

RUFFDRAFTS

the DOG WRITERS ASSOCIATION of AMERICA

FALL-HOLIDAY 2022

How Dogs Make the Holidays Brighter

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Dawn Secord*

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AND MORE!



Ruff Drafts

Send all material to Merrie Meyers
at: rdeditor@dogwriters.org

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

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

AT LAST, because of the impressive efforts of many people, the Writing Contest is complete. The results aren't in yet, but that matters less to me than the fact that it happened. Thank you, to all of you, who worked so very hard. According to Alexander Graham Bell, "The only difference between success and failure is the ability to take action." The contest committee took action, you should be proud of yourselves.

That brings me to the next subject. Where are our Young Writers? Is everyone aware that we have a separate category for smaller humans? Children are welcome to publish in Ruff Drafts, (if not published elsewhere,) and then, enter the Writing Contest? I've yet to meet a child who didn't want to tell the world about their dog. Let's encourage them to put it down on paper. Please help them submit their entries to Ted Slupik, (tslupik@yahoo.com) and he will send them on to the Ruff Drafts editor, Merrie Meyers.

As the year end approaches, I am hoping for some input. Most of you are incredibly talented, much accomplished, and way too quiet. Of course, I'm not referring to the complainers. Every group has lots of those, and some complaints are constructive and valid. What I worry about are those folks that want to help but don't know how. We have far too many people who are brilliant and could teach the rest of us how to be better writers, volunteers, or for that matter people, but remain silent. Tell me what you want, and if possible, let me know how you can help. We have a unique opportunity to make this community bigger and better, and that needs to happen now.

I hate to mention the upcoming holidays because I tend to gush too much. You are special, interesting, loving and mostly kind. You are better people for a lot of reasons, and I wish you well now and forever.

Therese Backowski

Therese Backowski

DWAA President



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

RUFFDRAFTS

Fall-Holiday 2022

HOW DOGS MAKE THE HOLIDAYS BRIGHTER



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, but for me, this year has been about treading water. Will there be another variant? Will there be an additional booster? Will there be business meetings or social gatherings, or will they be postponed or held virtually? One step up, one step back. Through it all, however, our dogs were usually there, sitting or lying right next to us.

For me, a day is not a day without a dog. So, it's no surprise that the theme for this issue involves how dogs make the holidays brighter. Now, I'm not one of those people who dress their pooches up in festive holiday sweaters, but they have been known to sport a holiday scarf or collar. Nonetheless, the reason for the season, sharing love and kindness, is second nature to my dogs. Pre-pandemic, when life took on a hectic tempo, they were a source of solace. Now that we are somewhat post pandemic, things are not nearly as chaotic as they once were, but they are one thing I am certain of, no matter what uncertainty lies beyond my front door.

As I write this, the flood waters from the morning's high tide are lapping up my driveway and nearly reach my front door. Not a great time to walk the dogs, but we will. And I'll chuckle over the lengths the dogs will go to first avoid the wet grass, and then ultimately give up and slog through the waterlogged swale which has risen above my ankles and mid-way up their legs. In South Florida, this twice a year (Fall and Spring) occurrence is called a King Tide because of the significant shift in water levels every 12 hours for about a week. Its arrival is concurrent with the full moon (and this year Hurricane Nicole). I didn't buy waterfront property, but, by golly, I've got it.

So I'm treading water again, but this time, it's literal, not figurative. Later this month, dog-silliness will return, as they try to steal holiday hors d'oeuvres off the coffee table, subtly trot off with any wrapped package that carries "Eau du Bone," and give me a look of total despair when they are cordoned off in a separate room to avoid even further catastrophes. Even with all their antics, their presence comforts me.

If you have a case of bah humbug because the holidays are becoming too commercial (e.g., monetized), change direction and celebrate our canine connection. In case you didn't know, there are more than 50 holidays throughout the year that celebrate dogs. So, while you are celebrating, add one of these events to your schedule. My new fav is Operation Santa Paws. Founded in 2001 by Justin Rudd, an animal lover himself, Operation Santa Paws is a call to all animal lovers to donate blankets, treats, food, toys, supplies, and money for all our loyal furry friends housed in several shelters and rescue centers around the country. Although the event started in Long Beach, CA, it is now celebrated across the globe. Observed from December 1-24, Operation Santa



Merrie Meyers
with Sunny (L)
and Danny (R)

See FROM THE EDITOR pg 20 ▶





SUE OWENS WRIGHT

My Howliday Tree

I

CONFESS I CAN GET A BIT GRINCHY at this time of year. We've barely finished carving our Jack o' Lanterns before it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. We haven't even gobbled the Thanksgiving turkey yet, but all the Christmas classics have already been shown on TV. When I hear Christmas carols playing on the radio during the first of November and know I'll have to listen to those sappy songs nonstop for the next two months, that old Grinch starts to take hold.

When I was younger, I loved celebrating Christmas. But now with the expense, expectations, and exhaustion that accompany the holidays, it's easy to understand why I would sometimes rather forget the whole thing.

Of all the seasonal rituals, I most enjoy decorating the Christmas tree, but even this has become a chore. That's why I have started a new holiday tradition of decorating a smaller tree for my pets. Over the years, I've collected quite a few pet ornaments. Each one kindles a happy memory of a pet. As I unwrap a decoration and hang it on a branch of the tree, it's like having that special dog or cat here with me again at the holidays.

Butterscotch's ornament adorns the top-most branch of the tree. Butter, as we called her for short, was our first in a long line of beloved basset hounds and the only one we raised from a pup. She was a wonderful dog and the most well-bred, with a distinguished pedigree from the

finest kennels. We've adopted our subsequent dogs from shelters or basset rescues, but she had the best temperament and conformation of them all. Butter had a heart of gold, as befits her name. She reveled in every holiday celebration, from greeting all the little goblins at our door on Halloween, to keeping me company while I decorated the Christmas tree. In photos of Christmases past, some of my dogs appear rather puzzled by the fact that a Noble Fir has suddenly sprouted in the living room. Fortunately, none of them ever took a notion to mark the tree as they would when outdoors.

Next to Butter's Christmas ornament hangs the one for Tabitha, a stray black and white kitty who adopted us. Like most cats, she was fascinated by the shiny baubles suspended from the tree and loved to bat at them with a snow white paw. Tabby miraculously transformed Butter from a confirmed cat hater to a cat lover. I recall one winter night when Butter deigned to share her doghouse with Tabby. The next morning, I was astonished to find them curled up together inside. From then on, they were best buddies.

Dolly shared only five Christmases with us before she succumbed to a rare hereditary disorder, but those years are remembered as among the happiest I ever had with my bassets. A lively little hound the color of cinnamon spice, Dolly was the essence of joie de vivre. It was as if she understood that her time here would be brief and she had to fill every day with as much life as she could. She brought me such joy in that short time. During the Dolly years, I hosted a basset hound picnic in our community every summer, commemorated by my cherished

ornament of the little lookalike basset popping up out of a picnic basket.

Daisy's delicate china ornament looks like the pretty tricolor basset she was, but it doesn't capture her impish nature. Thinking of Daisy at Christmastime evokes the memory of her devouring an entire box of my neighbor's homemade fudge that had been carelessly placed with other gifts under the tree. No one made fudge as yummy as Bernice's. Daisy obviously agreed. When the coveted holiday delicacy went missing, I found that naughty dog lying in her bed looking as innocent as the tree angel, but her fudge-caked bedding and muzzle were irrefutable evidence of who had committed this Christmas candy-snatching crime. Fortunately, she didn't suffer any ill effects from her infamous caper, but I always thought her chocolate brown eyes were a little browner after that.

When I decorate my pets' special holiday tree this year, I'll brew myself a nice cup of hot cocoa, sample some fudge in memory of Daisy (and Bernice), and unwrap my collection of ornaments for Butter, Patience, Dolly, Bramble, Daisy, Bubba Gump, and Tabby too. I'll ceremoniously place each one on a branch of the fir tree, including the newer ones for my last brace of bassets, Peaches and Beau. They'll remind me of the unconditional love all my animal companions have blessed me with over the years. My pets were the most treasured gifts ever to be found beneath our Christmas tree. Once again, they'll be with me in spirit, making the holidays bright. ■



PATTI ANDERSON

HOME *for* the HOLIDAYS

T

HE NEW SNOW LANDING SOFTLY on the city sidewalks was a little wet, leaving well-formed pawprints trailing behind Neka, the little black and white husky. She intrepidly led the way to the Veterans Resource Center, a place she had visited every Monday morning for several years.

As Neka neared the entrance and its front door, decorated with flashing holiday lights, she picked up her pace. The Santa bandana she sported around her neck slid slightly to one side, and her tail started wagging as she recognized some of the regulars from the Smart Recovery group for former drug addicts. Several of them were catching a quick smoke before they went in to the Center. Daunte spotted Neka first and crouched down, stubbing out his cigarette with a hissing noise in the wet snow. He clapped his rough hands together, calling “come on Neka, here girl”.

Neka wagged her tail even faster, as she moved forward into Daunte’s arms, receiving a big hug. Then her bright blue eyes fixed on Melvin, who had the collar of his army jacket pulled up around his neck, preventing his snowy wet dreadlocks from dripping down his back. He said “she likes me better ya know,” as Neka licked his hand enthusiastically. “Atta girl Neka,” he said, “that’s a go-o-o d girl”!

It was time for group, so Neka led the veterans into the building as they stomped their boots noisily on the worn carpet behind her, shaking off the fresh snow. There was the faint sound of a recorded choir singing “Jingle Bells” wafting in from the hallway. Today was the group’s holiday party!

Sara, the social worker in charge had decked out the small conference room they used for the Smart Recovery group with a red plastic tablecloth. She had spread holiday cookies on it and placed cups filled with apple cider. Neka sniffed the table with interest until Sara pulled out some

dog treats and gave them to her on a flat hand, smiling as they were wolfed down.

As the guys took their usual seats, Neka went to work, placing her chin on each person’s lap until they patted her on the head, greeting each individual in her special way. This was not something she had been taught. Neka had just started doing it at the very first group she had attended several years before. There seemed to be an immediate connection from day one with her and these Vietnam War veterans. Maybe it was due to Neka having been homeless and then being locked up for a long time in the city dog pound. All of the men around the table today had also been homeless at one time, but now lived in government housing. They were all recovering addicts and had also spent many hours in lock up at one time. Maybe there wasn’t an obvious reason for the strong bond between Neka and the group members, maybe it wasn’t something visible, but it was definitely there.

Sara brought out some simple gifts for the group members, including Neka. The colorful holiday wrapping paper was strewn all over the table after the presents were opened: such as new socks, wool scarves, Tom Clancy books, DVDs, and a loud squeaky toy too.

After the table was cleared off, the usual check-in began. Each member of the group took turns sharing with no interruptions, letting everyone know how their week had been, any challenges they had faced and what support they needed now.

Daunte shared that he had been harassed on the bus that week by a couple of tough teens -punks- he called them. He had resisted from hitting anyone by using his strategies from the program. A round of applause erupted from the group members, almost drowning out the tune of “Frosty the Snowman” that had been playing overhead. Neka popped up from her rug at the noise, and



started singing “woo, woo, woo” along with Frosty, cracking everyone up.

Daunte, being a first timer through the program was proud of his success and approval from the others including Neka. Sara credited the spirited husky as a large part of why the attendance for this group had improved significantly and why members chose to continue.

Neka always checked in as well. Today she related (with assistance) about being bullied at the dog park by a young muscular dog. She was older and thought she had made it perfectly clear that she didn’t want to play so rough, but her communication attempt went unheeded. Being a registered therapy dog, she always had very good manners. “You shoulda used your teeth Neka” volunteered one of the guys who never talked much. Another offered, “Naw, just walk away, the trouble ain’t worth it”. The advice offering went on

for a while with Neka intently listening, until Sara directed the next person to do their check in.

It was now ten minutes past the time group was supposed to end, and others waited in the dim hallway for the conference room. Minutes before, Sara had asked what everyone would be doing for the holidays. The quiet response indicated that many would be alone. Finally, Melvin said in a soft voice: “You all are my family, this place is like home.” Grinning and patting Neka’s head he continued, “I even have a dog!” Today was my Christmas...” with that he turned quickly toward the door, wiping his eyes on the sleeve of his army coat, leading us all out into the cold day.

Neka walked slowly back through several inches more of fresh snow, her pawprints from before now all covered up and gone. For a moment in time, perhaps Neka too had her best holiday ever! ■

MICHAEL HOFFMAN

DOG PARK MIRACLE

When I need a break
from wrapping Christmas gifts
I reach for the worn leather leash by the door
where a handwritten note reads
Take Ringo to the park
to see his friends.

My happy hound can fly
exploding through the gate
a kinetic 100-pound puppy
bounding like Scooby Doo across the
redwood chips
play bowing to Boxers and Basenjis
shouldering up to the Danes.

What kind of dog is Ringo?
Or is he a red-nosed reindeer?
a lady in a red hat asks joking.
No, he doesn't work for Santa
he's a livernose Rhodesian Ridgeback,
a lion hound
who's never been to Africa.
Definitely not a Visla either she laughs!
So many people don't know the difference
between reindeer and tall dogs
and we chuckle with holiday spirit.

Then we see the sleek Greyhound
who's the new dock diving champion
circling in frantic zoomies
around a trio of low slung Bassets.
His proud owner leans over and says
Fast enough to be Santa's helper, huh?

A well-tanned trainer in a green St. Nick's t-shirt
shows off his Doberman's newest trick
a gravity defying leap fifteen feet high
to catch a Frisbee with his eyes closed
while the sweet old lady with the blind Beagle
cries Oh my goodness, that's a Christmas angel!

clapping her slender hands
like a child on her first sleigh ride.

A huge bodybuilder struts in
with his thick arms folded into a cradle
where two young Chihuahuas
wearing tiny plastic antlers with sparkling lights
peer out at the action
grateful for the safety of their perch.

This Yuletide fest runs all day
with parades of wrinkled Shar-peis
freshly fluffed lamb chop Poodles
a pair of harnessed Malamutes pulling a wagon
stocked with egg nog, butter cookies and
candy canes
and a mini-riot of mischievous Jack Russells
who chase the Rottweilers without fear.

The whole crowd stops and stares
when a pretty young girl in a wheelchair
rolls up with a stunning white Afghan
whose slender nose nudges the heavy gate
latch open
just the way she trained him to.
A proud Saluki struts by and pretends not
to notice
but thinks to himself, I could have done that.

An Alabai the size of a pony and a grizzly
Ovcharka
hide in the corner behind the trees
embarrassed by the little Santa hats
their owners made them wear.
They hope the smarty pants Dogo won't
tease them
but nobody's safe from this Argentine hunter
who barks so loud that even the English
Bulldogs hear
Look who I found! It's Prancer and Dancer!

Bob the mailman tosses Milk Bones, bacon sticks
and pig ears
from the same brown letter bag he carries
every day.
He's not allowed to give treats to the dogs while
delivering the mail
but it's time to break the rules
to show them he's their friend
especially the two black Corsos on Maple Street
and the muscley American Bulldog two
blocks away.

The dedicated woman who spends her mornings
ringing a Salvation Army bell at the mall
walks around the perimeter of the park
holding a huge blue umbrella to protect her
Italian Greyhound
From what exactly?, people ask.
From a sudden downpour or frigid breeze, she says.
Mossimo is hypersensitive to rain and cold
which could send him to the vet.
She keeps circling under the clear December sky.

Andy, the retired judge and Tim the family doctor
relax and chat about their careers.
How would you change doctoring if you could?,
asks Andy.
Simple, I'd prescribe puppy ownership, garden
gloves, long sleeves and ice cubes.
What about you, Judge. Anything different from
the bench?
I would have sentenced first time
non-violent offenders
to 61 days in this dog park, from Halloween
to New Year's Day.
That's rehabilitation.

When the afternoon light starts to fade
the surfer with his beefy Boerbel first leaves
the sweet old man in a Santa suit
shuffling out with his arthritic Labrador
a twinkle in his eye and a big red sack, still full
of treats
while the overdressed real estate agent with her
cotton white Bichon
follows crooning... "He knows when you
are sleeping,
he knows when you're awake, he knows when..."

Ringo and I soon sit alone in silence
hearing only echoes of a hundred joyful barks
feeling grateful for the best gift of all
the absolute miracle of how
so many dogs

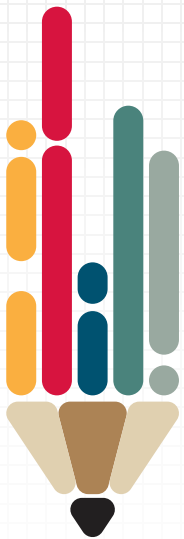


and so many people
can share so much happiness.

We walk home in the gathering dark
delightfully tired from so much play
when a plump red and white figure
suddenly appears
floating effortlessly in the air above our house
chortling a jolly ho, ho, ho in our direction.
The tall pines begin to vibrate in unison
with the unmistakable sound of sleigh bells.

Ringo stops stone still
tilts his broad head to the side
strains his furrowed brow in curiosity
then hears his name called from above ...

"...Merry Christmas, dear Ringo.
You've been a much better boy this year.
Come see what's in my bag for you,
and stay off the kitchen counter, please." ■



TIPS & TACTICS

The Plot Line

THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF WRITING. I was trained as a journalist, so my comfort level lies in reporting facts, providing analyses of data and recapping current events. But my ability to embellish or deviate from the “what was” is sorely lacking. I marvel at masters such as George R.R. Martin, J.R.R. Tolkien, or J.K. Rawlings (I’m sensing a trend toward initials) who can create not just a situation but an entire civilization with rules of conduct and engagement, as well as a backstory for each character. So, it’s not surprising that my goal of becoming a fiction writer seems unattainable to me. It’s not that I can’t start a story, but after the introduction, I’m stuck trying to figure out where the storyline is going and how all the characters will interact. I can craft interesting dialogue (as a PR practitioner I put my words in other people’s mouths for years), but plot development is my Achilles tendon.

So, a couple of years ago, hoping to learn from other writers, I responded to a neighborhood post and joined a local writer’s group. And learn I did. One of the group members actually creates a spreadsheet with milestones for each character, an overarching timeline of events and how the characters are affected by each situation. It works for him, he’s published four or five novels and a Kindle Vella, a new episodic platform Amazon created to help writers sell their work.

Although I flounder when it comes to foreshadowing, I’m rock steady when it comes to research. So, I collected some “How to” advice from notable sources, which I’m sharing here.

According to *Writer’s Digest*, there are numerous ways to craft a storyline, including: creating a point by point outline, drawing a map, which actually looks a lot like the tumult in my investments, and provides an overview of the big picture concepts. It also documents the rising and falling of actions, conducting a mid-story audit to cure a slump, asking yourself about the relevance of characters, actions and outcomes, conducting a momentum check to see if the plot drags along and tackles the incongruities one by one. (Is it believable, congruous, logically the result of a prior event, or too predictable?). It also offers great templates to work with (<https://www.writersdigest.com/resources/plot-development-charts-outlining-plotting-a-novel>).

Scribendi (<https://www.scribendi.com>) is actually a fee-based proofreading service, but their website is also a source for good ideas. Their editors suggest that the plot outline is not the be-all and end-all of your plot, it’s just the scaffolding that holds up the walls of your construction. They also advise that plot situations don’t have to be complex and your main character doesn’t have to save humanity to create an interesting story.

Of course, there’s always *Master Class* (<https://www.masterclass.com>), where bestselling authors lead online sessions. Based on your area of interest (they offer 180 different classes in a variety of subject areas), you can virtually rub shoulders with some of the most notable authors.

BARBARA E. MAGERA

Mama's Home



I decided to take a break from my hectic hospitalist job where I cared for the sickest imaginable patients. The Cavaliers were thrilled.

I NO LONGER HAD TO frantically blast out the door to run to work. Now, our mornings are filled with leisurely walks through our picturesque neighborhood which reveals a view of Charleston harbor. The Cavaliers enthusiastically gait through our circling streets. We all enjoy “taking time to smell the roses,” study the coastal critters, and watch the egrets forage for food in the marsh grass.

Following our early morning walk, we settle in our porch overlooking the marsh. Breakfast includes an assortment of local fruits and cheeses. Their favorite morning fare is John’s Island blueberries. Good choice for their high oxidative content. Everyone wants morsels of local goat cheese. With full tummies, everyone is a bit groggy and falls asleep within minutes. Their gentle snoring allows me time to outline my nutritious meal plans for the upcoming days.

Despite urging, my pack doesn’t care for salmon oil; rather, they want the “real deal” of baked salmon. Occasionally, they allow me a small portion. Regular feeding of salmon ensures a thick, shiny coat, even on older canines.

After they awake and stretch from their nap, I sit on the floor, and cradle one of the Cavaliers for a body massage. While on his back, I gently massage his shoulder and neck muscles. While working on his lower limbs, he naturally extends his hind legs. I move to massage both facial cheek muscles in a circular motion. His big brown eyes reflect his contentment. Finally, we embrace with wet kisses and cuddles. I perform individualized massages on each Cavalier, which is followed by a cool drink.

I locate their toy box. Two youngsters jump into the toy box and enthusiastically search for their favorite toy. Interesting how each has their favorite and how the toy matches their personality.

I throw several knot balls around the room to engage them in a fastpaced game of fetch and catch. Several volley to catch the moving ball but only one

family PORTRAIT



Here is my new Canine Family Portrait. I had an artist friend create a portrait of the dogs first. Just as she was finishing up, we inherited Daisy the Collie.

I felt bad that Daisy wasn't in the portrait. Then I got the idea to have a photo collage created, and Daisy's likeness was added to the group.

I made note cards with the image and included the dogs' names on the back.

—LOREN SPIOTTA-DIMARE

Loren lives in rural northwestern New Jersey on about 5 acres of land. The backyard, which is about 2 acres, is fenced so the pack can run and play safely.

Mama's Home

► CONTINUED from pg 13

manages to outmaneuver the others and control the ball. One canine runs towards me and drops the ball at my feet. He wants me to continue the fun. Two of the girls' athletic and clever abilities outshine their experienced males. Despite their petite size, they manage to outsmart them and repetitively retrieve even steal the ball and drop it at my feet. This strenuous game continues nonstop for a solid hour.

For the shy guys, a game catching soap "bubbles" engages them in a running and jumping exercise. A few novice players appear perplexed when the bubbles float in the air or hit the floor and disappear. Both these simple games improve strength, stamina and agility. Each Cavalier learns coordination and cooperation when at play with the pack. After our afternoon of play activities are finished, it's time for me to get started on dinner. For our evening meal, I prepare tossed salads, roasted herb potatoes, a squash casserole and flash seared beef tips for our entree. The kids are treated to bite size pieces of raw beef that are mixed with their regular evening meal.

During the last warm days of autumn, we eat dinner on our screened porch. Ceiling fans provide some moving air. The melodic cicadas usher in the sounds of dusk. After sunset, the soft bellowing of bullfrogs echo in the marsh. The Cavaliers join us on the porch. They intently listen to the symphonic sounds of evening marsh activities however; tonight they are sleepy and plop their soft bodies in overstuffed doggie beds. Before falling into a deep sleep, my husband and I caress each Cavalier in our arms for a time of cuddling. We gently place each in their individual crate lined with a comfortable doggie bed. Each receives a goodnight kiss before drifting off to sleep. Our evening prayers are filled with gratitude as we thank the Almighty for entrusting us to care for these loving little dogs whose primary mission is to please and comfort us. ■

Barbara E. Magera MD, PharmD, MMM (Cacaleeb) is a Cavalier fancier, exhibitor and breeder who lives and practices medicine in Charleston, SC.

WRITING COMPETITION UPDATE

The 2022 DWAA contest was a success with over 800 submissions including writing, illustrations, photography and more. Artists and authors from around the world entered the contest. The majority of entrants were DWAA members.

"The submissions represent a huge amount of talent from artists whose work exemplifies our canines. DWAA is privileged to receive their submissions to our contest."

—BARB MAGERA
CONTEST CHAIR



ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE

A NEW “LEASH” on LIFE

“I’m never going to get another dog.”

How many of us have said *that* at one time or another? In my case, it was after my 14-year-old dachshund Smokey crossed the rainbow bridge. I’ve had dogs since high school and decided it was finally time to go dogless. I told myself it was because I’m a senior citizen and slowing down, but in truth, it’s because I’ve suffered enough canine-caused heartbreak.

I

NEVER GOT OVER THE PASSING of *any* of my beloved four-footed friends. (Who does?) I still mourned my old dogs, even after all these years. There was Jade and Brandy, and Scarlett and Ivy, and Baron and Tivvy, and Oscar and Striker and Sheba, and now Smokey—all gone. Over the years the losses kept mounting and the sadness kept accumulating. I felt enough was enough. It was time to close that door in my life and hang up the dog leash for good.

I decided my retired husband and I would go and see new places—like the crimson lava of Hawaii’s volcano flowing down to the ocean under the night stars. Or a cruise down the Mexican coast to see the Incan ruins. Perhaps a drive up the beautiful New England coast to tour the lighthouses. We could just lock the door to our house, have my son watch over the place, and take off into the sunset.

At first, it wasn’t a hard decision to make. Our last two dogs were dachshunds, and there aren’t that many of them to rescue where I live. Locally, almost all dachshund rescues were seniors (I didn’t want a short-lived pet I would lose far too soon) or bonded pairs (my lease says only one pet) or special needs. That usually means wheelchair dogs with diapers, as dachshunds are so very prone to IVDD. Intervertebral disk disease is sadly common in these long-backed dogs and can often result in permanent paralysis.



Unbeknownst to me, my husband surreptitiously checked into adoptions while I was making travel plans to get my mind off things. Those “things” being my grief for Smokey. I decided New England should be our first trip. But I soon learned of my husband’s “wiener dog hunt.” He’d actually found a gem! A one-year-old miniature male dachshund had been surrendered to a shelter specializing in small animal rescues. I suspected behavior problems, but since the dog was a young purebred, I knew someone would soon snatch him up.

I then learned my husband made the very first phone call AND email AND sent a text to the shelter. He was told that since we had owned dachshunds before, we would get the first “meet and greet” appointment after this dog was neutered. The adoption fee would be the price of the vet bill. I found myself somewhat curious, so after the surgery, off hubby and I went to check out the canine.

The dog had a foreign name meaning “sausage.” *Not very original*, I thought, plus it was long and hard to pronounce. But the last syllable sounded like “niko,” and since he responded to that, the shelter christened him “Niko.” We met him outside and watched him frolic on the grass. My husband was YES, let’s get him! But I was still on the fence, thinking of lighthouses and Incan ruins...until Niko started playing with the leash. Tossing it, chasing it, and playing tug of war with

*“Dogs do speak, but only
to those who know how to
listen.”*

—ORHAN PAMUK

gusto! It was just too adorable! He seemed like such a happy little thing, with no fear or aggression issues whatsoever. My heart melted. So, home he came.

Well, every rescue comes with its own set of issues. On the plus side, Niko was blessedly housebroken and had no problem with the dog door. He did know one command, “SIT.” On the negative side, he was behind on his shots and terribly skinny; his ribs and spine visibly stuck out. Worse, he now had terrible abandonment issues. He went from his only home to the shelter and then to us.

Good food and the vet took care of his physical needs. The abandonment issues were a nightmare. Although housebroken, when we left him alone, even for a few minutes, he peed and pooped inside and yipped and howled from fear. We tried crate training while we hid outside, but our security camera showed him going so crazy in the big wire cage I was afraid he’d break a leg. That ended the crate training. He was miserable. We were miserable. I wondered if I’d just made a big mistake. I was now the frustrated owner of a Velcro dog.

We tried to cheer Niko up with new toys. No luck. He wasn’t happy. But one day I left his leash on the couch instead of hanging it up. Niko pounced on it, threw it up in the air, caught it, wrestled with it, and did zoomies all over with the leash still in his mouth. It was just like the “meet and greet!” I brought out my spare leash for him, and with two “toys” he went crazy with delight! We played keep away, catch, tug of war, and he showed us what every happy, healthy dog should have...pure joy, family love, and no fear. That day convinced me we’d made the right decision after all. Niko belonged with us 100 percent.



It’s been six months since Niko became ours. We’re still working on his separation anxiety. It’s going to take a while to heal the mental trauma he went through when his family abandoned him. But I can be patient. In the meantime, I’m looking into driving vacations and dog friendly hotels for the future. I’ve had dogs all my life, and loving them has always been a big part of living my life to the fullest. I’m not ready to close the door on that anytime soon. *Whatever was I thinking?*

As for my little Niko, all he needs is more time, more “lovings” -- and more leashes! ■

PAMELA DENNISON

Is it Safe *or* Dangerous?

DOGS LEARN THE SAME WAY we all do – through operant and classical conditioning. However, I feel there is another aspect that comes into play here (it's actually part of classical conditioning, but I want to tweak it out further). Dogs are very literal and take things at face value.

“Is it safe or is it dangerous?”

When you break down everything your dog might encounter into this simple statement, you may perhaps understand him a little better and look at things from his point of view and not your human point of view.

For instance, let's say you hit your dog for jumping on people coming to the door. Are “people coming to the door” safe or dangerous? **The answer is dangerous.** So what might your dog do then? He will make the association that people coming to the door are dangerous, cause them pain, and might (depending on his innate personality) escalate from jumping on them to biting them or may run away in fear.

Your dog runs away and when he finally comes back, you punish him. Is that safe or dangerous? **The answer is dangerous.** He will not understand that you punished him for running away. He will understand that you punished him for coming back to you.

Punishing a dog for having accidents in the house – no matter when (so get rid of the old outdated garbage of “catching them in the act”). Is it safe or dangerous to relieve himself around you? **The answer is**

dangerous. So how easy will it be to take the dog out on a potty walk in the future? (Plus, there's the obvious fact that if your dog is peeing or pooping and you yell at him – guess what? He'll be running away, peeing and pooping as he goes, so now you have a bigger mess to clean up!)

It seems to be human nature to react in a punishing or negative way when your dog makes a mistake. You yell or hit him for his mistakes (**dangerous**), **get angry or even rub his nose in his mistakes (dangerous)**. Yes, this is reacting to your dog, (some people actually call this “training”) but unfortunately the thing you are training is his fear response (**dangerous**) towards you.

If you change your mindset and really, truly look at the safe/dangerous paradigm, and act accordingly, you will be able to make better choices for your dog and thus help to create a well-adjusted one. Even if something bad happens once in a while (because life isn't perfect), he'll be able to bounce back quickly, because the bank of positive experiences you're building up will far outweigh the bad ones.

AND...edited to add... also think about it from the dog's perspective and how he'll relate to you if you protect him – he'll learn to **TRUST YOU TO TAKE CARE OF HIM**. Then you can work on the two-way trust thing – it's a beautiful thing to behold and it doesn't just come when you purchase or adopt a dog – you have to **EARN IT.** ■





From the Editor

► CONTINUED from pg 5

Paws provides an opportunity to support animals that might not have the opportunity to be loved and cared for during the holiday season and throughout the year.

However you choose to brighten up the holidays, I hope you are able to share it with your dogs. As the French say, *Meilleurs vœux!*

Merrie Meyers

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I also found some online membership groups for writers, which offer an array of services and support, including Jerico Writers (<https://jerichowriters.com>), and Now Novel (<https://www.now-novel.com>), as well as numerous writing coaches and editing groups. After looking into this, I was numb and overwhelmed with choices. Without a kernel of an idea, I didn't know which way to go. So, I decided to start with Mad Libs (<https://www.madlibs.com>), a word game that has evolved beyond a "fill in the blanks" notepad to an app you can use to create funny stories and play with friends on social media. Or maybe I'll just stick to the facts. It worked for Joe Friday. ■