

RUFF DRAFTS

the DOG WRITERS ASSOCIATION of AMERICA



WINTER 2024

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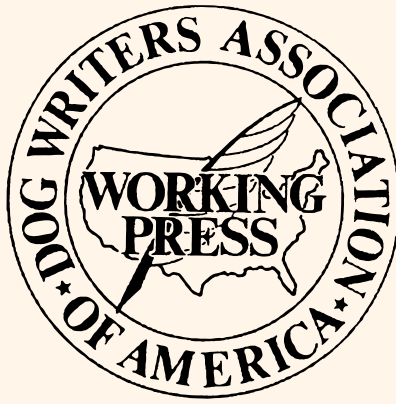
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New Merch!

LOGO WEAR

A close-up photograph of a brown dog's face, looking slightly to the right. The dog has large, floppy ears and is surrounded by dry, golden-brown grass. The lighting is warm and natural.

JOBS FOR DOGS



Ruff Drafts

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Winter, November 15

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

LET'S GET TO WORK

TO PARAPHRASE DARWIN, we consistently underate the intelligence of the animals around us. In my humble estimation, that is tragically true. Only an extremely small percentage of people offer our dogs the stimulation that having a job provides.

I see the waste of good minds both human and canine daily. I find it frustrating to see the potential in a dog, whether it be large or tiny, and know its brain is wasted because it has nothing to do. Those dogs frequently create their own activities and all too often, end up needing to be rehomed or worse.

Years ago, I stopped teaching general dog obedience classes to concentrate on training

service dogs. I found myself astounded by the abilities of these dogs. Not only did they provide comfort and emotional support, but they were also thrilled to do the “tricks” that helped their owners cope with life in a sometimes frustrating world. Opening doors, flushing toilets, removing socks, and picking up objects was the least of their duties. Those service dogs are happy to be able to do more than just lie around looking pretty.

This issue is focused on dogs who work. “Working” doesn’t have to be official, but it should provide the canine with a sense of usefulness and pride. In some ways, dog egos are human-like, they need to be motivated and rewarded for behaviors that are pleasing.

Few people understand that every single thing that we teach a dog to do is a job. Shaking hands, being quiet, sitting, walking on a leash, any task or command is not natural to a dog, so teaching him or her to do those things gives him a sense of purpose.

I am thrilled that we are dedicating this issue to all the dogs that “work.” I suggest that in your “work” you encourage readers to find a task that their pets can perform, even if it is only ringing a bell to go outside. Empower the dog, because someday they may rule the world.

Therese Backowski

Therese Backowski

DWAA President



Therese Backowski
and her dogs, Lucy
and Hank

RUFFDRAFTS

Winter 2024

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Comforter-in-Chief

Like 99.99% of the DWAA membership, I've had a few dogs in my life. Most of these dogs were terriers, starting with my fifth-grade birthday gift, a Wire Fox Terrier I named Corky. But there have been a few outliers; a Rough Collie, a Berger Picard, and a Bichon. Animal behaviorists will tell you that breeds were cultivated over time to fulfill specific roles in our world (and theirs). But inevitably, all of them have become my Comforters-in-Chief. Regardless of the situation, happy or sad, my canine companions were right by my side, knowing when to extend a paw, a wet nose or a warm back to lie against.

I grew up in a house where yelling and screaming were a daily event. Corky took me out of that environment. He opened my eyes to the world outside our house, initiated

conversations with people we met along the way, and his "alleged" cat chasing provided a plausible excuse for why we were gone so long on our walks.

If I fast-forward to every major and some minor crises in my life, there has always been a dog by my side to help me cope.

Danny, my Bichon, came to me as a foster three years ago. And, well, he stayed. Now, together we are grieving the loss of our Sunny, the 17-year-old Parson Russell who left us after Hurricane Helene disrupted our world and the stress became too much for him. At 14, Danny is no youngster, so I know there is more grief on the horizon. But for now, he bunny hops around the house and subtly stops next to me for a scratch and a smile.

I'm not sure what breed a future dog of mine might be. Dogs pick me, not the other way around. However, I am getting older and my vision is limited, and I was thinking of actually picking a dog that was bred to, or can be trained to, help me navigate. Regardless of what dog comes my way, my first requirement is that they must also be a Comforter-in-Chief.

Merrie Meyers

Merrie Meyers, Ph.D. APR, Fellow PRSA

Ruff Drafts Editor

▲
Merrie Meyers
with Danny

CINDY OJCZYK

Paws *for* Healing

HOW FOSTERING DOGS MENDED OUR BROKEN FAMILY

Cindy Ojczyk and family. All photos courtesy of Cindy Ojczyk

AS I LAMENTED yet another day of teen tantrums and family disconnection, my friend replied to my frantic phone call by suggesting we foster dogs instead of adopting just one. Our family dog had died unexpectedly. I needed to act fast. The happy yips that once echoed off the walls had been replaced by a tsunami of fighting and spewing of unkind words the likes I'd never seen.

I had little experience with grief. (Strike that. I had plenty of experience with grief. I just never learned how to properly grieve.) I didn't know how to guide my kids through such a big loss let alone wrangle their outsized emotions. Something seemed amiss beyond their heartache, but I couldn't quite identify what. Searching for solutions, I followed my friend's suggestion and settled on fostering dogs. I surmised that a parade of pups

would temper our grief, provide much needed levity, and shield me from having to choose between big dog or little dog—or to appear as if I favored one child over another. I held out hope that a host of temporary canines would reunite us.

Like many experiments, nothing unfolded as planned. We “failed” at fostering with our first two attempts. We didn't adopt them to another home. No. We adopted them into ours when my husband and I couldn't bear to force our kids to experience more loss. Kid A got to keep the purse-sized pup who tossed socks from the laundry basket. Kid B fell in love with the smiling retriever who strolled miles with her along our winding road. Whereas I envisioned a parade of temporary canines and no resident dogs, I now had two balls of shedding fluff plus a commitment to foster more.



▶
Cindy Ojczyk
and family



Betty, a Schipperke mix with fur-like polished onyx, threatened to undermine my mantra of “no more resident dogs.” My husband fell fast in love with the ten-pound pup who had the confidence of a general. When the kids started chanting, “Mom, can we keep her,” after he suggested we should, I found her a home.

Snickers, an energetic Schnauzer puppy with an old-man beard, bonded quickly to Kid A’s pocket pup. Their relationship threatened to destabilize my “no more resident dogs” wall. He found a home with a mom whose teen son had fallen into depression after the loss of his life-long companion. There was never a smile bigger than the one worn by the young man throwing balls to the pup as they ran up and down the pet store aisles during the adoption event.

Shelby had been a breeding dog in a puppy mill all four years of her life, living in a cage no bigger than one in which she could turn around. One thousand dogs in the derelict warehouse had already been euthanized by the breeder. Shelby and 200 others were saved by a coalition of rescues. She was the first canine we had to teach to be a dog. She knew nothing about toys, blankets, human love, or trust.

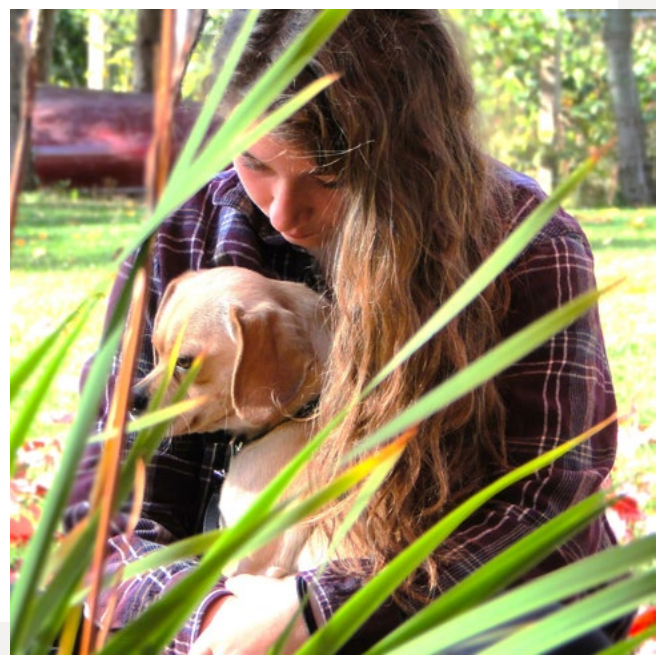
Picture a circus dog who leaps from all four legs into a ringmaster’s arms and you’ve imagined Rascal. The curly headed mini doodle could make the kids laugh after their toughest school days. And he could make them cry, especially when his mischief paired with their lack of attention. The resultant addition of chores to the chore board made them think twice about leaving their duties unattended.

One year into our canine parade, that nagging feeling that something bigger than grief was amiss resurfaced. I was fielding calls from concerned teachers about declining grades, behavioral issues, and truancy. At home we witnessed bouts of anger, disassociation from friends, and isola-

▶
Mia with Frankie,
Teddy and Crospsy



▶
Mia and Wrigs



IN MEMORIAM

Remembering Journalist Ranny Green

BY DAVID FREI

My great and longtime (50+ years) friend, Ranny Green, passed away on September 9, 2024, after a long battle with cancer.

I am going to share many of the great things he did in his life, but first this. I have spent a lot of time with cancer patients in my therapy dog work at the Ronald McDonald House NY, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, and many other places. All of them were, in some fashion, warriors in the fight against this horrible disease.

A quote from ESPN's Stuart Scott, as he neared the end of his life battle with cancer, will live on with me, especially now. Even though Stuart didn't know Ranny, I can't help but feel he was talking about Ranny when he said these words:

"You don't have to let cancer beat you. You beat cancer by how you live, why you live, and the manner in which you live."

That was Ranny. The ultimate warrior.

I saw and heard this in him for the past three years of "WE GOT THIS." It was his defiance that continued through a life that was supposed to have ended already. I heard it from him constantly in our visits at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center and Swedish Cancer Center in Seattle, and finally, at his home last Thursday.

Cancer didn't beat you, Ranny. You just ran out of time. ■



2024

CONTEST NEWS

MERRIE MEYERS

— 2024 Contest Chair —

DWAA's 2024 Writing Competition had high levels of participation. Within the 46 regular categories, 20 special (including 3 new young writer categories), there were 392 regular entries and 176 special entries, resulting in 568 items that will need to be judged. 95 unique individuals signed up to judge entries.

Categories with the largest number of entries include articles on health or general care (54) and articles on any other topic (54), with

behavior or training a close second (35).

Judging assignments are now out and judges are busy reviewing these entries. Good Luck Contestants!

Winners will be announced at our annual banquet on February 8, 2025, at the Hotel New Yorker. Watch your email box for ticket information.



dogwriters.org

ELECTION NEWS

Report from the nominating committee

The slate for the 2025 term of officers has been nominated:

PRESIDENT	Therese Backowski
VICE PRESIDENT	Billie Groom
SECRETARY	Emelise Baughman
TREASURER	Marsha Pugh
BOARD OF DIRECTORS CLASS OF 2024	Pat Cruz
BOARD OF DIRECTORS CLASS OF 2024	Dr. Joel Gavriele Gold

The Report of the Nominating Committee was received by the Secretary and published by October 1.

Any member in good standing may petition to run for a specific office if he/she sends to the Secretary, before November 1, a petition signed by ten (10) members in good standing.

If nominations are received from the floor, on or about December 1, the Secretary will mail a ballot to each member in good standing. If feasible, the Newsletter can be used to contain the ballot.

The secretary reported that no nominations were received from the floor.

If the election is uncontested, and no nominations were received from the floor, no ballots need be mailed and the slate is elected.

ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE - WGA



Dancing Paws, Laughing Paws, Prancing,
Singing Happy Paws

Puppy Paws that sway and slip.
Fluffy bundles that wobble and trip.
On their way to you to sniff.

Dancing Paws, Laughing Paws, Prancing,
Singing Happy Paws

Growing paws that now can walk
Without a bruise, without a flop.
At your side they love to stop.

Dancing Paws, Laughing Paws, Prancing,
Singing Happy Paws

Full-size paws that now can be
A joyful friend, no more puppy.
A laughing lolling tongue you see.

Dancing Paws, Laughing Paws, Prancing,
Singing Happy Paws

Gone.

Their magic dead, the dance has ended,
you're silent to the core.
The limp paws on the metal table will never
move once more.
All your tears can't bring them back, those
furry, lifeless four.

No Dancing Paws, no Laughing Paws,

It all will now depart.
The bliss is gone, the music stilled,
And love has cracked your heart.

The partner in your dance of joy has left you
all alone.



All that's left is an empty bowl and that
favorite chewy bone.

Ghostly Paws

Waltz in your dreams,
At least the dreams are good.
But they fade in the light of day
You'd keep them if you could.

Then it happens--the loneliness finally
Demands another dance.
And despite your dark and much cracked
heart,
It suddenly wants to prance.

Dancing Paws, Laughing Paws, Prancing,
Singing Happy Paws

The grief is there but you must care for the
new one who does live.
Those puppy paws and cute little claws need
all that you can give.
You never thought you'd feel it, but you're
really glad he came.

The Dance will now begin again
But never be the same.

A member of DWAA and THE WRITERS GUILD,
Anne Marie has published 25 books, 20 of
them with HARLEQUIN, which are listed at
Paperbackgems.com. Her Minigems.net site has
free dog short stories for her readers.

▲
Author as a teen
and her dance
partner, AKC
GSD "Jade" Photo
provided by author

BARBARA E. MAGERA

A PERFECT CAVALIER

D

THE CAVALIER KING CHARLES Spaniel (Ckcs) was bred to be a companion canine. Although many Cavaliers exhibit pointing and hunting behavior, their sole bred purpose and personality is to please their master(s). Cavaliers are loyal and they like to be an integral part of family life. By nature, they are terrible watchdogs. Their gay and happy-go-lucky nature is to make friends with everyone, including other domestic animals. Cavaliers are terrible at self-defense. If they are in the presence of an aggressive or feral-type breed, owners must protect and defend their Cavalier from unsolicited aggression.

My tricolor Cavalier, Constantine, has taught me patience and tolerance. Frustrating situations are not my best attribute. Unlike my other Cavaliers, who demand attention with barking or excitable behavior, Constantine remains quiet and reserved.

Our pack family includes a diverse age range, from young puppies, adolescents, midlife and senior Cavaliers. Constantine is comfortable with the pack of all ages. His favorite “buddy” is a senior Cavalier with debilitating arthritis. Generally, Constantine sets the pace for a brisk walk. He is a larger Cavalier with solid muscle and bone structure so he has a much wider stride than the others. Nonetheless, Constantine is extremely tolerant when walking with his older friend who moves slowly and cautiously.

Our bond is unique. Constantine understands language and my body gestures and responds appropriately. Even as a puppy, he was comfortable with leash training and easily learned commands. We are the perfect team.

Constantine loved the show ring. He understood my commands and performed very well. He was even smitten with a female Judge. In the U.S., the fashion flavor of the moment is a small and cute Cavalier. Constantine’s physique is obviously larger than the current trend of Cavaliers, but nonetheless he meets the breed standard.

I am in the midst of home renovations with no end in sight. My psyche is stressed as I wait for

contractors or material to show up at my house. This is not a simple interior design update. It is the work that entails major improvements. Coastal living means continuous upkeep and replacement of items earlier than you would expect. After two years of vigilant work, our accomplishments include the demolition and rebuilding of a deck and porch, replacing a roof, installation of high-impact windows and installation of new electrical fixtures. By the grace of God, we survived the 2024 hurricane season, however, there’s still some kind of disturbance brewing in the Caribbean. I wonder if Mother Nature understands that November 31st is officially the end of hurricane season.

Constantine intuitively understands my stress and anxiety. He works hard to distract me from ruminating over construction site mishaps. At the end of the day, he leads me to our bedroom and quietly lays near his fluffy rug. His large dark eyes fix on mine. Almost telepathically he conveys a sense of calm. He gently nuzzles my leg. I caress his soft muzzle in my hands. He licks my nose and face. After some cuddles, he returns to his rug and quickly falls asleep. His rhythmic breathing coaxes me into a peaceful slumber.

Constantine is appropriately named, as he is a continuous source of unconditional love, support, and loyalty to me and our family. ■

Barbara E. Magera MD, PharmD, MMM (Caraleeb) is a Cavalier fancier, exhibitor, breeder, photographer and writer (Canine Scribbles) who lives and practices Allergy Immunology in Charleston, SC.



▶
Photo Courtesy of
the author



Debbie Kay shared a picture of her 2-year-old companion dog, a Chihuahua named Zoey. Her job is to keep all the critters from my garden. She takes this quite seriously too. I often find her perched on the highest thing she can access to keep watch. When she spots a squirrel rabbit, deer or something similar, she will fly off chasing and barking at it until they cross the property line. Once banished, Zoey returns to her perch or will resume patrolling the perimeter of the property.

JAMES COLASANTI JR.

The Forever Teacher

I COULD HEAR THE RANTINGS and rumblings, partially in Italian and partially in English, as I climbed the steps to our attic. My father sat in the far back corner on an old wooden box untangling the Christmas lights used for decorating our front porch and the Christmas tree. He hated it, but it was his job, and he was a good man always willing to help my mom.

I was eight years old that year, and I sat opposite him sorting the tree ornaments, making sure each and every one of them had hooks to hang on our soon-to-be-decorated Christmas tree.

“James,” he started, “the luckiest man in the world is the man who has a dog who loves him. The two most important dogs in your life will be your first dog and your last. They are the ones who will teach you the most, and they will also be the dearest companions you will ever have.

“A dog teaches you a lot about life, that is their job, that is why God put them on the Earth.

“They are his angels with four paws; his eyes and ears to watch over you; and his way of keeping you on the right path. A dog will never lead you astray. They will always be by your side, and will always do their best for your well-being.”

My father was a master with animals. He always had their respect, and they knew he meant them no harm. Often, he would

help farmers who had an ornery bull in their herd. He would just take the animal aside and talk to him. I never knew what he said, but it always worked.

“When you were born, James, a friend of the family gave us Butchy to be your first dog. He knew that every boy needs a dog to grow up with, and it was the best gift he could have ever given. I named her Butchy because she was just too feisty to have a girl's name. We kept her in your cradle and she would always alert us when you were hungry or you needed changing. It was her first job. Now that you are older, she sleeps with you in your bed, always resting her head on or near your chest. Do you know why she does this?”

He looked up at me to see if I could tell him, but he answered when he saw my hesitation.

“It is her way of making sure you are okay during the night. She looks after you even while you are sleeping.” ■

SOUL

MEAGHAN CAVANAUGH

SOUL
PURPOSE

I DIED LAST NIGHT.

It wasn't the first time, and it won't be the last. But that didn't make it any easier.

I tried to tell you, but we don't speak the same language. I think you knew, though. You saw me separating myself from everyone in the other room when I knew it was time.

When I left, you were crying. I think you were worried I would be alone. Or maybe you were scared that you were going to be alone? But I wasn't alone. I was accompanied by dozens of friends who we'd met along the way. Former fosters we saved and rehabbed along with other family pets—some I knew, some who came before me—all comforted me and guided me back to the stars. I know you saw them in the photos you took that night when you checked them the next day.

And you aren't alone either. I'll check in on you from time to time, sending you little messengers in the form of hummingbirds or dreams at night. You can find me in the warmth of each droplet of the summer monsoons, and the crackle of wood in your fireplace in the winter.

I'm made of stardust, sent by the universe over many lifetimes to find you in each one of yours. You too are stardust, and our souls are destined to find one another.

I've come in many forms, each time as something that directly complements the earthly form you inhabit in that lifetime. I've been many things: a bird that guided your ship on an ancient sea journey, an elephant traveling beside you in our herd across the savanna, a human sister who helped you sneak out of the house to defy our parents. In this lifetime, I was your soul dog. We relished fifteen years together. Ah, the memories we shared. The hikes, romping in the river, snuggling on the couch with blankets. But my favorite? Watching the rainstorms with you.



Photos and illustration
courtesy of the author

PURPOSE

SOUL

Rain is primal—a constant, no matter which timeline we exist in. The rumble of thunder, the rhythmic sound of raindrops, the fresh, earthy smell of the air—these were moments our souls shared in every lifetime before.

Life brought us many ups and downs, and I thank you for entrusting me with your love. When your spirit was light, mine soared alongside it. But when you were hurting, sometimes the grief felt so heavy that I didn't know how to ease it for you. Our deep connection made everything feel more intense, and being different species... well, that brought its own set of communication challenges.

Goodbyes are always the hardest part, but we've done them hundreds of times. Sometimes you leave before me. This time, it was my turn.

We spent a lot of life together, but this next chapter must be done without me physically by your side. But rest assured, I'm still here.

Look for me when you need me—I'll always find you. It's my job. Especially if there's snacks. ■

P U

P U

PURPOSE





Gunny JRT in Training



Lily Mold Detection Dog



Larry and Ness looking for missing Ice Divers



Scout at the Tornado

All Photos Courtesy of Susan Bulanda

SUSAN BULANDA

The Working Dogs *in My Life*

SCOOT AND I HAD TO WORK our way through the debris that once was a beautiful house. A tornado had whipped through the community around midnight. The structural engineers surveyed each pile to make sure we could climb through to the basement to look for a missing family. After searching through all the damaged homes, we learned that the missing family was away on vacation. This was just one of many searches my dogs and I have done over the twenty years I was active in the field.

My husband and I each worked a dog. His first SAR dog was Ness, the first SAR Border Collie in the US. Scout was the first SAR Beauceron in the US. Since then, we have had many other SAR dogs.

For me, SAR was the culmination of a lifetime working with dogs. What drives us dog lovers to do what we do with our dogs? I don't think there is one answer to that question. I started as a preteen by training my dogs to do tricks for a local kid's pet show. This led to becoming a dog trainer and then a certified animal behavior consultant. Sports were fun, but doing something real with my dogs was always what I longed for. I tried flushing birds in the field, although I never shot anything. It was just finding the birds and the scent work that intrigued me. I owned a team of Siberian Huskies and sled raced with them. I taught my Doberman to detect drugs and do criminal apprehension work. My other dogs became therapy dogs and worked with children. I also taught Ness and Scout to herd sheep. Yes, many of my dogs were cross trained. Even though people said it could not be done, it can be done successfully. One of my best little working dogs was Lily, a 9 ½ pound Havanese who was one of my toxic mold detection dogs. She was so good at what she did that she was filmed and featured on National Geographic's "Dogs with Jobs."

The road to SAR work was long, but it was the most rewarding activity for me. It was clear from the start that SAR is not a sport, and no sport can qualify a dog to be a SAR dog. The teamwork between the dog and handler is like nothing I ever experienced. As a SAR dog handler, you must be qualified as a rescue person first and also be a member of a recognized unit. The dog is just one tool that you can use to find a missing person, and almost every search has the potential of saving a life.

At home, my dogs have always been my "ears" for me. Don't ask me how they know that when I take my hearing aids out at night, I cannot hear. Even my cats have learned to touch me when they need me. Although I am physically not able to do much in the field any longer, I still teach SAR dogs and help our local group. And yes, our latest in training SAR dogs is a Jack Russell Terrier from an outstanding working line.

My career with dogs spans about 63 years. Can I imagine my life without them? Absolutely not. They have been there through the rough times and the good times. They have given me and many of the people they have come in contact with comfort, friendship, companionship, and undying love. There is no doubt in my mind that God brought them into my life at a very young age and led me down the path I took with my beloved pets. It is because of my dogs and cats that I have been a successful writer with several Maxwell awards to my credit. ■

SUSAN HARTZLER

THE HEALING POWER *of* MY THERAPY DOGS

I was so nervous at first, not knowing what to expect or how my dog Baldwin would behave. My sweet rescue was a high-energy, 30-pound mop of black curls. I mean, he could play Frisbee for hours and hours and still want more. Could he really calm down enough for this new role? I had my doubts. As we were escorted into the playroom at County USC Hospital, I felt a knot in my stomach. That lingering sterile hospital smell didn't help, but I wasn't going to let anything stop us from realizing our important mission.

W

WE WALKED INTO THE ROOM where a seven-year-old girl named Maria sat all alone. She'd just undergone chemotherapy, and I was struck by how fragile she looked—more like a porcelain doll than a child. Her skin was so pale it seemed almost translucent, and her sunken eyes stared blankly ahead. My heart ached just looking at her—so young, already facing something so overwhelming. Would Baldwin be able to comfort her? Would I?

My mind raced with what-ifs. What if my newly certified therapy dog got too excited? What if he accidentally bumped her IV? But while my mind imagined the very worst scenarios, when Maria laid eyes on Baldwin, a sudden laugh escaped her lips, filling the room with a sound so joyful it caught me off guard. My “Muppet-looking” dog had worked his charm, and in that instant, the color began to return to her cheeks. This was the moment we'd been working so hard for, and let me tell you, I couldn't have been prouder—or more relieved!

But it didn't stop there. Before I knew it, he jumped up on the couch and stretched his whole body across Maria's lap as if he knew exactly what



she needed. (Hold your breath.) I held my breath, unsure of how she'd react, but then Maria's tiny hand reached out and softly stroked his chin. Baldwin let out a long, contented sigh and slowly lowered his head, closing his eyes. As he relaxed, Maria did too, taking slow, deep breaths as she gently stroked his soft curls. I could hardly believe it, but Maria's appearance improved with each breath. It was as if Baldwin had somehow breathed life back into her.

From that moment on, Baldwin wasn't just my pet; he was my partner, a bridge to something greater than the two of us could've ever imagined. With his uncanny way of reaching people—a sort of doggie sixth sense—Baldwin made Maria smile—and her smile melted my heart. After that first visit, I realized that volunteering as a therapy dog team was our true life purpose.

It made sense. I was already in my forties, carrying a deep sadness that I'd never have my own children. Sure, I loved spending time with my friends' kids and my nieces, but there was still an emptiness, a longing for something more. That's when it hit me—there was a different way to fill



that space—with Baldwin by my side, I could offer comfort and healing to children who needed it most. Together, we could make a difference.

In time, I added another dog to the mix, Bliss, a sassy blue merle Australian Shepherd with a mind of her own. I quickly learned that while temperament is essential for therapy dogs, proper training is just as crucial. Baldwin had passed his test on the first try, but Bliss—my foodie girl—she failed. Turns out she couldn't resist grabbing a tempting piece of hot dog. I had to put in extra work with her leave it command before we gave it another shot, but she passed the second time, even with the test being held right in front of a sweet-smelling donut shop! Though I must admit, there was one time she sneaked a bite of playdough inside the hospital playroom. (Show the shhh...)

The thing I quickly learned is that the human at the end of the leash plays just as important a

All photos and illustrations courtesy of Susan Hartzler



role as the dog in creating a successful therapy dog team. It's not just about holding the leash either—it's about working in perfect harmony together. As a handler, you're responsible for comforting the individuals you visit while ensuring your dog stays calm and focused. You have to be constantly aware, guiding your therapy dog away from medical equipment and keeping them from accidentally hurting someone already in pain—or eating the playdough.

Therapy dogs serve a wide range of purposes, offering everything from lifting the spirits of older adults in nursing homes to reducing stress and anxiety for hospitalized children. Unlike service dogs, who undergo specialized training to assist individuals with specific disabilities, therapy dogs focus on emotional support, providing comfort, love, and a moment of companionship to people in need. They bring a kind of healing that is different but equally important—offering their special kind of unconditional love. The work of therapy dogs is about being present at the moment, providing a lifeline when people need it most.

That's why well-trained therapy dogs are increasingly being utilized in a variety of settings, expanding far beyond the familiar realms of hospitals, schools, and nursing homes. In writing my latest book on the topic, I've discovered their impact in some truly unexpected places. For instance, they are being used in courtrooms in emotionally charged situations, such as human trafficking cases. Their presence can help ease the anxiety of witnesses and victims, making the process a little more bearable.

Additionally, therapy dogs reach out to first responders at the scene of a natural disaster, offering their special kind of support to those who dedicate their lives to protecting and serving others. The calming presence of well-trained therapy dogs can help kids build their reading skills and confidence. I've even heard of companies bringing in therapy dogs to help reduce stress and boost employee morale.

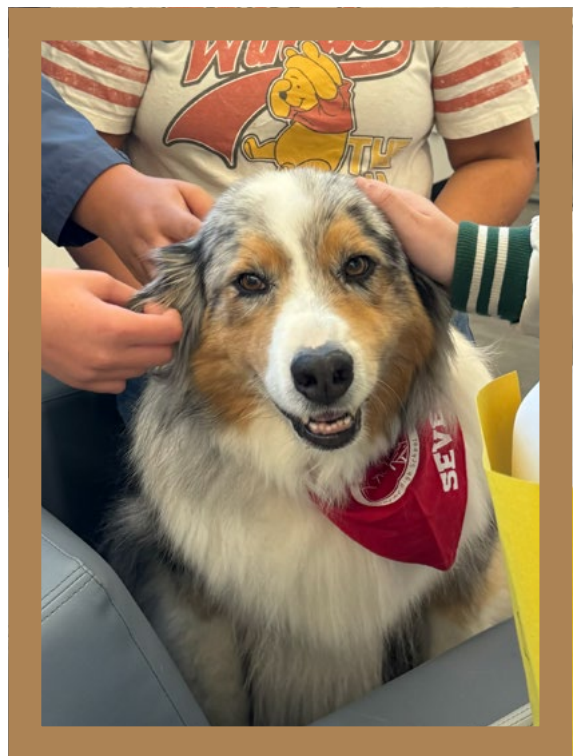
They're also great for building a sense of community. With my current pack of Aussies, Seven and Paige Turner, we visit students of all ages. I've seen them work their doggie magic—bringing a sense of calm to high schoolers and college kids, especially around exam time. And Seven—well, at

ten years old, he's practically a celebrity. Anytime we're out, someone's bound to shout his name, which cracks me up every time!

But it's not just the people they meet. Over the years, my therapy dogs have been a source of strength for me, too. When I was a caregiver for my father in the last years of his life, I couldn't have done it without Baldwin by my side. When things got rough, and they often did, I could always count on my boy to uplift my spirits.

Research on the health benefits of human-animal interactions is still relatively new but they reveal some remarkable statistics. However, according to a study by the National Institutes of Health and the WALTHAM Centre for Pet Nutrition, interacting with animals can significantly reduce cortisol levels—a hormone linked to stress—and even lower blood pressure. This finding is particularly crucial, as chronic stress is a major contributor to numerous heart-related conditions, including heart attacks and strokes.

See THERAPY DOGS pg 28 ▶



JAMES COLASANTI JR.

Play it Again, Rufus

HE WAS AN INCREDIBLE actor of the four-pawed, black, wire-haired variety, tapping in at 18-pounds: an Oscar-winner in his own right.

The ringing phone, a landline, shattered the silence of the night, destroying my restful sleep. “Hello?” It was my boss, Tim, calling from our new store, Borders, Books, & Music, on High Point Road.

“Hey, Dog Man, we need you back at the store pronto! There is a small black dog lying on the cement walk at the front of the store, and we think he’s dying. He won’t get up for any of us.”

I had been one of the oldest people applying for and being interviewed for a job at this new store. I had been told by friends that it was a workplace where you could wear a T-shirt and jeans, that the company furnished your daily coffee, and that it would be the most fun you would ever have on the job. So, I had taken the chance, making the leap of faith.

Teri and Tim, the two kids (and they could have been mine) conducting the interview, sat across from me at the table. This initial meeting was not going well. In fact, it was

taking a complete nose-dive as I had never had children as bosses before. Seeing my dilemma, I looked them both in the eyes and said, “I have 17 dogs,” which was a true statement.

At that time, we had rescued and were housing a pack of dogs. Immediately, the name, Jim the Dog Man, was christened and enshrined. And I was the first person hired for the new Greensboro store.

So, this dog had selected the right place, the right store.

At first glance, I thought I was too late. His shallow breathing was barely visible to the naked eye. I put my left hand in front of his nose. Regardless of what the nay-sayers would have you believe, dogs like to smell you so they can know whom they are dealing with. My father had taught me that, and if there ever was an animal whisperer, he was one.

The dog licked my hand. Then the dog raised its head and sat up. I called him “Rufus” because he looked Scottish.

“You okay, boy, Rufus?” He barked. “May I take that as a yes?” I put a slip-lead around his neck and walked him to my truck.

See RUFUS pg 28 ►

Some stray dogs know how to find a home,

it just takes talent; and finding the right individual.

Each dog has a unique story that leaves a wonderful canine memory.

—O. HENRY STORY, BY JAMES COLASANTI, JR.



TIPS & TACTICS

KAREN HARBERT

Adventures *in* Self-Publishing

WE ASKED DWAA BOARD MEMBER KAREN HARBERT, AUTHOR OF 23 SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS, TO SHARE SOME INSIGHTS ABOUT SELF-PUBLISHING

When I wrote my first novel, I followed the traditional path of finding an agent to represent me, submitting the manuscript (typed, double-spaced) and hoped for a blockbuster bestseller. The agent did her job, and I actually got a few very lovely rejection letters. Then the agent suffered a serious illness and I put away the manuscripts – there were three by then – and concentrated on showing my dogs, pursuing my career, and collecting more stories along the way.

A little over ten years ago, a well-known fantasy author was our house guest, and during the after-dinner conversation I brought up the subject of my own books. By then she had been self-publishing electronically. She suggested I try that route and gave me the contact information for her own e-editor. So I tried it.

The books came back to me formatted for Amazon Kindle and Barnes & Noble's NOOK. (I soon dropped B & N, as NOOK was overshadowed by Kindle.) There was a steep learning curve in uploading the books, including figuring out the pricing. Amazon publishes books for no initial fee. However, when a copy is sold, they take their cut from the top. On my first attempt I kept getting an error message and finally reached out to Amazon for help. Their answer was laughable – my price point was too low to allow for Amazon's share,

publishing costs, and then my royalties. I raised the price by a dollar and solved the problem.

Those first three books were well-received by my friends in the world of show dogs, so I wrote my fourth book using a background story that had intrigued me for years. I was having a wonderful time and kept writing. One thing about many years of showing dogs and serving in clubs, and also a long and rewarding career, is that there are true stories to draw from. In other words: Baby, I know where the bodies are buried.

As I wrote and tried e-publishing, I kept hearing people say, "I'd love to read your books, if only they were real books." If there's a downside to e-books, it's that they're 'one-and-done.' I think it may be possible for the initial book buyer to loan it once to a friend, but then it sits, forgotten, in your Kindle archives. A paperback, on the other hand, can be read and then passed along from hand to hand indefinitely. We can give them as gifts or donate them as trophies or raffle prizes, or to libraries, and they keep on giving pleasure to readers. Amazon offered a paperback option, so I tried it.

Talk about a learning curve! It's one thing to upload a perfect e-file. It's another to try to format your manuscript yourself... I'm talking about fixing margins that are too close to the centerfold or "gutter," so the first letters aren't gulped down and swallowed. The Book Creator app asks, "Do you have a cover"? Yes, a beautifully designed cover by a talented graphic artist. Oops, no, it's not quite a cover until you run it through the Cover Creator app to format the front, with the title on the spine and the back, a photo of the author, and

the book's descriptive 'blurb'. Oh, and then there's that tricky pricing decision again. It can take several attempts before you get it right. Then, if you're wise, you won't impatiently hit Publish and order your first box of author's copies. If you're wise, you'll order a single proof copy to review, rather than throw away a whole box of author's copies with typefaces too small to read and with part of your text in the gutter.

Proofreading: Self-publishing means there is no editor to catch your mistakes. After writing 23 novels I've decided that it's easier to write a book than to proofread it. If a word or a phrase looked right to you when you typed it the first time, it's going to look just as correct the third or fourth time. The same is true of punctuation, especially if Artificial Intelligence is giving less than helpful advice. For some reason, my newest version of MS Word wants to occasionally remove the quotation marks from the end of a quote. 'Only one punctuation mark is necessary here.'

You'll need at least two proofreaders, and unless you've actually written a runaway best seller, they should be friends who'll do the work for small gifts or homemade preserves. But they should also believe you when you ask for a harsh critique: "Tell me what's wrong before my readers do!" I call it, "finding the horses in the helicopter," after a truly forgettable movie we watched ages ago in which a pair of rangers on horseback were suddenly summoned by radio to the site of a distant emergency. A helicopter was sent for them, and soon we saw them at the new site—on the same horses!

I think my own worst turn of phrase was, 'the packet of registration certificates for the litter

of puppies that I last saw on the dinette table.' My sharp-eyed best friend asked how the puppies got onto the table.

Proofreading doesn't stop after the first time you and your proofreaders go through the manuscript. It takes three and sometimes four times to catch almost all the errors, but there's always one that eludes all eyes. I know. I'm lucky to have two very good friends with sharp eyes, and one of them admitted to getting involved in the story sometimes and not watching for punctuation errors.

When you're ready to publish, there are a couple of little chores you must do to plan in advance. First is the category: Where would you locate this book on a library shelf? Is it fiction? Okay, what kind? Mystery, Romance, Young Adult? Next is the sub-category: Mystery—Cozy? Hard-boiled? After that you need up to seven keywords, words to steer a search engine to your title. Mine might be Cardigan Welsh Corgis, dog shows, canine scent work, etc.

The pricing structure for an Amazon paperback is 40% for Amazon, 21% to 30% printing costs, and the remainder is the author's royalties. I don't make enough to quit my day job, but luckily, I'm retired. It does give us a nice amount to spend on eating out.

I've just finished the 23rd book in my series. My proofreaders have been through it two and three times, I've done it four times, not including correcting the nasty little errors my friends have found. Now it's time to start putting it in shape for publication. ■

MERRIE MEYERS

— Editor, *Ruff Drafts* —

Mistakes *to* Avoid If You Self-Publish



Self-publishing has come a long way from the days when my mother shared her holiday poems with her students using the school's mimeograph machine. Today, there are multiple resources designed to make your book look right at home on the New York Times bestseller list. A quick internet search revealed more than 20 self-publishing applications, and another 20+ self-publishing platforms. Although self-publishing gives us authors more opportunities to get our content "out there" to the reading or viewing public, without

the checks and balances of a traditional publishing house, there are lots of potential potholes one can fall into during the process.

Amazon offers a free "1-2-3 Steps to Self-Publishing" guide to help aspiring authors. But their software platform doesn't take the place of human hands touching your work before uploading it.

Proofreading. Every source I consulted stressed the need for an outside editor to review your work. (For more on editing, see pages 30-31

MEMBER NEWS



CINDY OJCZYK

New DWAA member, Cindy Ojczyk (“oh-check”), has been writing about dogs and cats since she began fostering with her family nearly 15 years ago. Back then, it was mostly dogs who paraded through their home. Her current foster fail, Shiloh, is not the most welcoming hostess, so Cindy now focuses her foster efforts on kittens and cats. She gets her dog fix volunteering with several animal welfare organizations, including a pet food pantry, an animal wellness program on a reservation, and an organization that provides vet care to pets of people experiencing homelessness. She writes about her experiences in her weekly Substack newsletter, Like People, Like Pets. Her second publication, PetStack, celebrates the pets of her readers and the unending ways they mirror who we are.



▲
Cindy Ojczyk and
Shiloh, courtesy
of Jennifer Grace
Photos

 cindyojczyk.substack.com

MEET DWAA'S NEW MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE CHAIR,
CHRISTINE CAPLAN

Like many of DWAA's members, Christine Caplan's professional pathway had a few twists and turns before she became a full-time writer. After graduating with a degree in Journalism from Indiana University (IU), Caplan started working for public relations agencies, generating publicity and exposure for numerous clients. After a few years, Caplan decided to try a new career path that focused on her love of animals. She went back to school and became a certified veterinary technician.

Christy worked for a veterinary practice, but also tried her hand at writing about animal health and wellness for the practice. Her success, becoming the voice of the practice, led Caplan to believe this was where she really wanted to focus her efforts. Using her veterinary science training and writing skills, Caplan started submitting articles to local,



See CAPLAN pg 29 ▶

Mistakes

► Continued from pg 25

in the Summer issue of Ruff Drafts.) A BookBaby survey (Amazon) of 850 authors and editors earning significant royalties on their work found that more than 70% had a professional editor review their work. I totally agree. With three degrees in communication, I'm still my own worst enemy when it comes to writing. (Editors: everything you read in Ruff Drafts is edited two to three times by others before publication. And, we still miss stuff!)

Award-winning sci-fi author Kim Catanzarite discussed self-publishing pitfalls in *Writer's Digest* saying, "The brain works in mysterious ways, and when it edits its own work, it tells itself that work is perfect. In other words, if you self-edit, you are sure to miss mistakes—even the glaring ones."

Before you get to the professional editor stage, you might also want to get a few friends to be beta readers and find the most obvious errors and/or omissions in your story. Writer's groups are great for this, as are friends who are non-writers but avid readers. Several members of my writer's group self-publish and I've learned a lot and enjoyed being a beta reader.

Cover Design. Another potential blooper in self-publishing is trying to design your own cover. Palmetto Publishing, a company that assists authors who want to self-publish, points out that people DO judge a book by its cover. No matter how well-written, your book has no chance of getting read (or listened to) if your reader skips over it because the cover doesn't convey the essence of your text.

Marketing Schmarketing. The Amazonians, as I call them, recommend developing a promotional plan BEFORE you publish your work. They call it a "lifetime marketing plan." Kind of like checking with MapQuest before you pull out of the driveway. This starts with visualizing your intended (widest possible) audience. Once you can "see" a book reader, you can visualize ways to engage them. This should start with search engine optimization (SEO) for both the book synopsis that will accompany its publication/listing and the artist's description (your bio). You might also want to join communities, such as writers forums that your audience frequents. If you don't have an active social media presence, such as a website and/or blog dedicated to your writing, now is the time to create one, again, before the book goes out into the world. Start collecting the names and email

addresses of friends and friends of friends. Create a grassroots subscriber's list. I follow an author who sends out an email every weekend updating her progress on her various projects. Will I buy all her books? Probably not, but I want to know what she's working on in case something sounds interesting. My research also identified the need for a "Street Team," a group of readers interested in promoting your work through word-of-mouth and providing you with reviews that you can use to promote the book. One way to cultivate this group is through Facebook. I've seen this used quite effectively with hobby groups. As a quilter, Facebook groups have been effective at alerting me to new publications that might be of interest.

Reviews. Speaking of reviews, a prepublication review that is written by a well-known entity, such as Reedsy, Kirkus Reviews, BookLife, Publishers Weekly and Write With Light, (the last two offer free reviews), will provide your book with much-needed clout. Of course, once you become a household name, you'll have other bestselling authors on speed dial and can get those Marquee Reviews without a problem. But everyone starts somewhere.

Armed with a proofread manuscript, a professionally designed cover, a community/audience following, and some professionally crafted reviews of your work, you'll be well on your way to self-publishing heaven. Good Luck! ■

Therapy Dogs

► Continued from pg 22

Other studies focus on how animals can help children with autism and ADHD. I've seen the profound effects of this firsthand during my therapy dog visits with special needs kids. At one school, Seven regularly sits with twins who both have autism. One is quiet, and the other talks nonstop, but Seven sits between them, offering comfort and allowing each girl to be herself. It's grace in motion.

I first became aware of grace in motion one afternoon with Baldwin when we took a walk at our local park. We lived far from County USC, the place we visited for more than ten years as a

therapy dog team. A little girl spotted us from across the baseball field, shouting Baldwin's name. She rushed over, and as she sat down, pulling Baldwin into her lap, she reminded me that we had visited her in the hospital years before. I couldn't place her in my memory, but she obviously never forgot my Muppet-looking dog. At that moment, I realized we had made a lasting impact on this little girl's life. It reminded me of the saying: "To make a difference in the life of a child is to change the world." That's when I knew Baldwin and I could change the world—one child at a time. ■

Rufus

► Continued from pg 23

Early the next morning I dropped Rufus off at my vet, Four Seasons Animal Hospital, for a full examination. Later that afternoon, I returned to pick him up and get a diagnosis.

Doc Stubblefield entered the patient room, looked at me quizzically, and asked, "What's wrong with you?"

"Me?" I asked. "What's wrong with my new dog?"

"Nothing," he replied. "Absolutely nothing. I haven't seen a dog that healthy in weeks, blood-work included."

"Last night," I stated emphatically, "Rufus was at Death's door, barely breathing. Even when I got him home, he just slept. Out like a light."

Doc started chuckling. "Man, you've been duped! Duped by someone on four paws who was looking for a new home. And he found one in you. That's a damn smart dog!"

Rufus always slept with his head on my pillow, right next to me, as close as he could get. He snored. Loudly. But he was the best.

When it was dinnertime, he would round up everyone in the pack, putting herding dogs to shame. His companionship and devotion were overwhelming. He made sure I knew how thankful he was for his home.

Rufus lived 7 more years filling me with his comical joy. And, as he came into my life in the night, he left the same way, only this time taking a small piece of my heart with him. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

*DWAA has a brand
new Instagram Page*

**Please follow us and catch all the
latest news from your Association!**



[instagram.com/dwaa_us](https://www.instagram.com/dwaa_us)

Caplan

► Continued from pg 26

regional, and national publications, eventually securing some recurring volume work, along with content and product reviews for local pet-related businesses.

Through her work, Caplan encountered several other pet writers who were also members of DWAA, including former DWAA president Carol Bryant. It seemed like a good group to join for mentoring and professional support, so she did.

Recently, Caplan answered a call for volunteers and was appointed Membership Chair by DWAA's Board of Directors.

"Her enthusiasm is infectious," says DWAA president Therese Backowski. "We know she will increase DWAA's member-to-member communication."

Caplan says she wants to increase DWAA's footprint in the larger media community, while also improving member benefits. Currently, she

is compiling information about member areas of expertise. This Subject Matter Guide will be provided to national media who are looking for individuals with specific knowledge to interview for their stories.

"I review each membership application as it comes in," Caplan says. I can't believe the varied experiences that our members have. What a rich resource and knowledge base we can offer media and pet-related companies."

If you have an idea you want to share with Christy, you can reach her via email or read her hound stories on wagandcluck.com. ■



wagandcluck.com



christycaplan@gmail.com

Healing

► Continued from pg 7

tion from family. Intensive medical intervention led to Kid A being diagnosed with anxiety and ADHD—inattentive type. Six months later, Kid B emerged with a similar diagnosis of anxiety and ADHD—hyperactivity type.

We could have stopped fostering but didn't. We were using the strategies we were learning in therapy to also care for the dogs. And it was working. By focusing on the importance of structure, the power of calm, the need for play, and the value of one good friend, we were healing dogs alongside ourselves.

The truth was, fostering dogs was more than a temporary distraction from our grief. Fostering had become the very yarn that wove our fractured family back together. Each dog had become a chapter in the story of our recovery as we found new ways to communicate, collaborate, empathize, and support one another. Because of fostering, we not only endured the storm of adolescence and the stress of mental health disorders but emerged stronger and more united than before. ■

STRUT YOUR STUFF



Sling your Swag, Promote DWAA

The Dog Writers Association of America has enlisted Queensboro to produce and ship our authorized logo wear. Shop a multitude of styles of apparel, hats and other items that are made to order with our logo!

Visit the links on our website and you'll be taken to Queensboro's website to place your order.



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