions, so I began softly speaking to him, rambling on about what a handsome dog he was. Not that he understood me, but his tail made movements that could almost be interpreted as the beginning of a wag. Then he looked me straight in the eyes...wowie!



TIPS & TACTICS

MERRIE MEYERS

How *to* Increase Media Coverage

ARE YOU WONDERING HOW to increase media coverage for your newest publication, research or product? A survey conducted by Propel, a PR software platform, indicates extensive use of media pitches, despite limited success.

The survey analyzed more than one million media pitches that Propel users sent to journalists—and used the data from all of those that were opened in their report. The most recent survey (Q2 2021) of media responsiveness revealed that most pitches are opened quickly, but few receive responses. Approximately 35% are opened in the first minute, more than half, 52.45% are opened within 10 minutes, and 82% within four hours of arrival. However, the numbers don't tell the whole story. Despite the favorable open stats, journalists responded to only 3.27% of the pitches received. With so many pitches being sent, competition for top of the mind awareness is stiff. On average, it could take about 31 media pitches to get a response.

Survey findings indicate the efforts that are most effective at generating media interest are relevance, specific and exclusive.

Relevance

The data show a direct connection between key topic categories and journalist responses. Trending topics include emerging social, legal, government and political issues, technology, family, and parenting, and figuring out the “new normal.”

Specificity

To craft a pitch that is opened, read, and responded to provide information (data and examples) that the journalists can use to tell the story. Customize the content for specific publications by becoming familiar with the platform's content. Allow enough time for the pitch to be run up the chain of command for approvals.

Exclusivity

The survey found the greatest degree of success occurs when a story is pitched to less than 10 outlets and contains customized, relevant information. For major announcements, an email blast to general media can be used as a follow up to the key pitch to specific journalists.

With these challenges to get media coverage through pitching alone, the best way to secure media coverage is to use a combination of approaches and media types. The four types of media are owned, shared, earned, and paid. They start with the media platforms that are most easily controlled and emanate outward. Think of them as the ripples a stone makes in a pond.

- **Owned media** is media content that you prepare, and it appears on platforms you totally control such as websites and blogs.
- **Earned media** is media coverage that results from those pitches. Its publicity provided to you by others and can result in a newspaper, trade publication or magazine/e-zine

Altruistic

► CONTINUED from pg 9

The connection was made! Moving cautiously, I sat next to him, let him smell me, then stroked him softly. “You are such a sweet fellow.”

“Suddenly he jerked away and began to whine. At first, I attributed this to my moving too quickly, trying too hard. But then I heard Hannah, ‘Carrie, don’t bother with that loser. Even though Duke is one of Evie’s pups and the sire of the litter you just saw, my husband Lucas and I have no use for him.’ I guess Hannah thought I would follow her out of the room, but I remained next to this frightened dog, Duke, speaking softly, petting him.

“Not to be taken lightly, Hannah returned, shaking her head at me and pointing her finger at Duke, firmly demanding, ‘Out, Duke. Outside! Now!’ Noticing that he limped on his way outside, I queried Hannah. ‘It’s his hip. It was displaced when he was struck by our truck last year. Our veterinarian was wrong when he assured us that it would pop back into its socket without treatment.

“Once home that evening, I shared my thoughts about the visit with my two inquisitive sons, Mason 7 and Dre 15. We hadn’t given thought to introducing a dog into our household because our cats, Sissy, aged 17, and Milo and Wilson both aged 11, were so well adjusted. However, the sight of Duke, limping and cowering in the corner haunted my dreams that night, prompting me to ask Hannah’s permission to take Duke to the park occasionally. This was the beginning of our periodic visits, which developed into weekly playtimes with the boys and ice cream treats. Duke added a rewarding dimension to our lives.

“But we grew more concerned each time we saw Duke, he had lost even more weight and seemed more skittish, less frisky. A few months later, Hannah announced that they had decided to rid themselves of Duke, taking him to the pound...was I even slightly interested in adopting him? Without hesitation and with tears in my eyes, Duke, our Duke now, was in my car traveling to his new, loving and forever home...our home.

“In spite of the many ugly stories written about his breed, I knew that he would be good for our family and our family would be good for him. As I opened the car door in front of the house, I slipped the lead over his handsome head, looked him in his eyes, sternly and slowly instructed him to be calm and cool. As I opened the front door, the three cats ran to greet us. I literally held my breath. Sissy sassed right up to him and smacked

him right in the nose, letting Duke know that she was the first lady in this house. Duke turned, gave me a quizzical look but continued walking into his new home, where he was immediately enlightened: our couch with matching chenille chairs served as command centers for the cats, Wilson, a tabby, and Milo, our Main-coon. So, he enthusiastically leaped on the remaining couch: lumpy and old but unoccupied ...now his. In no time, he would confiscate my bed.

“Totally attached to my boys, Duke was also popular with most everyone (toddlers to seniors) he met during their daily trips to our nearby park. An endless bounty of treats and scheduled meals of nutritious Blue Buffalo helped him to gain a badly needed ten pounds. This playful three-year-old canine made our pandemic-shuttered hours more endurable, always pestering us to ‘love me, pet me, scratch me, talk to me.’ And when we did, time flew! Almost inseparable, Duke became Mason’s unshakable shadow, his “guardy-guy.”

After hearing Sindy’s story, Carrie understood the depth of which this family respected “their Duke.” The January surgery by Dr. Salas was successful and the healing of his right hip went without a glitch. After six weeks, the family began gradually resuming their treasured strolls in the nearby park. But caution was in order; his trauma and pain were so fresh that walking near traffic caused Duke to shake and whine. It took several more weeks before he was once again greeting his old friends and assuming his nanny duties for neighbors.

However, taking Duke for his second surgery in late April (successful) proved to be difficult. His trepidation was still so fierce that Sindy and crew were forced to muscle him into Dr. Salas’ office. Although his left hip needed fixing, his memory did not.

Finally! A celebration for the success of both surgeries, While Sindy provided the edible treats for both the four-and two-legged, Carrie presented the family with a photo-pillow featuring Duke with his best bud, Sissy.

It took the combination of these altruistic acts by a special stranger, a dedicated veterinarian and a committed family to completely change the once grim forecast of the life of this fortunate pit-bull, Duke. We are grateful for such character. ■

MEMBER NEWS

GWEN ROMACK

Training Hoomans *is a Ruff Job,* *but Somedoggy Has to Do It*



FINN, A VIZSLA/BEAGLE MIX, and his transcriber, Gwen Romack, recently took home 3 shiny new awards for the first book in their series, “The Finn Chronicles,” and their spin-off children’s activity book, “Fun with Finn: All About Dogs.”

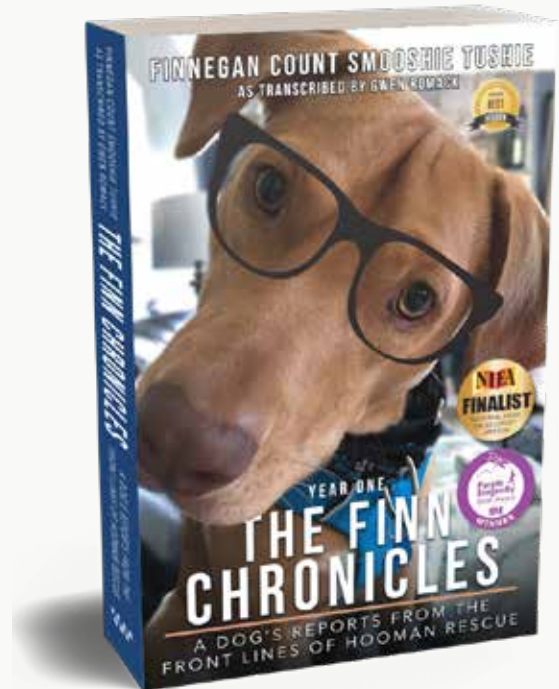
Gwen was delighted with her recognition from both the National Indie Excellence Awards (category: Humor) and the Purple Dragonfly Awards for the first book in the annual series, published in July 2020, “The Finn Chronicles: Year One” received more recognition from the Purple Dragonfly Awards for the category “Children’s Activity Book/Educational.” The books in the series recount life hilariously from a dog doing his best to train and manage his rescue hoomans.

After they took off in popularity, the duo decided to partner with a veterinarian, a rescue organization, a teacher, and a mom to create an engaging and educational coloring/activity book for Finn’s youngest fans.

For more information on Finn and his books, go to:



<https://linktr.ee/gwenromack>



RALPH PROTSIK

the AKITA

Hachikō the name that he bore

An Akita of eminent lore

In sunshine and rain

He would wait for a train

And a man who died seasons before



MEMBER NEWS

LOREN SPIOTTA-DIMARE



DWAA MEMBER and published author, Loren Spiotta-DiMare, can thank her DNA, partly, for her success as a published author. Spiotta-DiMare is the author of a dozen children's books and three reference books for pet owners. However, Loren is the second pub-

lished author in her family. Her mother is also a published author. After threatening to write her life's story for several years, Jeanne Pace Spiotta completed *My Life in Fabulous New Jersey* at age 81!

Loren and her sister never thought she'd make good on her promise, but she did. A cousin helped edit the copy and Loren located a designer and printer to create her book.

"I've been teaching Introduction to Book Publishing classes for several years. I always show my students my mother's book and say, 'If Mom can produce a book at 81, you can certainly do the same.'"

Mrs. Spiotta, now age 92, and Lauren recently held a book signing at Brandywine, the elder woman's assisted living community at the New Jersey Shore. To increase interest, Brandywine's activities director produced and circulated a promotional postcard.

This is a second such activity for the women. A few years ago, Loren's mother took it upon herself and organized a book talk at the Belmar Library for the mother-daughter team.



From the Editor

► CONTINUED from pg 5

And truly he was.

P.S. Two months later, Danny and Sunny keep each other company on walks and while napping. Danny zooms around the house. He's learned to hoist himself onto low furniture, climb some shallow steps and yip with joy over treats. Recently, my neighbor visited her family and gave them an update. "I hate to say it," she shared, "but Danny doesn't miss you guys. He's a different dog now." Hearing this, they just smiled.

Tips & Tactics

► CONTINUED from pg 13

story, coverage or interviews on a broadcast platform or even shares from one platform to another. The benefit to this type of media is it is delivered through a third-party's platform which carries greater credibility.

- **Shared media** encompasses social media, which is prepared content that interfaces with key audiences. This includes internal audiences such as employees and suppliers, and external audiences, such as customers, influencers, policymakers, etc. These platforms, which include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and so on, are strong "go to" placements for important news content.
- **Paid media** is prepared ads that are inserted into other platforms such as social media advertising or sponsored content, such as Facebook and YouTube ads.

Using a combination of media types to promote your content can also create a push-pull effect with journalists. Seeing your content in other locations can heighten or reinforce reporter interest. Although the process is most often completed in the order shown above, owned, earned, shared, paid, its often referred to as PESO, because it's easier to remember.

Constructing a strategic plan to push out your information takes time, along with a lot of trial and error. Don't get discouraged if your initial efforts don't achieve the goal. Every attempt helps identify the approaches that don't generate interest, narrowing down your path toward future success. ■

ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE

Beauty *and the* Beast



I'VE ALWAYS BEEN a "big dog" and "little dog" family. A German shepherd service dog named Sheba for me, and a little dog for my kids to snuggle. And yes, my husband and I snuggled the little one too. Sheba was my worker dog and our red dachshund mix, Oscar Mayer Weiner Dog, was her small sidekick. (Okay, the name isn't very original, but he really looked like an Oscar!)

Oscar was a surprise to be sure. And no, it wasn't love at first sight. At the time, we had three dogs, plus our housemate owned a standard poodle. Needless to say, the last thing we needed was another dog.

We live in San Diego and my cleaning lady, Maria, lives in Mexico. She showed up one day with "Shorty," and asked me to keep him. She had rescued the stray from across the border but couldn't keep him herself. I reluctantly had to refuse. The landlord didn't know we were way past the "two pet maximum" lease clause. We were already pushing our luck.

Maria begged "Please take him"! Street dogs don't live long in Tijuana."

I replied, "Okay, but only until we can find him a good home."

Well, we all know how fast that can go south. I became another failed foster parent.

Oscar was wary at first, but he soon realized he'd struck gold. He made himself right at home and paid us back in kind. Despite his small size, he became a ferocious watch dog. He proved it when someone tried to break into my teenage daughter's second story bedroom one night. Little Oscar alerted us before the big dogs did! His growling and barking scared the intruder, who climbed back over the patio railing to the overhanging tree.

When the tree limb cracked, our intruder fell two stories down. The next morning, the blood all over the concrete patio told a frightening tale. Little Oscar strutted his stuff before my German shepherd and black lab, and even our small terrier had to admire his "cajones." We loved our brave Tijuana transplant even more.

As the newest dog in the family, Oscar outlived the others, except for my service dog Sheba. By this time the children were grown and gone, so it was only hubby, me, Sheba and Oscar.

Oscar Mayer always sat on my lap while I wrote. My 18-year-old pup was still bursting with health and his glossy coat and bright brown eyes showed it. But then cancer struck, and in three short months, my little guy was gone.

My husband waited for what he considered an appropriate mourning period, then said, "You should get another small dog."

My reply? "No way!"

I'd had enough gut-wrenching goodbyes. Watching Oscar being put down nearly did me in. My heart couldn't handle it anymore. I flat out refused, and I meant it. No new dogs. I still had my beloved Sheba. She was more than enough.

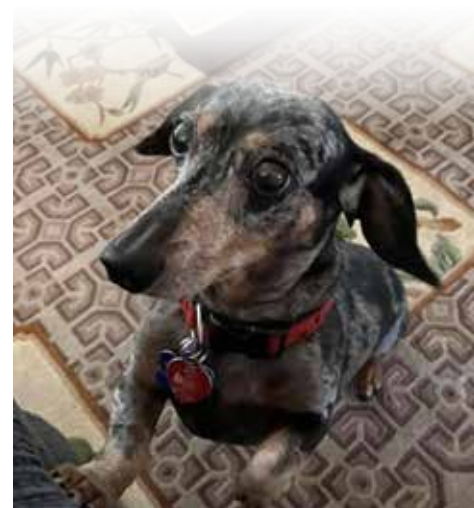
Then my stubborn Navy husband's military campaign kicked it. My email was flooded with photos of available dogs from shelters and rescue organizations. Next came the subtle remarks, which weren't so subtle at all.

"It's too quiet around here with just one dog," he said.

I miss sleeping with Oscar. He loved to snuggle."

"I hope no one tries to break in. Two dogs are better than one."

I've written many romance books, but I never used or believed that trite "Love at First Sight" shopworn cliché. I'm so glad I was proved wrong by a damn good man...and eleven wonderful pounds of dapple gray.



▲
Smokey

I wasn't about to be swayed, so he brought out the big guns.

"Fine. You don't have to get a new dog. I'm getting one for me."

Well, I certainly couldn't forbid that. So we went to a dachshund breeder, where a 6-year-old miniature dapple gray male named Smokey had been returned when his divorcing owners abandoned him. I had Sheba, The Beauty, with us to see if the two could get along. Smokey, The Beast, immediately attacked my leashed German shepherd with everything he had! I couldn't believe it! Sheba just looked down at him with disdain, and didn't even break her "Sit."

My husband quickly picked up the attack-dog Smokey and calmed him down. Then we noticed black specks under his coat - tons of black. Great, I thought. Flea dirt. Only I quickly realized it wasn't flea dirt; these were bite scabs from being rudely dumped in a huge pack of strange dachshunds. This confused, abandoned dog had been fighting for his food and his life, and even took on the threat of a German shepherd. His strong survival instinct was way off the charts.

This dog had heart!

THAT was my "Love at First Sight" moment. I took Smokey into my arms.

My husband met my gaze and asked, "Yes?"

"Oh, yes," I replied.

(I won't mention what I thought of the heartless breeder.)

Once home, hubby smugly admitted that Smokey was for me all along. I guess grief really did mess with my head because I'm usually not that slow. I should have seen right through his sneaky—but now welcome! —ploy.

So instead of Oscar, Smokey now cuddled contentedly in my lap. It took a full 3 months for the last of his terrible bite scabs to fall off.

When old age finally took Sheba soon after her thirteenth birthday, I was devastated. I debated whether to get a new service dog but decided against it. Knee replacement surgery and a VA-provided scooter took care of my mobility issues. But nothing could take care of the big hole in my heart.

Thank God I wasn't dog-less. Smokey continued warming my lap while I sat at my keyboard. We went for cheery walks in the park to see the ducks. He nestled up against me in bed at night. And Smokey's presence consoled my aching heart until I finally accepted that Sheba would never again nap under my desk while I wrote my stories.

Smokey's been with me for seven years now. I've written many romance books, but I never used or believed that trite "Love at First Sight" shopworn cliché. I'm so glad I was proved wrong by a damn good man...and eleven wonderful pounds of dapple gray. ■

BARBARA E. MAGERA

Rutledge

FROM THE FIRST TIME I saw you as a 6 month old puppy, I knew our bond would be strong. My fearless little clown was always ready to fetch. You allowed the little ones to run all over you, yet you played gently with them, making sure the puppies were having fun.

You delighted in teasing your littermate who coveted your stuffed bear. You managed to distract him so that the toy, previously in his mouth, was now in your possession.

As you grew older, your athletic skills matured. Despite running with several seasoned players, you negotiated curves and furniture to gain control of the ball, then carefully dropped the sphere within inches of my feet. You encouraged robust and prolonged play even though your playmates were pooped. Despite your strenuous show circuit schedule, you never lost your love for play.

One of my most fond memories was showing you at our national conformation event. During your debut at only 6 months old, you were not the least bit intimidated. While the other youngsters were nervous, your confidence was palpable. When you first entered the ring, the Judge could not take his eyes off you. Instead of requiring you to stack perfectly at all times, we both realized that as a puppy, you needed to have fun in the ring. You enthusiastically frolicked with "Mr. Rat," a black furry toy. Then, when it was your turn to stack, show and gait, you did this flawlessly before the discriminating Judge. Even at this first show, your playfulness and happiness mesmerized the crowd, particularly the judge who awarded you with your first win.

When we returned to our hotel room, I was exhausted but you were still wired from the day's events. You blasted out of our room to visit newly found friends down the hall. All the while, you tightly clenched your well deserved ribbon.

Later that night, instead of sleeping in your crate, you choose to cuddle with me in bed. Within minutes, you fell fast asleep and did not move from your original position. The night was filled with your gentle snores and occasional soft coos.

During your show career, you got many ribbons, points and accolades that you qualified for the Westminster Dog Show. Our team was betting on a gorgeous Blenheim Cavalier girl who was shown by an experienced handler. I was fortunate to show you in a competitive group of exhibitors, which included professional handlers. Despite the pressure, you focused and responded to my cues. This made you an instant star, as you were awarded Best of Winners. We were both ecstatic and "over the moon."

After your final show, we flew home to Charleston. Despite many delays and a tiring flight, you did not make a sound in your Sherpa bag, which was carefully nestled between my feet. When we finally landed, you deeply inhaled the sea coast air. When I brought you home, you carefully inspected each room to make sure of your surroundings. You bolted down the stairs to find your toy box. You frantically tossed toys around the room until you found your favorite one. Then you brought the toy to me for an enthusiastic game of fetch and catch. This game continued for quite a while until I decided that we both needed some nourishment.

We ate on our screen porch overlooking the river as we watched the setting sun and rising tide. Then, I caressed you in my arms. You licked my face with many kisses. With the full moon shining on our faces, we both fell asleep, content to finally have you back home with me. ■

Barbara E. Magera MD PharmD MMM (Caracaleeb) is a breeder and fancier of Cavalier King Charles Spaniels who lives and practices medicine in Charleston, South Carolina.



▲
Rutledge & Barb

BILLIE GROOM



Chance

WE STOOD ON THE SIDE of a deserted road, the warm breeze a mild consolation from the heat wave sweeping through the outskirts of Jackson, Mississippi in the fall of 1994. My partner, Jesse, filled the dogs' water bowls, took a swig from the jug, and wiped his beard with a bandana he fetched from his blue jeans pocket. We had recently left Jesse's homestead in Texas, where his mother lived in a two-bedroom trailer in a town with only one gas pump, located in the parking lot of the only profitable business in town - the liquor store.

Our sky blue, renovated school bus falsely emanated the all-American dream of whimsical adventures. We were tired, stiff, and thankful to find a quiet spot to let the five dogs out for a bathroom break. Two of the dogs started the journey with us five months prior, traveling from my home in British Columbia, Canada, to Texas. On our way we picked up three stray dogs. One of these dogs, Tika, stayed in Texas with Jesse's younger half-brother. She was a natural emotional support dog, and they were inseparable for nine years.

One long day, shortly after arriving in Texas, against my own good judgement and Jesse's outright pleas, I

decided to go into the local animal control. A small, emaciated black and white dog lay on the cold cement floor, her floppy ears covering her tiny face. She was full of ticks and shaking uncontrollably. The heavy-set employee sat two feet from her at a prefabricated desk, eating a submarine sandwich that dripped a darkish substance, the texture of mayonnaise, onto his magazine.

"You can just have her. She ain't worth nothin'." He announced this as though he was doing us a favour.

Jesse glared at a Mercedes convertible as it made a uU-turn and parked beside our bus. A short, stalky man, wearing a suit that brought back memories of my corporate days in Toronto, brushed the dust out of his black hair as he walked toward us. Two of the dogs barked. He stopped approaching, and the dogs stopped barking.

"Hey there," he said with a warm smile. He looked to be in his early thirties. "My wife just lost her dog. He died of old age. She is completely heartbroken. Her dog looked just like that dog there." He pointed to the one sitting at my feet; the one from the animal control. "It

DUFFY

BILL PATTERSON

I REMEMBER DUFFY

UFFY

How do you decide which was the best dog you ever had? If physical perfection or an ability to reproduce in large numbers is your point of reference, you are entitled to your opinion.

AS FOR ME, the best dog I ever had was like three Cardigans in one: he had a classic head, an impressive chesty front and a powerful driving rear. Unfortunately, the genetic architect made a few miscalculations in assembling his parts. His topline was “linearly challenged.”

On August 4, 1982, the AKC issued a registration certificate for Pooh’s Thane Macduff, a red and white male Cardigan Welsh Corgi, born April 17, 1982. The breeder was Ellie Macnair and the owner was William E. Patterson.

In his first year, Duffy grew up with our Siamese cat, Rama. We always said Duffy got his quiet, calm temperament from Rama. They were the closest of friends. Rama was protective of his buddy, once even chasing a neighbor dog away from our front gate for barking and growling at the young puppy.

Encouraged by Ellie to join in “doggy” activities, we began entering Duffy in conformation shows when he turned 6 months. She had sold Duffy strictly as “pet quality” and must have been surprised at our persistence in dog show competition, albeit unsuccessful. She tactfully mentioned

that we might try obedience, and that’s what I did.

With an old book by Blanche Saunders, *Training You to Train Your Dog*, I had taught Duffy some beginning skills - to heel on leash, sit, down and stay. After a brief interview at our local obedience club, we were accepted directly into the Novice training class. This was somewhat exceptional, since the obedience club normally expected all new members to go through a Basic Class before advancing to Novice work. But that’s the way Duffy was. He seemed to watch me all the time with his broad smile, as if to say, “Teach me something”!

I had forgotten just how good he was. Going through the old records, I saw that he got his Companion Dog (CD) title in three attempts with scores averaging about 190 (out of a possible 200), including two placements in the top four. His AKC title was awarded on March 17, 1984, when he was 23 months old.

Five months later, Duffy scored 195½ in his first showing in Open, placing third in the class. In the next three weeks, he scored 194½ and a 195, with a first-place ribbon on the final leg for his

second title. His AKC title of Companion Dog Excellent (CDX) was awarded August 26, 1984. The obedience newspaper Front & Finish reported that Duffy was ranked Number 4 among Cardigans in obedience.

Duffy was a comical performer in the ring. People would gather 'round to watch him. The rules gave credit for a brisk performance, but Duffy was known for his thoughtful deliberation. He had an obvious willingness, but he was never in a hurry to get the job done. In retrieving a glove, a dumbbell or a scent article, his pace was a carefree, smiling walk, rather than a brisk trot.

At one show, the judge turned to my wife at ringside and asked if they should get coffee while waiting for Duffy to bring me a glove. Of course, Duffy's amble was my fault as a trainer, but after it was ingrained, it was easier to accept than struggle with it. And people got a kick out of him. The best score he ever got was a 196 in Open under Bonnie Baker, a judge who never gave away points.

Obviously, Duffy was not meant to be an OTCH (Obedience Trial Champion) dog. We were a couple of amateurs just having fun. He did, however, earn 3 OTCH points in California. In May 1989, at the Cardigan National Specialty in Pomona, Duffy got the High Combined Score in Open and Utility. His picture was taken that weekend by a reporter for the AKC Gazette, and it appeared in a subsequent issue. This red and white Cardigan was flying over the high jump with a dumbbell in his mouth. An enlargement of the photo hangs on the wall in my office.

Duffy in Pomona California

Even as he was getting old, Duffy was always the most trouble-free, healthy Cardigan with a plush coat and the most soulful eyes imaginable. I saw the changing of the guard when Duffy conceded his Top Dog role to Billy, who had grown suddenly from a nursing puppy into maturity. Always before, Duffy could put everyone in their place with a warning bark or growl. This time, Billy accepted the challenge and ended a tussle in dominant position over my aging Duffy. Like descents in a wolf pack, the time had come for a new leader.

Duffy became arthritic and his ambling gait gradually changed into a laborious shuffle, yet his

smile and pleasant nature continued to the end. His appetite waned and he lost weight.

As if to let us know that it was time to leave us, he stopped eating in the final week, subsisting on water and an occasional bit of cheese or chicken breast from my hand. He gave us time to adjust to the inevitable as he grew weaker and needed to be carried in and out of the house.

It was August 4, 1997, fifteen years after the date of his registration, when I picked Duffy up that morning to carry him out into the yard. After sitting together for a while, I lay him down in the car for our scheduled trip to the vet. As he prepared the syringe, our vet explained that sometimes there could be an involuntary groan or bellow at the final instant, especially if an animal's heart was strong, but that there would be no pain or consciousness. Duffy's heart was indeed strong. The vet made a final check with his stethoscope and then quietly said, "You did the right thing."

The King is dead ... long live the King! ■

Bill Patterson is 90 years old and lives with his wife in San Antonio, Texas. He was on the DWAA Board of Directors in the 1980s with Mordecai Siegal and Pat Santi.

DUFFY

Duffy on the Grooming Table



CHELLE MARTIN

Little Dog, Big Heart

I

‘VE HAD FIVE DOGS in my life. The most recent one was a long-haired black and white Chihuahua named Rex. I can still remember the day we got him from a local breeder. It was the year after 9/11 and, unlike the current demand for dogs during the pandemic, there had been a lull in people looking for puppies.

At first, this little pup was apprehensive, but as soon as I held him, and he snuggled into my jacket, I knew he was a special dog. I put him down, and the breeder’s dogs sniffed him before I picked him up again. He was even more relaxed the second time I held him.

Being a “leftover,” he had been bullied by some of the other dogs there, going so far as to hide under pallets that held their doggie beds. Once he was back in the safety of our home, he would constantly stretch his back legs, which were used to crouching beneath the safety of the pallets.

We named him Rex. Or I should say, he responded to that name more than all of the other names we tried. He was very shy, unaccustomed to being “outside.” A leaf would blow past, and he’d be terrified. He didn’t know stairs, so I took him to a training class to learn.

It may have been the environment he grew up in during his formative months (he was 5 months old when I got him), but Rex was super-aware of his surroundings. If I returned home with a shopping bag, he knew it didn’t belong there. He would bark at it until he inspected its contents and deemed them safe. If I moved a blanket where it didn’t belong, he’d bark. If a pot was accidentally left boiling on the stove, Rex barked. Things had to be just so.

He didn’t like the sound of a rustling newspaper. Why? Had he been disciplined with one?

He didn’t like the doorbell. We think he may have associated it with puppies going home from the breeder. Was someone coming to take him away from us?

He quickly picked up things like housebreaking from his big sister, Sassy, a black and white short-haired Chihuahua from the same breeder, with different parents, and a year older.

Rex loved his stuffed squirrel with the squeaker. He carried it everywhere. And he loved baths and a daily massage. He was a Leo, after all. Our birthdays were 3 days apart in late July. I considered him my “mini-me”.

Despite his 8 pound size, Rex would protect me if someone even tried to get too close, no matter what. We could be people-watching in the car at the park, and if someone approached to admire him, that sweet, fuzzy little dog would turn into a great protector..

When Rex was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and pulmonary hypertension around age 14, I thought I was going to lose him. My other dog already suffered from the same condition, but the vet said Rex’s condition was much worse.

Thanks to Dr. Jonathan Goodwin at Garden State Veterinary Specialists in Tinton Falls, New Jersey, medication turned his life around. This patient little dog received six pills twice a day for the next five years. Thank goodness he loved liverwurst, the great pill hider.

Then the inevitable decision came on September 1, 2020. Rex left us at the age of 18 years, 1 month.

Rex never outgrew his fear of newspapers, the doorbell, strangers, or other dogs, but he did come a long way. My mini-me gave me courage, love and the best memories.

There is no replacement. On occasion, I have looked for one, but I have not had that connection. He was a once-in-a-lifetime dog, and I’m glad he was waiting for me. ■

LESLIE BROWN

My New Home

M

y first home wasn't a very nice one. The people didn't like me. They didn't pet me or talk to me. Sometimes they forgot to feed me or let me in the house, even when I cried. But I didn't know life could be any different.

And then it was.

My mother found me on craigslist. The ad said, "Dog needs home," and then a phone number. That was it.

And so, she called. She wanted to know why they didn't want me. Why did I need a new home?

They said they were too busy for The Dog. The Dog wanted too much attention. The Dog made their house too dirty.

I didn't have a name then. They just called me The Dog.

When my mother saw me at their house, I was curled up in a corner on a little towel. She looked at my sad eyes – that was all she needed to know.

She sat down on the floor next to me, rubbed my head, scratched under my chin, and asked if I wanted to go home with her. I put my paw on her arm. It was a yes.

When we got home, she gave me my first name ever. She gave me a bed with a pillow and lots of kisses on the nose. It was all new to me. It was a different life. I was happy for the first time. ■



GAIL DIEDRICHSEN

My Vow Fulfilled



T

he unhappy collie stood in the tub soaking wet. I had driven miles to adopt this homeless dog who had been abandoned at animal control. His fosterer, Mary, kindly decided he needed a bath before climbing into the

backseat of my car for his long ride home. Weeks prior to our meeting, Mary had shared one photo of the matted collie, but soaking wet, he looked even more emaciated than I remember. Regardless, I saw it in his eyes - the same sweet look I had noticed in the photo. It was love at first sight. Brody was THE ONE who would fulfill my promise.

My promise was pretty simple. Laid up in a hospital bed over the holidays and in the throes of a major pity-party, I had an epiphany. A soft tapping at my door had offered me the opportunity to interact with a therapy dog. I missed my own dogs very much, so this black Lab mix was just what the doctor ordered and the best medicine.

As I stroked the dog's soft ears, I silently made a promise. "If I get out of here alive, I will adopt a dog who will become my partner as a certified therapy dog, and I will pay it forward." This was truly an experience that touched me, and at



that moment I knew what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

I remember that time well. I was so eager to grow some hair back on my head and begin living a “normal” life again. Hell bent on keeping my promise, I looked beyond the bedraggled appearance of the young sable collie in Mary’s bathtub, and felt sure he had the “right stuff.” ***Besides, like me, he was a survivor.***

With plenty of optimistic blind faith, Brody jumped into my car and we headed west across Indiana toward Illinois to start a new journey together. I glanced at him often in my rearview mirror. He was a diamond in the rough and I knew it was love.

I kept the faith and gave him lots of loving care and good nutrition. Before I knew it, Brody filled out. No longer could I feel every vertebra and rib when I ran my hand down his back. His coat lost its dry straw-like appearance, and in the sunlight it began to shine a beautiful deep red. We enrolled in obedience classes, where he quickly grasped the basics and we progressed rapidly, completing a PhD level in the Canine Life and Social Skills training program. We earned a Canine Good Citizen certification, followed by an Advanced Canine Good Citizen. Enrolling in a class specifically designed to prepare a handler and dog for the animal-assisted therapy test, we passed with flying colors. I could not have been prouder of our achievements.

My dream had become a reality! We visited schools and played games with reluctant readers, we read with children at libraries, and we volunteered for the summer camps of four different humane societies. Brody had a fan club! In fact, he

was featured in several newsletters and magazines that were promoting humane education programs. Because of Brody, my heart was full.

For fun, we enrolled in trick and dance classes. Brody’s bag of tricks were incredibly helpful. When a very large collie with big sharp teeth waved a friendly hello, he became less scary and won fast friends. When Brody pulled flashcards from a deck with his teeth and paw-pressed the Easy Button while playing reading games, the students were motivated. When we took a bow after performing our dance routine in a classroom or nursing home, the beaming smiles said it all.

Brody was a favorite among both young and old. We volunteered in numerous elementary classrooms and several nursing homes, but college students, especially the young ladies, were his fave. He loved them! He was in his glory reassuring anxious students at two local colleges during exams. Brody was an expert de-stresser and knew how to lower blood pressure. While stroking Brody’s white ruff for some time, one college girl looked at me and softly said, “It’s like petting a cloud.” I knew we had accomplished what we were there to do.

One day we were visiting a class at the local arboretum. It was wintertime, and we had a wonderful time playing outside in the snow. I had hoped to go inside the classroom and have Brody perform his usual goodbye paw-wave. We entered the building, but when I asked him to follow me downstairs to the classroom, he said, “NO, I cannot do those dark stairs. I am afraid.” From that day forward, Brody continued to



▲
Victoria at daycare

SHERRI TELENKO

VICTORIA

O

ONE YEAR AGO, I held a one-week-old puppy in my cupped hands and squealed. She was real. She was here. And she was very hard to find. Collateral damage of the historic 21st Century global pandemic was a lack of adoptable dogs – but not cats. I accidentally got a third one of those in 2020, which left me on the hunt for a feline-friendly, smallish dog. And this tiny Sprocker I cradled in my hands was going to be it. I'd driven four hours to meet this half Springer/half Cocker Spaniel, make sure she was real, and not puppy-mill bred. With all boxes checked, it was love at first sight ... for me.

I can't say the same for her.

This isn't a story about me falling in love with her; it's a story of my dog, Victoria, falling in love, but not with me. Victoria is in love with her doggie daycare and has been since the moment she stepped paws in their pen, months after she came home with me.

Seven weeks after our first introduction, I drove back to pick up my precious little Sprocker. She was bigger, wide-eyed and full of mischief. My feelings hadn't changed. I was enamored. She, however, wailed a piercing cry as I carted her away from the only home she'd ever known. The whimpering continued for the eternity of our drive.

It wasn't a fairy tale beginning.

Fast forward to months later and she's vaccinated, fixed, and rocketing off the walls in my home powered by an energy not yet harnessed by the modern space program (though it should be). Victoria's in love with life and an open field, anywhere she can run with the freedom of a gazelle. The energy level is off the charts. I needed back up.

I needed the Canine Bond Socialization Centre, a business near me that picked up enthusiastic pups, ran them in a fenced rural yard with a barn and water feature, then returned them home, happy and tired. I sent up a distress call and this doggie daycare was my Batman.

Turns out sending my crazy little cocker-cross to dog daycare wasn't just about getting her tired; it was an important step in developing her social skills.

Socializing a canine, getting a dog used to other dogs and people, helps a pup behave better in a variety of social situations. Dogs are pack animals, and raising a confident balanced dog who's com-

fortable running, rolling, leaping and wrestling in a group of all sizes is important. Even if a dog plays with another dog at home, or in my case unwilling cats, doesn't mean they'll interact well during encounters on the street. My previous dog could be reactive with certain dogs, and I wanted to avoid that now that I had a chance to raise my new puppy from the start.

So doggie daycare two to three times a week solved many problems, especially in the work-from-home era. Daycare that is monitored by staff members trained to read dog body language and encourage positive play is best. Clearly, dogs must be vaccinated with no history of aggressive behaviour to attend. Daycare is – or should be – about learning positive socialization, not just about running and playing.

Although running and playing is Victoria's favourite part. It was her dream come true.

Then, just when I thought I had it all sorted out, we hit a hurdle. My puppy got a minor virus – yes, a risk of socialization – and she had to take a two-month break from daycare. The virus had no discernable impact on her, although she ironically had to socially distance from other pups until the vet gave the 'all clear.' Two months to be safe.

After the longest eight weeks of my life (bested only by the eight weeks I waited to bring her home), Victoria could return to daycare. At first, I wasn't sure if she'd remember. We waited in the front yard for 'the dog school bus' to arrive. A white van pulled into the driveway. Victoria froze. Then her favorite daycare employee stepped out of the car.

And she knew. It was love at first sight – or love recalled. A frenzied recognition resulted, so extravagant the physical expression of joy we could barely switch leashes. Pronto, Victoria jumped in the van with nary a look back at me.

As the van drove away, I watched from the curb, lovelorn and a bit shell shocked but knowing sometimes a little distance makes the heart grow fonder. Hopefully, Victoria will be equally excited to return home. Maybe. Her passion for puppy play is, so far, unrivalled. ■

TED SLUPIK

Love *at* First Sight

(EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK, SOPHIE...BEST FRIENDS ARE FOREVER
ARE PRESENTED IN ITALICS BELOW)

I

ALWAYS WANTED A COLLIE, not so much because of the famous Lassie, but because of my neighbor Laureen's stories about her childhood adventures with her rough coated collie, a sable mahogany collie named Shamus. Laureen took 100% care and responsibility of Shamus from a young age and won many medals and awards. As an only child of a single mother, the dog was meant to occupy her as she grew up, teaching her responsibility. This activity instilled in her a lifelong passion for collies.

After many hours of talking about collies with Laureen, my wife and I searched for several years for the "right" collie, but we never seemed to come close to finding one. One day, while I was working at a client quite a distance from our home, I finished early and was on the 60-mile trek home. On my way, I passed a large not-for-profit place named Lambs Farm; a farm-like organization run by developmentally disabled adults. One part of the organization was a pet shop that sold dogs donated to them by breeders because the dogs were not considered specimen or "breed standard," which means most likely the dogs could not be shown. The organization made money by selling these dogs at a nominal price having paid nothing for them.

Just by chance, I pulled into the parking lot at 3:45 p.m., noting that the pet shop closed at 4:00

p.m., only fifteen minutes later. The lights were already dimmed, but the employees still let me in to look for five minutes before they closed the doors for the day. A coincidence? I think not. As soon as I walked in, I spotted an area in the back with a larger pen that housed two collies. They were a male and a female, brother and sister, and the sister turned out to be Sophie. Even if I had wanted to take her home that day, there was not enough time to process the paperwork. I didn't really want to do that anyway without seeing how the collie would react with Lizzy, our Chihuahua and how my wife would feel about the choice.

From the first moment we took Sophie home, she amazed us. She was very calm and gentle from day one. We could not believe how attentive and smart she was at eight weeks. She became the best friend to Lizzy, the Chihuahua, with whom she spent the next seven years. Although Sophie was a "people person" and did not much care for other dogs, she couldn't have been closer and more attached to the little five-pound Lizzy, even at her eventual 70-pound size.

Recognizing her intelligence and desire to learn, I began to train her each day for about an hour and the more she learned, the more she wanted to learn and looked forward to our training sessions. This daily training went on for over a year. Sophie was a people person and always wanted to



meet the humans we met during our walks. At the age of six months, we took her to a puppy training class which is where we confirmed her love of people, not necessarily of other dogs.

After ten minutes of the trainer's lecture, the trainer suggested that we let the puppies off lead to let them run off some energy and get to know each other. Every dog but Sophie went to the center of the room and started barking and chasing the other dogs. It was quite chaotic, but Sophie did not participate. She was much more interested in the handlers than the dogs. Sophie took it upon herself to walk around the room in a clockwise circle and introduce herself to every owner standing in the circle. One by one, she went up to them, poked them with her nose, got a pet, and then went on to the next person. You could probably not even train a dog to do this, or if you did, it would take a lot of practice.

Sophie never disappointed. She would learn something very quickly and then would get better and better at it. During her training, once she learned the voice command for something, I taught her an associated hand signal. At that time, I did not know much about standard hand signals. I made up our own signals that Sophie learned, and they were unique to us. People who knew the standard signals never knew what I was asking Sophie to do. Sophie learned more than 40 hand signals. This technique allowed us to amaze the patients at the hospital during her 12-1/2 years of therapy dog work at a large community hospital. Sophie was a pioneer in the early days of the animal assisted therapy dog program there; being the youngest and the longest serving therapy dog in the history of this hospital's program.

Sophie had an uncanny ability of sensing the mood of the patient and their visitors in

the hospital room. She made it her business to introduce herself to whoever was in the room when we entered including all visitors as well. Her gentleness of spirit created an emotional healing presence to whomever she had contact with. When Sophie passed, I wrote a book about her life, her therapy work, and the people she met along the way. Following is an excerpt of a five-star Amazon review submitted by a famous "dog person" after he read the book:

"If you have ever been blessed with the friendship of a dog, you have experienced a bond so strong it transcends time. As every dog parent knows, there is always that one special dog who, although you love them all, that occupies a special corner of the heart. If you have ever been alone and frightened, you know what our elderly experience every day in hospitals and nursing homes. They depend on the kindness of strangers and the simple joy of a visit or a kind word. In his book, "Sophie...best friends are forever", Ted Slupik beautifully narrates how one special dog became that kind touch in the daily lives of so many elderly patients in need. Mr. Slupik takes us on the journey of Sophie's life, from her training to her personal appearances, to the many lives she touched with her own. And even though Sophie is no longer with us, the story of how she used her life to improve the lives of others is beautifully told in this wonderful book"

The above exemplifies my relationship with Sophie. She and I were best friends and that bond lasted her entire life. It truly began with love at first sight... ■

MEET THE AUTHORS

of the DWAA

— by —

LISA BEGIN-KRUYSMAN

Meet DWAA Author Dawn Secord

I

IN OUR CONTINUED MISSION to share the book publications of fellow DWAA members, in this issue we present Dawn Secord - Artist / Illustrator / Writer.

What is your book's title?

No Ghoulis Green Monsters Here - a children's picture book awarded the "Silver Award" by Mom's Choice Awards and made the Society of Children's Writers and Illustrators July 2021 reading list and Finalist in the International Book Awards sponsored by American Book Fest.

What inspired you to write it?

The book, No Ghoulis Green Monsters Here, is my first book. It is the first in a series called "A Dog Bling". The lessons for children in this book are facing fears, finding self-confidence, and developing teamwork. My goal with the book is multi-fold. Considering my love of dogs, one of the goals is to promote dog ownership. Through Bling and her book, I hope to reach families and show them how wonderful dogs are. My love of books goes back almost as much as my love of dogs. I wanted families to have real pages to flip and touch. Another goal was to promote literacy in children. The book would help children with that goal as it's a tool to assist families with the joys of reading rather than spending time playing games on electronic devices. My last goal was to provide families with a learning opportunity through my books and Bling. The book has a parents' guide, which is free and downloadable from the book's website. The parents' guide can make the book not only a story book but an educational tool as well. There is a coloring book page, an art lesson, a history lesson, a geogra-



phy lesson and a glossary which serves as a vocabulary lesson. A teachers' guide is in the works.

Please tell us about your background.

I purchased my first Irish Setter in 1984 from an ad in the Dallas Morning News. She cost \$100. My family was one of true dog lovers. My great grandparents raised foxhounds. My grandparents on both sides of the family had dogs - Miniature Schnauzers and Kerry Blue Terriers. Dogs were family members unquestionably.

In high school, I had two scholarship offers for art school. At that time, I feared I would be unable to secure a prosperous future as an artist and chose to go into finance. At age 33 I was the general manager and acting CEO of a pet product manufacturing company in Southern California. I was miserable and all I wanted to do was paint. My husband and I could not

afford for me not to draw a salary and start up the art business, so I looked for something that required little capital and allowed me a flexible schedule to paint. The perfect industry was opening up at that time - pet sitting. In 1996 I started Fur, Feathers & Fins LLC in Southern California. It quickly grew and in 2003 I was named "Pet Sitter of the Year" by Pet Sitters International. That same year, I won the inaugural poster competition for the AKC with my painting of an Irish Setter pup sitting in a silver trophy cup. The art was titled, Full of Dreams. My art career was doing well at the time. Winning the competition really gave me a push. Thank you to the AKC!

In 1984 I knew I wanted to write a children's book and an Irish Setter would be the main character. Years went by, and it was never the right time, or the right dog, but my dream continued. Careers would get in the way. Relocation from Texas to Southern California would get in the way. As life would have it, paths opened to allow my dream to begin. In 2009 I was painting an English Setter and wanted a critique of the conformation of the dogs featured. It was suggested I contact an expert, then AKC judge, Marsha Hall Brown. Mrs. Brown agreed to see the painting and a wonderful friendship began that day as she guided me through some adjustments that would enhance the painting. A few years later, Mrs. Brown asked me to illustrate a children's book she was writing. We agreed on the project and a journey into the world of illustrating and publishing began. The book, *Show Dogs Escape to the Seashore*, won a Maxwell Award for the cover illustration as well as a Muse Award from the Cat Writers Association. In 2012 my husband and I bred our first litter of Irish Setters. At that time, I had owner handled four Irish Setters to their AKC Championships, one to a Best in Show. The pick pup from this litter was named, Bling. All of a sudden everything aligned. I was involved in the children's book world, my life allowed me to illustrate and write my own book, I had the perfect dog with the perfect name.

Tell us about your current projects and works-in-progress.

My goals are being realized. Bling has done many virtual school visits during COVID and children love her. She has visited libraries and home school groups. She is a true ambassador of the breed and the species. I am constantly receiving photos from parents and grandparents of their children reading the book. Parents of toddlers tell me their children cannot stop looking at the illustrations. Recently, a professional tutor was telling me how she was assisting a 3rd grade student with a reading disability. ►



- The child was given *No Ghoulish Green Monsters Here* as a reading assignment and was able to read the entire book. It was a milestone for everyone.

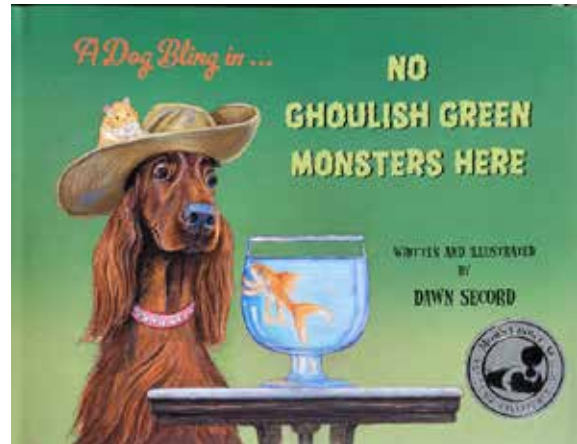
The book is currently in six stores in the Dallas and Austin areas as well as several local libraries.

I am currently writing the second manuscript for book two in the “A Dog Bling” series. It is about Bling rescuing a kitten. The lessons will be about helping those in need and friendship.

In 2016 a second book was published by author Marsha Hall Brown, which I also illustrated. It is a historical book following a whaling family’s life at sea. The title is *Under Sun, Stars and Sails* published by Spinner Publications. On my easel are illustrations for another children’s book (for another author) featuring the story of a Cocker Spaniel pup.

When autographing books I often say, “Always enjoy dogs, books and art”, a message rings true to my heart.

Thank you for sharing, Dawn, and we wish you success on all endeavors!



To learn more about Dawn and her work please visit:



aDogBling.com



[adogbling](https://www.facebook.com/adogbling)



DawnSecord.com

Meet DWAA Author Karen Fine, D. V. M.



WE CONTINUE TO CELEBRATE our DWAA members who’ve authored some terrific dog books! Here is the story of Karen Fine, D. V. M., a holistic veterinarian and author of two nonfiction books coming to readers in the near future.

What is the title of your book?

THE OTHER FAMILY DOCTOR: A Veterinarian’s View of Love, Loss, Mortality, and Mindfulness pitched as *All Creatures Great and Small* meets *Being Mortal*. Published by Anchor an imprint of The Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group (Penguin Random House) and the oldest trade paperback publisher in America. A memoir, this book is the first nonfiction title on Anchor’s hardcover list, which is launching next year and explores how the author, through her work with her patients and their owners, “comes to better

understand humanity, mortality, and the unique role animals play in our lives.” Fine was represented by **Jennifer Herrera** at the David Black Agency.

What inspired you to write your book?

My main inspiration was to address the profound love people feel for their pets, and thus their grief when their pets become ill or die. I’ve witnessed a lot of human suffering over the years, both in the clinic setting and during my 25 years of house call practice. And my own dog, Rana, developed an aggressive cancer when she was only four, which was devastating for me. I felt that by telling my own story, both as a pet owner and as a veterinarian, I could help others. I also wanted to share how much I’ve learned from animals about how to handle illness, among other things. Animals are incredible teachers if we can be open to learning from them.

Another inspiration came after I learned about the high rate of suicide in the veterinary profession. Suddenly I saw my own struggles in a new light, and I wanted to write about the issues we in the field rarely speak about even amongst ourselves. In that way the book is also a love letter to my profession.

These topics may sound depressing, but I'm an optimist. My goal is to help people feel better by normalizing the profound relationships we have with our pets. And, like most veterinarians, I have a large stock of funny stories to draw from, so there is a lot of humor in the book as well.

In the Publisher's Weekly announcement for your book deal, the term "preempted world rights" was used. Can you explain what that means?

A preempt means that you are not going to consider any other offers, and world rights refers to the rights to publish your work worldwide.

Can you tell us how you acquired your literary agent?

I attended the Muse and the Marketplace conference in Boston twice, and the first time my entire focus was on the query letter. I also took an online course with Jane Friedman on how to write a proposal. I queried for a long time, and several agents requested material.

The most frequent comment from agents who declined to represent me after requesting material was "too much death" followed by "not enough platform" and "I don't know how I would sell it". Several agents were really encouraging, however, and one even said she wanted a signed copy when it was published.

After many rejections, I decided to spend the money and work with an editor, and I was fortunate to find Allison K. Williams. I was able to refine some of the "too much death" and the manuscript became more balanced. After finishing the revision, I updated my proposal and sent it to an agent who had given me an R & R, or Revise and Resubmit. She loved the changes and offered to represent me. We worked through a couple of revisions of the proposal, which took about six months, and then she sent it out on submission.

Was your manuscript complete when you began the query process for an agent?

When I began the query process, I had no idea what I was doing. I queried with only 50 pages because I'd read that nonfiction didn't need to be completed, and I didn't realize that memoir is considered an exception. I actually had an agent interested who read the 50 pages and wanted to see more, but when I got the full version to her six months later, she never responded. That was disappointing, but it helped give me the courage to continue (and I suppose querying only one agent would have been too easy...).

Please share your experience during the proposal/manuscript editorial submission process?

My agent didn't tell me more than I needed to know about the process, which worked out well. I think if she had told me more details, I would have just been more anxious. I trusted her judgment and was happy to have her take over the process.

Can you tell us about your new textbook?

During my research for the memoir, I stumbled across a human medicine approach called Narrative Medicine, which involves improving care by viewing patients in the context of their larger story. I was so

Everyone loves a good dog story and the behind-the-scenes tales (pun intended) from authors who've persevered in securing a literary agent and/or a publisher. Our new "Meet the Authors" feature will spotlight DWAA members authoring a book in any dog-related genre, Fiction or Non-Fiction, who are interested in sharing their personal path to publication.

Please send inquiries to RDeditor@dogwriters.org

- enthralled that I wrote an article for a veterinary publication about it. Two years later, I received an email from a publisher in the UK who was seeking someone to write the first textbook on the topic for veterinarians. It ended up being a great project to work on during Covid when I was home a lot with my son. That book comes out this October and is called *Narrative Medicine in Veterinary Practice: Improving Client Communication, Patient Care, and Veterinary Well-being*.

Has being a member of the DWAA positively influenced your writing experience?

I was honored to have two articles I wrote for Bark magazine become finalists for a DWAA Writing Competition award, but I haven't won. I would love to have a medallion with a dog on it!

We thank Karen for sharing her personal insight and experience in the publishing trenches. We hope it encourages our members to pursue their own writing paths.

To learn more about Karen and her work please visit:



karenfinedvm.com



JAMES COLASANTI JR.

NOAH'S BARK



THERE IS SOMETHING to be thankful for in almost every minute of our lives.

You never realize just how much a barking dog can change your life; or how an abundance of loyalty and devotion can repay you at any opportune moment. Reminiscences of a rescued dog, who in turn saved us, come back to me daily.

Dogs come into our lives in different shapes, colors, and temperaments. They arrive from shelters, as gifts, and sometimes they just turn up on our doorsteps unannounced. But each dog plays a part, leaving an indelible imprint on the story of our lives. Memories of these happenings remain after everything else is long gone.

Next to the container on my desk that holds my pencils and writing pens sits the intricately carved teak wood box in a position of prominence. The inscription engraved on the brass plate on the top says "Noah," a name of biblical proportions, a name for a dog who could survive a flood. I always knew that there was a reason why this particular dog had survived Hurricane Katrina. A reason much greater than I; a reason from a much higher authority.

I firmly believing that everything happens for a reason. I also believe that there is magic in our lives of which we have no control. And sometimes, just sometimes, that magic is in the form of a dog.

I can remember the late night he arrived in Greensboro after a long van ride from New Orleans.

"Here's your Old Man, your Katrina dog."

"Old Man?," I asked quizzically.

The Animal Rescue volunteer tucked the black Wire Hair Terrier into my waiting arms.

"Yeah, he's at least 12 years old, according to the folks who rescued him."

"Really"?

"The first responder, a fireman, told us they found him straddling a two-by-four porch railing surrounded by 7 feet of murky water. He was trembling like he had the shakes."

Somehow, I couldn't understand the horror of what he was describing. But when I did, I was overwhelmed.

"He's still a little afraid, probably scared from all of the trauma, but with your experience, you shouldn't have any trouble. Good luck."

Noah licked my hand once, just once, to convey his gratefulness. It created an unspoken bond that would last between us for the remainder of his days. It was love without boundaries.

During his check-up when Noah was also neutered, I learned that he was Hhigh heart-worm positive. The veterinarians performed a "half-treatment," saying they didn't believe Noah's heart was strong enough to endure a full dose. Because of this prognosis, they believed his life expectancy would be 2 more years at most.

Noah was always at my side, not in an affectionate way, but more as a guardian. He never barked, never growled. He never touched me while I slept, unlike some of my other dogs. Instead, he slept at the left side of my feet. That was his spot and none of the other dogs ever went near it. This was Noah's domain.

Brody

► CONTINUED from pg 23

become more reluctant and less sure of his ability to navigate with confidence. His heart was still in it, but his old hips and rear legs were failing. I was heartbroken to think he would be leaving me one day sooner than later.

Some of life's events seem to come at us in a circle. My husband became ill. It was sudden and Brody had become feeble. I knew things would be tough for us the next few months, and I wondered how I would care for a sick husband and an old dog. Brody made that decision for me. On the very morning my husband was to begin his difficult treatments, Brody decided it was time for him to go. It was almost as if he knew.

Looking back over the time we had together, I realized how it seemed to fly by much too fast. I'm comforted knowing how much love he shared during his short time. My appreciation and love for my partner has grown over the years. I could not have loved a living being more. Not only did my devoted boy give joy, laughter, and comfort to so many people, he had also been MY partner who enabled me to keep that vow I had made to myself in that hospital room almost ten years ago. This love will be with me forever. I've adopted another collie in Brody's honor. Cupcake will continue Brody's legacy of sharing love. ■

Noah

► CONTINUED from pg 33

Then, some years later, it happened. I remember that other night like no other.

I had been asleep for several hours. And while I am normally a light sleeper, I was dead to the world.

I could feel Noah licking my face, something he never did. He barked once. Then he barked again and again and again.

My eyes opened and immediately began to tear up and smart. The smoke was entering my bedroom from above. It was thick and acrid and burned my lungs as I inhaled. Noah had been trying to get my attention.

I sprang from my bed yelling, "Out dogs, let's go out. Hurry, hurry up, out." Everyone evacuated to the fenced-in backyard. All got out. I dialed 9-1-1 from my mobile phone.

The firemen were able to use firefighting foam on the fire with minimal damage to our house. They believed a rodent had bitten into an electrical wire in the attic. It was a miracle that things were not worse. Because of my Katrina dog, we were all safe, and after that night, Noah always held a special place in my heart.

I rubbed my fingers along the edge of the box in which his ashes remain, thinking about his last

night. He had just turned 19 a week before.

As I gently lifted him up onto my lap for the last time, I whispered in his ear, "Goodbye, Old Man, it has been great, and thank you, thank you very much." ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: James-Jim the Dog Man to his friends--has been awarded four Maxwell Medallions by the Dog Writers Association of America for excellence in storytelling. A past president of the Greensboro Animal Rescue & Foster Program, James shares his home with his literary editor, Sam, and six rescue dogs. He is retired from Barnes & Noble Bookstore. His stories have been published in *Cesar's Way*; *New York Dog*; *O.Henry Magazine*; *Triad Happy Tails*; *Simply Pets Magazine*; *Greensboro News & Record*; and many others.

Chance

► CONTINUED from pg 17

would make her whole world if I brought that dog home to her.”

That would make YOUR whole world, I thought. Admittedly, since childhood, I always questioned “what’s in it for them”? It was nothing against him personally. In fact, I truly believed him, and trusted that he and his wife would give Chance a wonderful life.

Through strands of long, golden hair blowing across his hardened face, Jesse eyed the man as he removed bills from his leather wallet. We needed money. We were on our way to North Carolina to build a small home on 24 acres in a desolate area where people had more guns than teeth. I do not recall questioning this plan at the time.

I looked into Chance’s soft, beady, black eyes that resonated a soulful intelligence and intensity reserved for dogs who were forced to grow up too

quickly. Do you want to live with this socially acceptable man and his sad wife?

“She’s not for sale. Sorry,” I said, acutely aware that my statement was intended for both men. The man stared at me for a moment. It was clear he was accustomed to getting his own way. As he walked to his car, he turned one last time. His face softened. Chance lay peacefully on my dusty boot.

I had Chance for 13 years, during which time I rescued and cared for hundreds of dogs. A few stayed with me until they passed away, and, although I loved them all, there never was, nor will there ever be, another Chance. ■



Emelise Baughman, Secretary
455 Chapman Road
Chapman, NE 68827-2736