

RUFFDRAFTS

the DOG WRITERS ASSOCIATION of AMERICA

SUMMER 2025



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Meet the Board

BILLIE GROOM AND
LISA BEGIN-KRUYSMAN

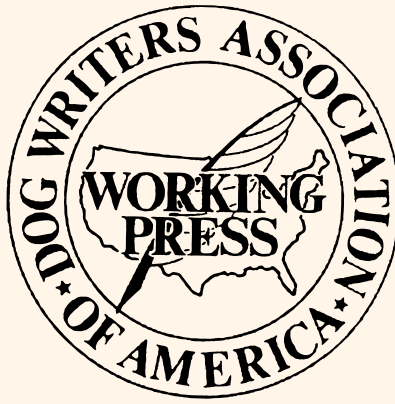
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Tips & Tactics

DON'T BE QUERY WEARY!



THE TRAVEL ISSUE



Ruff Drafts

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

ISSUE DEADLINES

Spring 2025, February 14
Summer 2025, May 16
Fall 2025, August 15
Winter 2025, November 14

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Angela Capodanno

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

I HADN'T BEEN PRESIDENT of this organization for more than what seemed like five minutes when I received a letter from a long-time member. Puzzled, I opened it and read it with great dismay. The member was angry because she received an email indicating that her dues were due. She was furious. The letter contained two handwritten pages of complaints that included everything from the irritating things that she experienced while judging the Writing Contest, to the exorbitant amount of the dues. One of her questions was, "Where does the money go?" She was especially disappointed because I couldn't (wouldn't) change her password to the website for her, even though I explained that I didn't want to know anyone's password. Above all, she wanted to know why being a member of this organization was of any benefit to her.

I didn't agree that the dues are outrageous, because they aren't, but I did wonder if we, as an association, couldn't be doing more to benefit our

members. Perhaps with the brains and writing power of so many of us, we could be helping one another more, couldn't we?

I felt attacked and discouraged, not to mention sad, because as I said, I'd been president for about five minutes...

So, thus began the process of learning my new job and figuring out what, if anything, needed to change.

The Website.

It began by reconnecting with our former webmaster, **ANGELA CAPODANNO**. She has masterfully revamped the website.

If you haven't signed in recently, please do so. It is easy to navigate and it works 99.9% of the time. We've added content, and even a spot to shop.

Writing Competition.

We've revised the Writing Contest as well as the entry, and payment process. It was a breeze this year, especially because **MERRIE MEYERS** and Angela Capodanno continued to refine the entry process so that most entrants could easily understand how to upload submissions.

Two new Youth categories were added to the 2024 writing competition, increasing the number of entries among writers under 18. Two additional categories are being developed for the 2025 contest. We are seeking additional Special Category Sponsors to provide even more cash prizes. Sponsors determine the focus of their category and all funds go directly to the winner.

Membership.

We now have a Membership Committee, chaired by **CHRISTY CAPLAN**. Last year's membership stats indicate that we are rebuilding our membership base (down from pre-COVID numbers). Currently we have 241 active members with more applications pending. We hope to get to 250 by summer.

One recruitment strategy involved offering non-members incentives to join. Any nonmember who entered the 2024 Writing Competition received a signup discount during the month of

See PRESIDENT'S COLUMN pg 39



◀ Therese Backowski and her dogs, Lucy and Hank



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Birch, Anise, and Clove

Errata

Barb Magera is credited as the
Photographer of the photos which
appeared on pages 7 and 10 of the
Spring 2025 issue of Ruff Drafts.
We regret the omission.



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



SO MANY OF YOU MOVE around town or across the country with your dogs in tow we decided that a travel-themed issue of Ruff Drafts would yield some interesting stories. We weren't wrong.

My first canine-involved trip was on the back of a Boxer named Countess. My great-uncle George had an affinity for boxers, and large ones at that. At 18 months I was still tiny, and in my way of thinking a Countess-transport was the perfect option to get from here to there. What she lacked in a saddle she made up for in kindness. She patiently allowed me to crawl all over her, including when she stood up and took a step, at which point I slipped off her back, giggling the whole way down. Years later, I was told I made many attempts to get on the Countess taxi, mostly ending in a downward slide to earth.

Jumping forward several decades, the tables have flipped and I am now a dog trans-

porter. Every summer, I travel from Florida to North Carolina with a dog or two in tow. The dogs keep me company, filling the time between chapters of an audiobook with commentary that ranges from snoring to yips, signaling the need for a pit stop.

In other news, we continue to look for new ways to celebrate you and your work. In this issue, you'll see a rundown of our blog sections and information about how to submit your content. We've been slowly refreshing it and hope you can help put some punch in the lines. Thanks in large part to Anne Marie Duquette, who wrote all the contest winner profiles last year and this year, we've been adding content. Anne Marie also curates the Flash Fiction and Bad Writing sections of the blog. Betty Weibel volunteered to review the agility submissions. What sections would YOU like to help with? Remember, when you provide us with a piece for the blog, it qualifies as "published" for the writing competition. Easy peasy!

Speaking of content, last month we were remiss in not mentioning that ALL the photos from the 2025 Awards Banquet included in the Spring Ruff Drafts were taken by Dr. Barbara Magera. We so appreciate that she spent her evening capturing the celebration. If you'd like to see more of Barbara's work, please visit the blog section entitled Dog Shows.

Recently, every non-member who entered the writing competition received a limited time offer to join DWAA without having to pay the one-time application fee of \$35. We got some takers, but there's always room for more members in the tent! If you know of a former member who didn't renew and would like to, please let our membership chair, Christine Caplan, know. You can connect with her from the Membership > Why Be A Member page of our website.

I enjoy reading the content that is posted by our members in email, on Substack or wherever you choose to share it. If you'd like me to journey with you, please send me an

▲
Merrie Meyers
with Danny

▶ See EDITOR'S COLUMN pg 38

ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE

OSCAR'S STORY



W

HAT DO YOU GET when you cross a dachshund with a beagle? A red, beagle-sized dog that looks like a dachshund! It was quite unusual to see this BIG dachshund, but compared to my German Shepherds, he was still “the little guy.”

We’ve always been a “big dog” and “little dog” family. A German Shepherd service dog for me, and a small dog for my kids to snuggle. And yes, my husband and I snuggled the wee one, too. Sheba was my GSD mobility aid dog, Striker was my retired GSD service dog, Tivvy was our terrier, and our new dachshund mix, Oscar Mayer Weiner Dog, was the sidekick.

(Okay, the name isn’t very original, but he really *looked* like an Oscar!)

Oscar was a surprise, to be sure. At the time, we had three dogs. The last thing we needed was a fourth. We live in San Diego, and my cleaning lady lived in Tijuana. She showed up one day with “Shorty” and asked me to take him. Maria had rescued the stray youngster from across the border but couldn’t keep him herself.

I reluctantly refused. We were already pushing the “one-pet” lease clause.

“Please!” she begged. “Street dogs don’t live long in Mexico!”

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

Well, we all know how fast *that* can go south. I became another failed foster parent. I figured, well, we’ve hidden two extra dogs from our absentee landlord. What was one more?

As the new dog in the pack, Oscar was wary at first but soon realized he’d struck gold. He settled in quickly, wisely stayed at the bottom

of the pecking order, and made himself right at home. He also decided that since none of the other dogs slept in our bed, he would boldly claim that territory for himself. He’d snuggle right against my shoulder every night, and I found him in the same spot every morning.

Oscar had no real “job” at first. We humans had our four-legged favorites, of course, but I made sure to give the new dog extra attention. Despite my ever-present service canine, Oscar soon attached himself to me. Even though he was small, he became a ferocious watch dog—or so he thought. I found it amusing that when my two GSDs went into full “stranger danger” bark mode, Oscar was right there with them.

If he was in the car with me, he growled if someone came too close. In our yard, he even sat on the seat of my motorcycle and guarded it. A dachshund on a bike? It was just too cute! Oscar took his job seriously, even if I did not. After all, I had two GSDs. They were my front line of defense. And Tivvy barked at *everything*, so we never took her seriously.

But Oscar was no Tivvy. One night, around two in the morning, Oscar started growling. With his nose right next to my ear, I woke up. And like those foolish people who ignore fire alarms, I ignored my dog.

“Oscar, quiet.”

More growling. More annoyance over interrupted sleep.

“Oscar, shut up!”

Our bedrooms were all on the second floor, with a wrap-around balcony in the front of the

Oscar. Photo by
John Mitchell

See OSCAR pg 41

ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE

My Move *from Hell*

AS A FICTION WRITER, I love to pretend that the heroines I create are extensions of myself; stronger, nobler, better natured. But recently, I decided that I've been seriously delusional! To set the scene: Imagine a military husband residing in San Diego receiving orders to Florida. Picture the writer wife determined to play the part of heroine.

Finally, the empty house is packed, the cars are loaded and we are off. I'm heartily glad we're taking two cars. My husband is questioning the sanity of taking two children, an Afghan, Irish Setter and a Lab, two large Dutch lop rabbits, and three cockatiels to Florida. Not only must we stop at every gas station for child bathroom breaks, but for dog breaks, too. We can't synchronize the potty stops. I tell him to quit complaining, and be glad our California horses are traveling by equine transport. He says it's small consolation when the cars smell like a zoo.

Still, I managed to remain relatively calm. But my patience is sorely tested at the "rest areas from hell." A wild woman wanted me to rearrange my luggage in the back seat so she could get a ride with us. I told her I didn't pick up hitchhikers. She wouldn't leave until I rolled my window down so my two big dogs' growls would send her on her way. Of course my husband was in the men's room at this time.

By now my inner heroine is starting to get a complex. She isn't managing all this well. Two hundred and fifty miles from the next city--our destination--my smug inner heroine congratulates herself on making it this far. We stop for the night and put the children and dogs in the hotel room. The last thing I say to the kids is, "Keep the dogs in the bathroom." I come back with the suitcases, open the door, and Bam! Ivy my Afghan dog, is off running, straight for the unfenced busy Interstate frontage road. The hero is missing again (this time



at the hotel office), and there's just me to catch this dog who's mad as hell from being cooped up in a car for five days. I yell at one kid to get the hero, and yell at the other for not following directions, and I'm off.

In the adjoining meadow I jump a mud puddle, and feel my right ankle bone snap. As I've done this before (it's a rotten joint and hurts like hell), I know I'm in serious trouble now. So is my dog. I watch her head for enough 18-wheelers in high gear to kill a herd of elephants. I'm crying hysterically and screaming for her to please come back. She never does -- my Afghan is all legs and no brains. I can't believe I've driven this dog across the whole nation only to watch her die. I close my eyes as she heads onto the road. I can't watch.

Relief comes. It's the hero. He goes into serious denial when I tell them I've broken my ankle again. "Are you sure? Maybe it's just a sprain." I'm screaming, "It's broken! Get the dog, get the dog!" He doesn't want to leave me lying alone in the dark. But I made him find Ivy first. I managed to hop back to the hotel room on one foot. After traveling two and a half miles to catch up with Ivy, my husband returns with my muddy dog, and with ice for my foot. My hero is livid. He says the dog isn't worth my broken ankle. If he didn't truly love me...he doesn't finish his sentence. He's covered with mud from the flying tackle he used to bring her down.

Things go from bad to worse. The next morning, I got behind the wheel of the car and drove with a broken ankle. We're in the middle of nowhere, hundreds of miles from the nearest hospital and I can't leave my car and animals behind. So, I drive there with prayers and cruise control. Once we finally get there, I get crutches and a cast. (Yes, it's broken).

Finally, we found the rental home. Once the moving van with the furniture arrives, we can

See MOVE pg 38 ►

BARBARA E. MAGERA, MD

My Family Vacation



HE WAS SO CUDDLY and soft. At 12 weeks old, this little beagle puppy was snuggling in my arms and licking my face. He chewed gently on my fingers. Little did my puppy know that this moment fulfilled four years of yearning. I wished for a dog my entire seven-year-old life. I recalled the words sung by Gene Autry about “How much is that doggie in the window? The one with the waggly tail.” My dreams came true with this little soft ball of fur.

On my seventh birthday, we visited some distant family members in Salem, Massachusetts. They owned a Great Dane who drooled on everything and everybody. My Mom tried to remain cordial but was horrified when the dog

shook his head and drool hit Mom’s face. That one trip to Salem was our last visit to the historic town famous for witch hunting and stake burnings. Maybe this gruesome past explained the unhappy existence of my Salem relatives.

The highlight of our trip home was stopping at a produce farm in rural Connecticut, supposedly to buy apples. When the farmer’s children led me to their barn, my eyes met my future loyal companion. Tears of joy streamed down my cheeks as I scooped up my beagle male pup, whom I named “Corky”. While I was hugging and kissing Corky, the farmer’s kids were busy running after his squealing litter mates. Corky remained quiet and content in my arms. I placed him on the grass to see if he would rush to his canine family; however, to my surprise, he stretched his paws on my skinny legs and whimpered to be cuddled again.

Once home, Corky’s unleashed energy burst forth as he ran zoomies around the house. How he avoided crashing into furniture or walls was beyond comprehension. Once he tired out, he lovingly followed me everywhere. As an only child, I was not used to having company 24/7 and in every space. He playfully chewed at my socks and eventually managed to pull off one sock and shoe while I was on the commode.

At mealtime Corky inhaled his dinner with gusto. One steadfast rule my father demanded was not to feed the dog anything from our table and he sternly meant it.

Bedtime advanced quickly for both of us. The plan was that Corky would sleep in his doggie bed located on the floor next to my bed; however, as soon as “lights out” occurred, his loud whining and barking commenced. In my childish mind, I tried to comfort him by

sharing my doll with him. Surely cuddling with my favorite doll would bring him comfort and settle him into a slumber. What commenced was an aggressive tug of war. While I was holding my doll's head, Corky was pulling on her arm. In those days, doll bodies were made of a soft rubber stretchy material. Corky was having a grand time by latching his little jaws on one of her arms and pulling with all his might. Finally, her arm ripped off and a snowstorm of tiny foam stuffing blew up on my bed and his. I started screaming and crying bitterly as I was overcome that my beloved puppy had amputated the limb of my favorite doll. My Mom was not pleased. My parents tried their best to clean up the foam mess before Corky started munching on my doll's foam innards. After more zoomies around the house, peeing and pooing on the white living room rug, Corky exhausted finally fell asleep in the dining room. My Dad gently picked him up and placed him in his doggy bed. We all managed about four hours of sleep until Corky awoke with barks and screams to resume play and zoomies.

Puppy chaos continued for the next two weeks. My mother's nerves were fried from cleaning up doggie excreta. She had not grown up with indoor pets. In fact, any creature that routinely peed poed, or puked on her immaculately clean floor was a great source of anxiety for her. Why my parents chose a white rug for their off-limits-except-for-guests living room was beyond my comprehension. Corky chose the white rug as his favorite indoor relief area.

At age seven, I had no idea how to house-break a puppy. Turns out Dad, who'd reportedly grown up with pet dogs, hadn't a clue either. After two weeks of puppyhood Mom was frazzled with trying to keep a clean house. She clearly voiced displeasure with cleaning up after an active puppy who showed no progression with housebreaking.

The most dreaded day of my childhood happened in July. I woke up expecting warm licks and hugs from Corky. When I rolled out of bed, I sleepily walked into our kitchen. All of Corky's doggie toys, his doggie bed and water bowls lay near the kitchen door but there was no sign of Corky. In my young mind, I just assumed Dad took Corky outside for a walk. Breakfast with Mom continued as normal although her conver-

sation was sparse. During the next hour, I asked where Dad and Corky were located. Mom just didn't answer me. I immediately ran outside, still in my pajamas, expecting to see my cute little puppy outside with Dad who was ready to greet me. Instead, there was just sunshine and silence. My screams for them remained unanswered. I ran through the entire front and huge backyard. Then I saw the empty space in the garage where Dad's car usually sat. Tears of fear ran down my cheeks. Was Corky sick or worse hurt and Dad rushed him to a local Vet's office? My tears turned into sobs then into loud screaming of "where is my little puppy?" I ran up the back stairs into my house and screamed again at my Mom "where is my little Corky?" By this time, Mom's eyes were misting and her voice was cracking saying "your father will explain it to you later his afternoon."

I was terrified that something terrible happened to my puppy. I imagined that he either fell down the long two-story outdoor stairs and was seriously hurt or worse ran onto the busy front street and was hit by a passing car. All I could do was bury my face into my bedroom pillow and cry my heart out. By mid-morning, the emotional toil and trauma must have worn me out to the point that I fell asleep until Dad came home in the afternoon. He came into my room and gently stroked my head. "I'm sorry Barb" was all he said. I flung my arms around his neck and begged him to tell me what happened to my beautiful little puppy. "Corky was so lonely for his brothers and sisters that he had to go back home to his family on the farm." I was shocked. I begged and pleaded with all the negotiating power a seven-year-old could muster. I promised to take better care of Corky. I vowed to take him outside for pees and poos. I promised to clean the floors, rugs and mats wherever he peed or poed. I even offered to vacuum the coveted white living room rug daily to keep Mom happy.

My childhood attempts at negotiation failed miserably. In fact, no one listened or even attempted to provide a reasonable response to my intended plans. Even mealtime conversations were replaced by elevator music from the radio.

I was devastated. In my young mind, I thought that I had done something terribly wrong



BLOG

We are dusting the cobwebs off our blog! During the last year, we've been expanding our blog content, and more is coming. DWAA's blog provides you, our members, with a platform for sharing ideas in nearly 20 subject areas. A description of the blog sections, along with information about how to submit your work, follows. Please send an email to the individual listed in each section, and include the name of the section in the subject line of your email. Submissions should include a title and your contact information. Once received, submissions are checked for relevance to the specific category and scheduled for posting.

Agility

Blog posts on Agility should be sent to Betty Weibel. Betty is no stranger to the world of agility. She is an Ohio-based writer, editor and public relations pro who works with the [United States Dog Agility Assn.](#) and a team of writers and editors on the USDAA publishing team. They developed this agility-focused blog to inspire writers to explore the sport and its stories, whether it focuses on competition from various leagues, or the benefits of the sport for canines and their handlers. We welcome all contributions and feedback. Send your submissions to her at bw@yp-pr.com. Please include contact information with the submission.

Awards Banquet

Photos and stories from the annual awards banquet should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.

Bad Writing

Based on Professor Scott Rice's "The Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest," we challenge you to submit writing that would cause any editor to shiver with distaste. The rules are simple. Each original submission must consist of a single sentence no longer than 50 words, and contain the word "dog(s)". You can also submit prose that is shorter but equally as awful. Please include BAD WRITING in the subject heading and send your submissions to Anne Marie Duquette at AMDQ1@yahoo.com. Please include contact information with the submission.

Contest News

This section of the blog will include information about upcoming contest categories and deadlines. Special Category Sponsors interested in promoting their award topic can also submit content. Send submissions to 2025dwaacontestchair@gmail.com. Please include contact information with the submission.

Dog Shows

Photos, and stories about any kind of dog show can be featured here including confirmation, obedience, rally, hunting, scent work, etc. Submissions should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.

Flash Fiction

Flash fiction is a popular genre, known for the ability to express emotions in just a few short words, or paragraphs. Entries must be a firm 200 words MAX, including title, and your WORDS, not photos, must tell a story. There must be a dog in the story. Send entries to Anne Marie Duquette at AMDQ1@yahoo.com. Please put "Flash Fiction" in the header. Please include contact information with the submission.

Gallery

The Gallery section of the blog provides a showcase for visual communicators. Artists of all types; illustrators, painters, photographers, sculptors, textile artists and even videographers are welcome to submit two dimensional versions of their dog-oriented work. Submissions should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.

Hall of Fame

Hall of Fame honors the distinguished members who represent the best of the best in DWAA. These individuals can be found mentoring others, serving in positions of leadership and/or advocacy and serve as icons in our community. Submissions for this section are authored by DWAA's board of directors' Hall of Fame selection committee.

Health

Health submissions focus on the physical, emotional and mental well-being of dogs. Entries can address medical, nutritional and exercise tips, and tactics. Submissions should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.

History

History can include anything from an important "Day in Dogdom" to stories about famous authors and their work. Stories about famous dogs are also welcome. Submissions should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.

Leadership

This section is about DWAA's Board of Directors, Committee Chairs and Project Leaders. Submissions for this section are authored by DWAA's social media team.

Loss

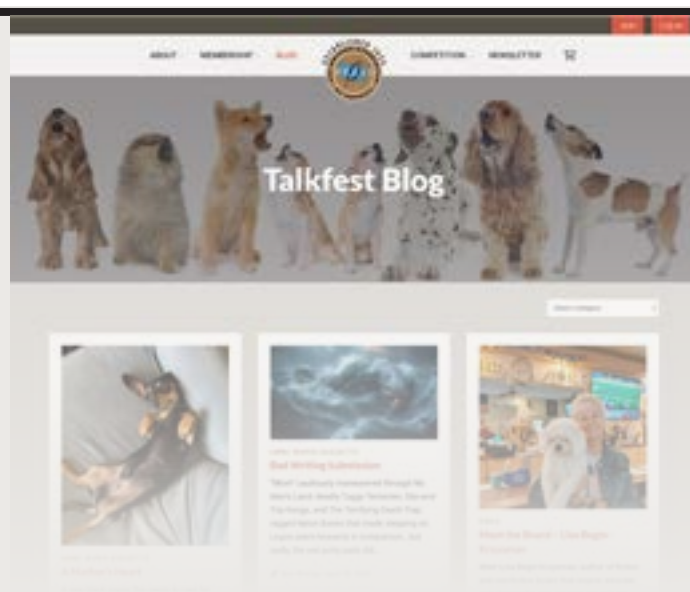
The loss section offers writers a chance to reflect on the lives they shared with their four-legged family members. Submissions should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.

Member News

We want to see you shine! DWAA members receiving recognition from community or industry groups, winning awards or achieving significant goals should consider sharing this information with their peers. Submissions should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.

Membership

The benefits of DWAA membership can be found in this section of the Blog. Members are also invited to submit reflections of how their DWAA benefitted them personally or professionally. Submissions should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.



Press Releases

This section provides news that is submitted about DWAA. Contest is typically sent out to a broader community but reposted in this location. Submissions should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.

Rescue

Members are invited to submit information about the activities and achievements or rescue organizations or individual dogs that have been rescued and their families. Submissions should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.

Spotlight

Members who win a regular or special award category in the most recent writing competition have an opportunity to be profiled in this section. Sponsors are also profiled. Profiles are compiled by Anne Marie Duquette. Individuals and sponsor organizations are contacted directly.

Tips and Tactics

Ideas for writing, editing and promoting your work are covered in this section. Columns are reprinted after they run in Ruff Drafts. This section is curated by Merrie Meyers, editor of Ruff Drafts.

Young Writers

This category is specifically for writers under 18 who want to share their work. Submission also provides them an opportunity to qualify for the writing contest. Submissions should be sent to Merrie Meyers at RDeditor@dogriters.org. Please include contact information with the submission.

JAMES COLASANTI JR.

...A TRIP WITHOUT ME...

THE TRIP *to* FOREVER

S

UNDAY MORNINGS. It always happened then, and I was always ready. It was my favorite day of the week.

Our green and white 1955 Pontiac sat in the driveway with its rear doors and trunk opened, ready to be loaded up for the trip. We had gone to early mass, and we were changing clothes for the day's events.

We were leaving the comforts of the city to visit our cabin in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York.

The cooling fall air fell sedately over the pastureland and cornfield that surrounded the perimeter of our property. White fluffy cumulus clouds passed silently overhead giving a momentary shade and a special clarity to the earth below. As we walked in the woods, streaming sunlight dappled the pathway with both light and dark patches.

Butchy, my dog, a spayed-female terrier-hound mix, led the way. At the time we were both six years old, having been born in 1949. My father, James Sr. followed directly behind the dog, and I brought up the rear.

On the outskirts of the woods that bordered the cornfield, we came upon an outcropping of fallen logs. We all sat to rest our weary limbs.

Butchy, whose hearing was as sharp and as keen as her sense of smell, stopped dead and cocked her head. She had heard an animal, most likely a deer, in the thick brush below us.

She darted, her back legs pedaling through the fallen leaves kicking them up into the air as she ran. I screamed after her, but her speed knew no stop as she had seen her target, and she was after it. We both knew that she would not hurt whatever it was she was chasing, but we didn't want her to go too far into the densely wooded center of the forest.

My father whistled to her, and although Butchy normally responded to this, and to him, she did not come back. Tears welled and started rolling down from the corners of my eyes. I was afraid I had lost my best friend.

The sun was beginning its descent behind the tallest pines, terminating the daylight in our part of the forest.

My father knelt down next to me, putting his hands on my shoulders, and said, "Let me tell you this son: A dog is a companion and a friend like none other that you will ever have."

He continued by telling me, "When God made the Earth and put people and animals upon it, he gave everyone a soul—people and animals alike. Now there are some people who will try to tell you that animals don't have souls, but you have to realize that they are the same people who thought the earth was flat. And James, a dog is never lost to you if he or she can retrieve the scent of your soul. That is what will bring them back to you every time."

My father taught me, and always wanted me to learn his way, and not the hard way,

Now dry your eyes, it's time for us to go, and take off your jacket and give it to me."

As we left the forest, my father laid my jacket on the ground near the path in front of the logs where we had been sitting earlier. At the time I didn't understand what my father was doing. But I knew better than to question it.

The sun had now dipped behind the trees casting long shadows over the open pastureland matching my long face as we trekked back to the cabin for supper.

Much later that evening we returned to the edge of the woods to the exact spot where we had first entered. Our flashlight beams scoured the path to the woods and came upon a familiar sight.

Two gleaming eyes reflecting back the glow from the beams looked up from the nest she had made in my jacket. Just as my father had known, Butchy was there waiting for our return.

I left the forest happy that night with my companion, Butchy. Our relationship would continue for another ten years, and in my heart, forever. Each of us learned from one another about trust, the joys of real friendship, and the true meaning of unconditional love. ■

ROBERTA ELSIE JAY

Mother Tasha Also Plays

Tasha obeys like a robot every time I ask.
 She heels as if she's literally stuck to my side.
 She fetches a pencil, a newspaper, brings them intact.
 She loves her puppies ... and gives our cat a sloppy bath.

When she's not on command, I can't contain her.
 On her own, she yearns to travel, as German Shorthairs do.
 She's 20 miles from home when I find her.
 She's an explorer of the world.

Tasha goes with our family to a secluded bay in Baja.
 She awkwardly curls up on the cushion around the
 table in our camper and sleeps, patiently waiting,
 all 70 pounds of her.

Reaching the ocean water of the bay, she instantly dives in.
 She swims for hours.
 She is in the water every time I look for her.
 She is tiring, I can see. She's going to drown.

I have to find something to help her.
 I look around for what's in camp, anything ...
 Oh, I've found it!
 I call her out of the bay.

I scramble putting the blown-up truck inner tube under her wet paws,
 around her belly, and over her back, encompassing her middle.
 She obeys without complaint, longingly eyeing the water.
 She doesn't realize the danger she faces. I am satisfied. I set her free.

She looks so strange, so comical, a big dog swimming in
 a huge make-shift life jacket.
 But Mother Tasha is now safe to play
 her loving heart's out. ■

CINDY OJCZYK

Three's Company, Four's *a* Crowd

THE MASKED BANDIT *on* OUR HONEYMOON

Steam billowing from the showerhead nudged a soft cedar scent from the bathroom paneling. The spa-like atmosphere had me conjuring images of a shampoo commercial with cascading water that would wash away the grit and stiffness from miles hiked earlier in the day.

A

S I STEPPED ONTO THE TUB floor, I was wrested from my reverie by a disturbance outside the cabin. *Who is shouting obscenities in the middle of our quiet woods?* I pulled my wet foot from the warmth so I could balance over the toilet to peer out the window.

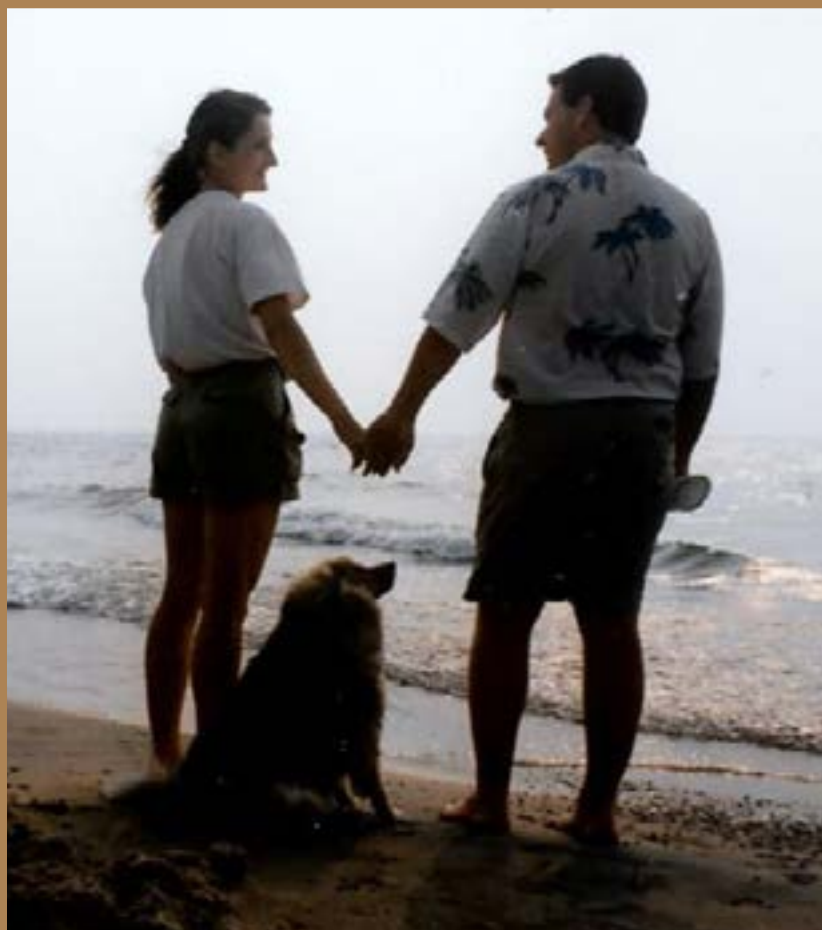
Joe and I had just celebrated the first day of our honeymoon. A cerulean sky and peak autumn leaves served as a backdrop for a week of adventure in a national forest in northern Wisconsin. Happy energy had filled the three of us – me, Joe and our dog Snuka. While the offers to care for Snuka during our vacation had been plenty, it didn't seem right to leave him behind. He had trekked beside us through two years of dating.

Snuka's food and toys were packed alongside our kayaks and hiking boots for our first official family trip. Joe and I were running on little sleep and dwindling adrenaline. Snuka was wound tight like a top ready to spin. In the first hour on a remote trail, he chased a squirrel up a tree trunk before he realized he wasn't a cat. He slid like a cartoon character to the ground, bounced with a grin, and sprinted down the trail untethered, zigging and zagging and adding more miles than the two of us combined. He rattled a pair of bounding deer, nosed a turtle sunning on a log, and snuffled countless golf balls buried in fallen leaves in the course carved out of a forested valley. Thank

goodness Snuka had been firmly leashed at our side when we encountered a bear at our cabin door.

My friend, Loree, believes we don't find animals, they find us. Snuka followed me into my life on a sunny spring day during college senior week. Students with little to do littered the grassy quads bathing in the sun and tossing the Frisbee. As I crossed through the chaos to the cafeteria, I spotted a wide-eyed smiling dog. Lured by his resemblance to a stuffed animal one might see in a Christmas window at the department store, I stopped for a moment to pat his very furry head. I didn't think anything more was communicated in this short gesture. Two minutes later with my cafeteria tray in hand, I caught a flash of fur at my feet in line at the salad bar. I took him outside, patted his head, and thanked him for the laugh. Three hours later and through two sets of steel doors he found me again on the other side of campus. I had just returned a set of dumbbells to the weight rack when I caught a glimpse of his generous smile reflected in the mirror.

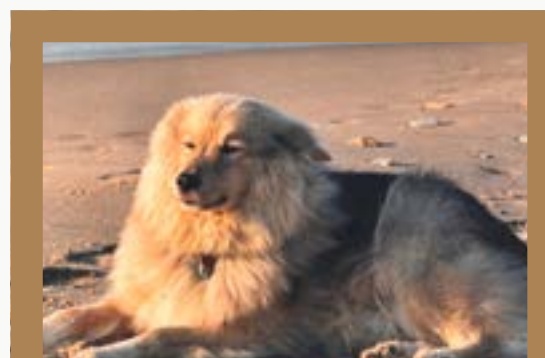
We took our first walk with an extension cord loosely tied around his neck. During the second walk we upped our distance from one block to two since walking made him happy. After a month of searching for his past home, he found a new one with me. I bought a leash and collar and engraved a silver-plated tag with his name.



Cindy, Joe and Snuka
on the beach



Snuka



Snuka became the model to which all future dogs in our life were compared. He wasn't just committed to the act of obedience. He genuinely loved people and the reward of praise. Yet the scene unfurling outside my steamy bathroom window was not what anyone would expect from our never-before disobedient dog. My new husband was pitching rocks to the side of Snuka who was barking at a hissing raccoon perched on a low branch of a yielding tree. Snuka and tree were planted in tar-black muck at the deep bend of a meandering river.

Alarmed, I wrapped myself in a towel and darted out the back door. With one hand holding my towel, I used the other as a megaphone. I joined Joe in yelling at our crazed dog who seemed to have developed selective hearing for the call of the wild. Snuka eventually capitulated and trudged toward me and Joe. A bounce soon returned to his step and his smile reappeared as if treeing the masked bandit had been victory enough.

With the fear of dog versus raccoon diminished, my new husband realized his new wife was standing before him in the Northwoods

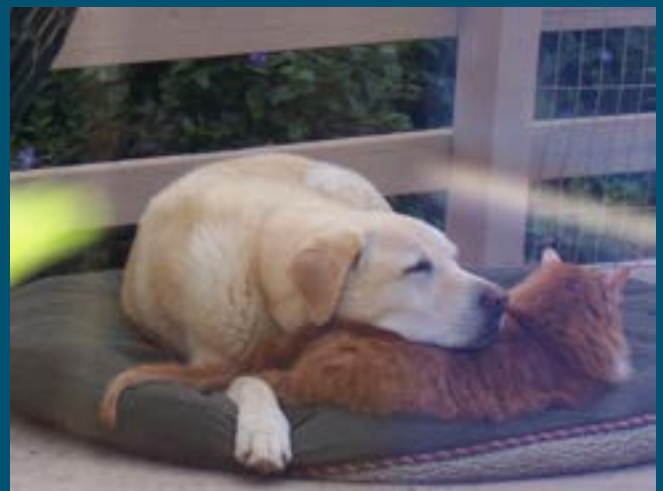
with nary a stitch of clothing. He was amused. I was not. I dragged our foul-smelling dog to the tub. Two hours and one bottle of shampoo later, the last patch of dog hair was released from the grasp of the thorny brambles that entwined his Keeshond fur.

We arrived at our dinner destination a quarter hour before close. The room was thinning of patrons, enabling us to nab a choice seat in front of a stone fireplace. As wood crackled and light danced, we dined on a bountiful Wisconsin relish tray and smokey pork chops while laughing about the unique start to our honeymoon and what would become a long-term love affair – with dogs. (FYI, as of this writing, we are 36 years into a love affair of our own!) ■

Cindy Ojczyk is an award-winning writer whose weekly newsletter, *Like People, Like Pets*, is found at cindyojczyk.substack.com.



cindyojczyk.substack.com



ELIZABETH ANNE JOHNSON

Is That *a* Cat... in My Element?

I'M SURE MANY OF YOU have seen or maybe owned (or coveted) the best dog car in the world--a Honda Element. Why, oh why, don't they make them anymore? The back seats are easily removable, there is no carpet -- just waterproof flooring that can be washed out, and the step up is low to the ground for older dogs. It's essentially a big open box of love for your well-behaved dog family, and in my world, even a fiery red cat named Spencer, who thought he was a dog.

Delbert (the car) was the most loved vehicle in my life and my dog's lives. Delbert's open doors meant GO! Delbert was a space holder in time for my four (and ½) dogs --Louie, Madison, Cedar, Sage, and Spencer the half dog/half cat--and myself, the happy chauffeur of my favorite furry hearts. We made many memories together thanks to Delbert shuttling us back and forth dozens of times from the southern tip of the west coast of California to the northern tip of Washington State, approximately 1,300 miles one way. In Delbert's era, I owned a second home on an island in Washington that was our regular passage into sanity, rest, relaxation, fun, a beach to run on, whales to see while we walked on the beach below our bluff, which included all of us getting blessed by whale blows when they foraged close to our beach. It was a magical sprinkling of hello from the deep. We, my four dogs and Spencer, would all stand there in quiet awe as these uber-large gray whales and their babies would come to our little beach spot café for their favorite meal of ghost shrimp after their long passage north. We were all looking for the sustenance and the sanity only deep, quiet water can provide. Pure heaven for myself and the furry ones after a 22+hour drive.

Delbert had a 6" full foam padding in the happy dog area, with several cozy blankets, a small curl up bed for Spencer, although he refused to use

it since it was a "cat" bed and slightly embarrassing when you are pretending to be "one of the dogs," and room for travel supplies for our trips.

Our rest stops were always quietly hilarious and drew a lot of eyes our way. Madison was a tall 110-pound yellow lab, Cedar was a black lab mix at 80 pounds. Sage was a finer-boned lab mix that was 65 pounds. Louie was a 45-pound Puerto Rican street dog mutt/border collie, and Spencer was Spencer -- a cat. Five leashes, five animals. Me, I'm only 5'2" and 111 pounds, but I had dogs and a cat that were pros at leash manners and potty breaks -- even managing never to piddle on anyone else. This courtesy included Spencer, the very short guy who thought he was a dog. The magical word "wait," which everyone knew made it easy for me on the poo pickups, just in case you were wondering. It never took long for someone at the rest stop to give us a double take. We were hard to miss.

It also never took long to hear the inevitable question I've heard at least 100 times -- "Is that a cat?" Spencer was easy to leash train and was always in with the other four busy noses swinging about while chasing yummy rest stop pee-mail scents. I think Spencer liked the autonomy, and certainly, the celebrity status. He always was a bit of a ham. He pottied on command, was brave and polite on the leash, and definitely got the most attention.

We averaged 4-5 rest stops per one way trip, and I can't remember one where I wasn't asked that same question at least a few times -- "*Is that a cat?*" It reminded me of the comedian Jeff Foxworthy and his hilarious comedy clips "Here's Your Sign." I was living that clip!

We always ended up needing a wee nap on our travels, or at least I did. The dogs had naptime all figured out. Louie was sentry and would sit up

See MY ELEMENT pg 37 ►

KATE J. KULIGOWSKI

SIR BURTON



THIS REMARKABLE CANINE first came to us in early spring of 2015 as an uninvited ball boy on our neighborhood tennis courts in Albuquerque. During our weekly Saturday morning game with friends, he suddenly appeared, fetching all our balls, be they in the air, bouncing or rolling. After which, with a smile, this corgi-beagle cross gently released them at our feet, then stood in readiness to spring again.

“Where did this Wimbledon guy come from?” laughed my husband, Wally, whose next serve was returned, even before it could soar over the net, by this new furry player. However, our tennis opponents, Mark and Ginny, did not find any humor in this interloper’s athletic agility.

“Kate and Wally, you’ve been rescuing dogs in this area for decades, so do us a favor and do

your thing. Remove this one from our court and find his owner...please. You might find him appealing, but we see him as disruptive and so will the other players on these courts. Let’s call it a morning and continue this game next week.”

No coaxing was necessary for this handsome, tri-colored, long-haired canine pup to strut on his cute, stumpy legs to our car and jump right in. And it took but a few phone calls to locate his owner. “That poor dog is always wandering the neighborhood. His owners just moved here from back east. Following our December snowstorm, their back fence totally collapsed. It has never been repaired. I am surprised he has not been hit by all the speeding cars on the busy thoroughfare where he lives,” his concerned neighbor Petra voiced before supplying his owner’s phone number.

Burton the Brave.
Photo Courtesy of
Kate Kuligowski

Once I reached his owner, Viola, I volunteered to repair their back fence at no cost so this sweet, adorable pet would not wander away again. "We have four boys who stay with us and will take care of those fence repairs, don't worry." My offer of free fencing supplies met with the same reply, "Don't worry." Legalities, not caution, dictated that I return this wonderful creature to his owner.

The following Tuesday my tennis lesson at the same location was interrupted by the same antics of the same adorable canine. The women players cooed, petted, clapped and cheered him on as he retrieved ball after ball...lobs, serves, drop shots, the works. This show-stopper provided an absolutely delightful morning! Once again, this loveable guy jumped into my car, and once again, I spoke with Viola. "How can your dog be safe roaming the streets? Please allow me to help your boys to reconstruct your downed fence."

"My boys will repair it this week. Expect me within the hour," was her crisp reply. But while waiting, my concern for the safety of the dog caused me to contact our area Animal Control officer.

"I know you mean well, Kate, but the law is in her court. FYI: her family has a very recent history here as she requested us to destroy her two German shepherds when they refused to pay their fine after our officers had picked them up three times. Are you willing to report her as records indicate this would constitute the third time for this dog, too?"

"Please, no. I think this animal is remarkable! Can't I just adopt him?"

"Not without her signature."

A rude Viola was not amiable to my proposal to purchase her dog even when I offered (she could choose the amount), citing, "My boys need a dog." The dog went back with her, and my concern for his well-being soared. Only two weeks later that sweet dog was on my front porch, waiting by the front door, as if he belonged. What a scare when I noticed the trail of blood as he dragged himself into the entry! His head, chest, tail and back leg had sizeable gashes and he was covered in blood, dirt and grease. After checking his wounds, I realized he had survived my worst fears...and had come to us for help. An emergency veterinary visit (in which I registered him as "our dog" and named him "Sir Burton") diagnosed him as "a very lucky

guy!" He was only shaken and bruised with slight lesions, except for one on his right haunch which could leave an ugly scar.

Now a serious quandary...legal vs moral obligation.

Aware that we should come to a decision about his custody, we were still wavering, hoping for calls of inquiry or a mention in a lost pet column. Nothing, but still...

The decision was not to be ours.

To make it easier for Sir Burton to rest after his trauma and not be pestered by our other six dogs, we kept him on the south side of our home when we were gone. Negligently, we failed to notify our lawn helper, Marcus, who innocently left open the wrought iron gate. Dog gone. In vain, we conducted an exhaustive search for weeks and could only hope that he had not returned to his former home (still without fencing), but had instead found a loving, forever family.

Fast forward to our February 2016 visit to New York City, for the annual Westminster Dog Show and Dog Writers of America Association award banquet with our charming rescued Boston Terrier, Oscar, whose photo and story graced the summer 2014 edition of DWAA Ruff Drafts. Before returning to New Mexico, we visited Wally's sister, Marie, in a small lakeside New Jersey community. Arriving late on that stormy evening, we just plopped in bed, only to awaken the next morning staring into the piercing eyes of a dog whose nose was almost touching mine. At first, I thought it was Pippin, Marie's adored English Spaniel, but as I moved my face away, my immediate thought was "Burton?" I was puzzled. Was this a dream? Now I was completely awake and reassessing my situation...New Jersey, Marie's home, new dog, but wow did he resemble Burton!

"Marie," I called out. "When did you get another dog?"

"Oh, the FedEx delivery guy found him wandering around near Medford Lakes a couple of months ago...no tags, no collar. I agreed to keep him until we found him a forever home. His chip allowed me to contact his owner who was happy to transfer his ownership to me. When it gets warmer, I will search for a new home for him. Isn't he precious? He gets along famously with Pippin."

See SIR BURTON pg 43 ►

KATHY MANDELL

Traveling Dog Lady

Traveling Dog Lady is the name of my website, but I don't travel with my dogs as often as I would like. It has always been my dream to travel across the U.S. with my dogs, and we are doing that this summer with my two remaining dogs, Charlie Brown, and Petey. My wonderful husband is giving us the grand tour! Road trip!

PREVIOUSLY, my dog-centric travel experience took place in and around New England with various dogs—my canine copilots for many years—when I was single. As a woman traveling alone, having three huge dogs and one who could appear rather menacing with only three legs!) was guaranteed protection.

Charlie and Petey are both great road trippers. They are well-behaved at pit stops, and they sleep the whole time in the car while I'm driving. Charlie is a 65-pound hound dog, and he rides in the back seat, with a seat protector and a pet seatbelt. Petey usually rides in a small crate or car seat, buckled in safely but near me (we are very attached to each other).

When I was single, safety was my biggest concern, and bathroom breaks were tricky without a second human. I would go to places where I could bring the dogs inside with me: either a port-a-potty, a big box store that allows pets, or a pet store, for example.

Hotels generally charge more for large dogs. Dog-friendly rooms for large dogs are not always available and accommodations can be unappealing. I've had a lot better luck when traveling with our 14-pound chihuahua mix, Petey. You can squeeze him in anywhere.

Charlie and I have taken some trips alone and had some substandard experiences. On a trip to Pennsylvania, we stayed in a big-name chain that touts itself as pet friendly. I made the reservation ahead of time online, yet I was given

the worst room in the place! There were huge stains on the carpet and furniture, and the room smelled terrible. I paid extra to have my large dog with me, and that's what I received in return.

As a travel professional with a three-decade career in tourism, I was used to first-class all the way. This was NOT first-class.

On our first South Carolina trip, we also encountered some disappointment. For the outbound leg, I pre-booked a pet-friendly hotel room. When I pulled into the parking lot of the hotel, it looked like a hospital! I left and drove around some more, but my GPS kept bringing me back there. I finally saw the tiny little sign with the hotel's name — a large chain hotel, but the sign was teeny-tiny above the door. I parked in one of the empty spaces near the front entrance. As I exited my car, a man who was standing nearby hollered, "You can't park there! That's for handicapped!" I told him "I'm only parking here for a minute." I noticed there were no other cars in the parking lot, and there were multiple handicapped spaces. Surely, I could use one temporarily so that I could be safe.

The property was crawling with police, and they were carrying flashlights. Still unsure if this was really a hotel, I spoke with the woman running the front desk. After she confirmed that I indeed had a reservation, she took me aside and told me the hotel was currently locked down because the police were looking for someone. She then told me she was a retired police officer, and



she offered to escort me while I walked Charlie around the parking lot until my room was ready. At this point, I probably should have left! But I took her up on the offer. She also explained that the man who hollered at me was a resident of the hotel. The Interstate overpass was right next to the hotel, and all of this took place amid deafening traffic noise.

When my room was ready, the woman helped me carry all my belongings into the hotel, hinting it was best that I do that all-in-one trip. Once the electricity was back on, a uniformed officer escorted me up to my room using the elevator.

I joked to Charlie, “If you have to go potty tonight, too bad. We are not leaving this room! You can go on the floor!” We left first thing in the morning and couldn’t get out of there fast enough.

The plan was to stay in Myrtle Beach for a month. I even had a friend from California visit for Labor Day weekend. Right after she left, Hurricane Florence came barreling into town! Rather than wait for evacuation orders, Charlie and I headed back to Massachusetts a week early.

I got the last available dog-friendly room at a hotel, and it was horrible. Stains everywhere. The stench. Flies. So many flies. There were no regular guests in the hotel, just construction workers. I didn’t feel safe walking Charlie around the parking lot. There were discarded, disgusting mattresses beside the dumpsters. The toilet was

broken and would rock back and forth away from the wall. I slept on TOP of the blankets and brought my own pillow and sleeping bag inside from the car. I made sure Charlie slept on the bed with me so he wouldn’t pick up any bugs or diseases from the floor. I didn’t sleep a wink and left immediately at sunrise. In hindsight, I should have just kept driving.

The pets and I moved to South Carolina permanently a few months later. Petey rode with me, and I used a professional pet transport company to relocate my other five pets.

Despite these bad experiences, we are nevertheless looking forward to our cross-country road trip with our amazing dogs in the summer of 2025! ■



KATHLEEN KENNEDY

BOO LÀ LÀ

A Cavalier's Adventures in France

A PLANNED TRIP TO FRANCE was threatened by a painful herniated disk. Painful? Read excruciating. After treatment, I was anxious, causing my body to tense up, shoulders seemingly to grow out the side of my neck. Apprehensive, a letter from my neurologist let Boo accompany us. Petting her eased the tenseness. We traveled first class—I love Champagne, so it was worth it. The South of France made it imperative I buy Boo a French beret, which she proudly wore.

The car ride was long, so I knew we weren't going to the Vet. People kept asking to pet me—difficult since I was wearing Mommy's silly hat. One man scratched me under the neck. Ahhhh! I almost went home with him.

The flight attendants were thrilled to have Boo on board. They'd stop as they passed, talking to Boo, who made herself comfortable in the little cubby at my feet. We went to sleep, and Boo decided to sleep on my head.

Mommy finally took the silly hat off me after we got on the plane. People were eating—dinner, snacks, drinks—I had to be content with my earlier dinner. And the grilled asparagus looked so good! At bedtime, Mom's head was better than the floor. Daddy had his own chair next to ours. So, who's driving this thing?

When we arrived at the Chevre d'or in Eze, we sat on the terrace with our welcome drink and hors d'oeuvres, enjoying the view. The Chevre d'or Hotel was once a village of private homes built into the rocks, ingeniously turned into hotel rooms. All had private entrances off the narrow streets of Eze, with magnificent views of the Mediterranean.

After that long ride, we got to sit on the "Ter-RAHSE," funny talk for a patio that was much nicer than ours. Time for more snacks and drinks; again, they got the fancy-schmancy welcome drink—I got a bowl of water. At least it was Evian.

In the room, a placemat, fresh water bowl and biscuit awaited Boo. On her walk, she sniffed and explored and greeted people. Excited and wanting to run ahead, I told my husband, "I think she likes it here."

Liked it? I loved it. No cars . . . I even got to walk around unleashed sometimes. And it wasn't even our backyard! It was prettier. New places to explore, hills and giant rocks to climb . . . there was barely a flat run in the place. New people to meet. They all loved me, of course. I was with Mommy and Daddy practically every minute of the day. I could get used to this.

Boo would walk before breakfast, down a path to a particular "spot" under a tree to potty, then bark for her biscuit. We played chess on a giant chessboard on the lawn overlooking the Mediterranean, with Boo officiating of course. We hiked to the top of Eze, looked down over the whole village and wandered through the gardens, with Boo cleverly avoiding the giant cacti. We stopped for coffee often, lunch every day, shopped for souvenirs and gifts, all with Boo in tow. Dogs were welcomed everywhere. We'd have our dinner with Boo sitting under the table, then we'd sit on the terrace, looking out at the lights of the cruise ships moored at sea. Boo's head was bobbing about, little nose twitching all the time, smelling the cool, clean air of the Mediterranean. She loved it here.

What a backyard this house has! There were great smells. Oh . . . and Mommy lost the chess game.

Tee hee.

Boo was unhappy the morning we packed to leave. She lay on the big bed with her nose between her paws, eyes pleading with us to stay.

MAGGIE MARTON

EMMETT'S EPIC ROAD TRIP

MY HEART RATE skyrocketed as I pulled my ancient Mercury Mariner into Manhattan traffic. I glanced in the rearview mirror and saw Emmett sound asleep on his bed in the back of the SUV.

Lucky dog, I thought. To be the chauffeured instead of the chauffeur.

By the time I reached my oldest friend's apartment building, my nerves were shot. By pure luck, I found a parallel spot within the same block as her building and made it into the space in only a couple tries.

Em and I left Philadelphia a few hours ago, and now I unloaded my sweet old dog in our second-to-last stop heading east on Emmett's Epic Road Trip.

How did we get here?

We got here—literally—by driving from Houma, LA, to Knoxville, TN, to Crofton, MD, to Philadelphia, PA, and then, finally, to New York City. After a few days in New York, we'd leave and head to Washington, DC, then Nashville, TN, then home to Houma.

We got here—spiritually—the day Emmett received his second and terminal cancer diagnosis. He seemed to be thriving on an oral chemo, and I simply couldn't accept that his end would come in a town that was not our home away from the friends and family who had loved him for well over a decade.

Emmett and I had been selected to appear in the famous Pinups for Pitbulls calendar, and the photoshoot was in Philly. So, I planned a road trip to take him to see his favorite people and places on our way to and from the shoot.

I can guess what some of you are thinking: *Are you crazy?! A 3,000-plus-mile road trip for your dog?!*

Yes, I think I might be crazy. And, yes, a 3,000-plus-mile road trip for my dog.

If you knew Emmett, you'd understand.

He was a brindle pittie-hound mix whose purpose in life was to connect with people. It was nothing I trained him for; it was who he was. Unbeknownst to him, Emmett changed people's hearts and minds about bully breeds. He comforted and encouraged children who were residents of a mental health facility over many years as their dedicated therapy dog. He visited classrooms and libraries, met with state representatives, gave demonstrations, and snuggled his friends (spoiler: everyone was his friend).

Our trip highlighted his personality and everything that made him so special. When we arrived at our hotel in Philadelphia, I wanted to take him for a walk—ideally, to JFK park to snap a pic at the Love statue—but it was pouring. While we waited for a break in the rain, we walked around the blocks surrounding our hotel, looking for a patch of grass for him to go to the bathroom. We turned a corner, and a group of construction workers were breaking up a slab of cracked concrete while a police officer idled on the corner.

One of the workers looked up and said, "What a handsome dog!" Emmett walked over to the man, sat down in front of him, and looked up into the man's face. The guy laughed and started to pat Em. The guy's coworker watched the whole exchange, set down his tools, and walked over. Emmett turned to him and got some scratches. Meanwhile, they told me all about their pets at home, at which point the officer walked over and started to tell me about his Persian cat. All three men crouched down over Emmett, patting him like they've been friends forever. When it was time to go, Emmett left reluctantly, and all the men called, "Bye, Emmett!" and "See you later, buddy!"

See EMMETT pg 43 ►

NEIL PLAKCY

What Hurricane Wilma Taught Us About Traveling *with* Our Dogs

WHEN MOST PEOPLE PLAN a trip, they worry about flight delays or hotel amenities. When you have two golden retrievers—Brody at 80 pounds and Griffin tipping the scales at 100—travel planning becomes an entirely different beast.

Our boys have never embraced car travel. What should be a simple journey becomes a symphony of whines and nervous panting, with occasional harmony from sliding paws as they struggle to maintain dignity on the leather seats. When they were puppies, they expressed their displeasure by throwing up. Yet sometimes, travel becomes unavoidable, teaching us lessons about preparedness and patience that no travel guide could provide.

We discovered the hospitality industry's unspoken bias during home renovations. "Pet-friendly" apparently means "small, well-behaved purse dogs welcome." One hotel after another recited their policies: "One large dog, maximum" or "Two dogs under 25 pounds each." When I explained that Brody and Griffin were essentially furry family members, the polite smiles remained but the answers didn't change. The establishments willing to accommodate our golden duo were places where we questioned whether the sheets had been changed this century.

This challenge paled compared to our evacuation during Hurricane Wilma in 2005. Living in Zone 1 near the ocean makes evacuation orders non-negotiable. While most rushed to book the last available hotel rooms, we packed our SUV with essentials, two adults, and two golden retrievers who made their displeasure about the unexpected journey abundantly clear.

We retreated to my mother-in-law's house about an hour north and inland—far enough to provide safety from the storm's rage. What we hadn't fully considered was how our temporary invasion would affect someone accustomed to quiet solitude. Suddenly, her orderly home contained two anxious humans and two large dogs who couldn't understand why their comfortable routine had been disrupted.

Drinking from water bowls sloshed liquid on her floor—dangerous for someone in their eighties. Her fondness for black jeans led to frequent discov-

ery of wisps of white hair on her legs. Fortunately, she is a dog lover, so she took it all in stride.

When the storm force winds hit, shaking the hurricane shutters, we sat on the floor with the dogs, stroking them and talking in gentle tones. When the power went out, we put ice cubes in their water to keep them cool.

Her neighbors were less welcoming, and when I had to take the dogs out to walk we were frequently challenged. Who were we? What were we doing there? I alternated between miming deafness (I am indeed deaf in my right ear) or waving my hands and saying, "No habla," which is a useful phrase in South Florida if you don't want to talk to anyone. I began varying our walking routes to avoid the most persistent interrogators, who only wanted to know which neighbor to report to the homeowners' association.

The experience taught us valuable lessons about emergency planning with pets. We now maintain a detailed list of inland friends willing to host our entire family—humans and canines—during evacuations. We've researched veterinarians in those areas and keep copies of vaccination records in our emergency kit.

While traveling with two golden retrievers presents unique challenges, the rewards of keeping our family intact during difficult times far outweigh the inconveniences. Brody and Griffin may never enjoy car rides, but they've helped us build resilience and creativity as pet owners. Most importantly, they've taught us that home isn't defined by location but by being together—even in someone else's space, under the watchful eyes of nosy neighbors, waiting for the storm to pass. ■

Neil S. Plakcy is the author of over 70 novels in mystery, romance and adventure. His most recent golden retriever mystery is *Dog Grant Me*, and he won the Dog Writers' Association award for best novel for *Dog of Thieves*. His website is www.mahubooks.com.

MARSHA PUGH

The Dog Show Traveler

Entries were made for a five-day dog show cluster about five hours from home. A long but easy drive, hotel reservations confirmed, the car's GPS is programmed and the rear seats down. Now my checklist for loading the car.



I

AM CURRENTLY showing one short-coated toy breed. "Wash and wear" is often suggested as all that is necessary for my Italian greyhound. The evening before, she is just that - bathed, nails trimmed, whiskers and

stray hairs trimmed. Next comes the difficult part, her accoutrements:

Two crates, one for the car, one for the show site. Five extra crate pads and blankets in case an emergency change is necessary. Her paperwork: shot record, AKC registration, emergency contact information, veterinary instructions. Shampoo, trimmers, food, water, bowls, her pink bling poop bag holder, a roll of pink bags. Medications in case of stomach upset or injury. Ex-pen, pee pads, clean up spray. Vinyl tablecloths for under her ex-pen in the hotel room. Sheets and pillowcases for the hotel bed in case she jumps on the bed (well, she usually sleeps with me, so sheets go with me). Under all that is the folding luggage cart to carry it.

Five show leads are included packaged in their own special container. The leads match my outfits and they feature jewels or are made of soft leather.

The dog's packed, so it's my turn. One suitcase with five show outfits, one for each day. They include dress slacks, a dressy blouse and a blazer. My choices must not conflict with the color my dog and in case we win and want a photo, we don't want her to disappear because my clothing is too close to her color. Once the show outfits are packed, I also need casual clothes for five days.

When in the ring, you have about two minutes to make your best presentation, so you want to be sure you are in attractive comfortable clothing and your shoes don't slow you down. So packing appropriate shoes is vital.

Now for the phone, Kindle and chargers and a power strip, safety pins, duct tape, and anything remotely necessary goes into a tote for the passenger seat. Car's packed and we are ready to go at first light or even before. I can still see out of the rear windows so all is good. There are times when I am a Show Chair, my car is filled with all of my stuff and three or more days' worth of trophies.

My husband stays home to care for the other dogs, so I cook and freeze five dinners for him and for the dogs. So, time to set my travel alarm.

Again, because of my wash and wear breed, we usually have an early

ring time. I've been told that because some breeds require extensive grooming, they are awarded a later ring time. Eight or nine AM isn't unusual, so we start our journey pretty early in the morning. Whatever time GPS allows, add an hour or more. Doggy walk breaks, human breaks, gas breaks and food breaks.

Traveling with a dog adds time and often with my finicky dog, if she sees another person, they refuse to make use of the dog area at the rest stops, so that means trying again at the next rest stop.

My dogs and I have traveled to dog shows all over the country. Formerly, my parents drove me everywhere to show dogs. Eventually, it was just my mom and I, so she was my navigator. This was long before MapQuest or GPS. Rather than maps, we used the dog show judging guide which usually provided great

directions. If lost, a local gas station could get us back on course.

Early on, dog shows were held at race tracks, ball parks, or armories. With modern convention centers, many are now five day events held indoors. With these clusters of shows, they become a destination. Attending a cluster in St. Louis, Hot Springs Arkansas or even Frankenmuth, Michigan can be turned into a tourist event. I learned all about fried pickles at a tavern in Frankenmuth. At one cluster held in Southern Maryland, the show organizers offered fishing excursions, golf outings and a minor league baseball team game for those who wanted to extend beyond dog showing.

If you are on the road and see a bumper sticker "show dogs on board" it means there is another crazy person just like me. ■



AKC Grand Champion

MISTER BROWN

listens to coyote avoidance

advice from his

petite neighbor

CHARLTON

Photo by
Michael Hoffman

PATTI ANDERSON

A FIREWALK *into* the FUTURE

With the ink still drying on my college diploma, I loaded up my 1973 red and white racing-striped Javelin with many boxes and a repurposed bass drum.

S

SOON MY “RITE OF PASSAGE” would begin. It is not unlike other cultures that transition their youth into adulthood, like the firewalk ceremonies where they must cross over hot coals with bare feet. Here, some might call it the “empty nest ritual,” where parent birds push their young out of the nest whether they can fly yet or not.

I was traveling west, solo from Minnesota, to start a shiny new teaching job in Washington.

Taking a packing break, I picked up the local newspaper. Out of habit, I perused the pet section.

Two hours later, I walked into our home with a rambunctious, six-month-old Siberian husky. It could have been a T-Rex on the leash, as my parents froze for a moment, then started spewing forth all the reasons why a husky puppy was this side of insanity.

True to this pup’s DNA and her breed’s penchant for running, she was currently doing “zoomies” around our basement, probably proving my parents right.

I decided to name her “Jenta” (Norwegian (soft”)J”) for little girl), although “Kismet,” had been a runner up.

“Jenta”, I murmured. Jenta looked up at me as if she had been wearing that name for years. She was bi-eyed, which was cool, one eye being a sort of royal blue and the other a chocolate brown. Scratching behind her black-and-white ears, I earned a tail wag.

Several days later, I shifted the car into gear and headed towards the proverbial “road less traveled”.



Day 1

My parents booked the Fargo Holiday Inn for me. After tonight, it would be random highway motels along the way.

The hotel had a 10 x 10 ft., chain link kennel in the parking lot for any dog guests. I settled Jenta into it, providing water and a chew toy, while also chaining my bike lock to the door.

Blurry eyed, but rested in the morning, I grabbed a donut off the breakfast tray and hustled out to collect Jenta.

My heart thumped wildly as I scanned the deserted kennel. The bike lock was still intact. Jenta must have climbed up and over!

Panicking now, the tears streaming down my face as I hollered, “Jenta, here Jenta...,” I wondered if my husky truly knew her name?

With massive relief, I spied a blue eye peeking around the corner of a dumpster.

“Here girl,” I crooned, clipping the leash to her collar, while admonishing myself about not getting I.D. tags. I hugged Jenta tightly, making her squirm a bit, my tears being licked off by her rough tongue.

Day 2

Sweat dripped off the stubble of the guy’s chin onto the Javelin’s open passenger window. The North Dakota temperature was sweltering, especially with no air conditioning. Jenta was curled up on the floorboards. We idled in a lengthy line of traffic that was stopped for construction for over half an hour.

◀
Patti and Jenta
1980

▶
Jenta 1979

The smell of weed drifted into the car as the hitchhiker said, "Hey honey, got a ride for me?"

"Sorry, no room," I replied, motioning toward the bass drum and boxes.

"There's room right here honey," he said leeringly, while opening the door. It was then that Jenta rose up slowly, climbing onto the passenger seat, causing the creep to jump backwards. Swearing profusely, he moved along.

I murmured into Jenta's neck, "You are a very good dog." Jenta licked my face just as the traffic started moving. My heart was surrounded by a warmth that had nothing to do with the sun overhead.

Day 3

Due to the Montana State Fair, there was no available lodging for miles. At a rest stop, someone suggested a campground down the road.

It was pitch dark when we pulled into an empty spot there. Settling into the bucket seats, we hunkered down for the night, asleep in minutes.

I awakened to an animal noise several hours later. The "woo, woo, woo"-ing was coming from Jenta! Disoriented, I realized the car was rolling forward, picking up speed.

Wide awake now, I slammed on the brakes. Setting the emergency brake, Jenta and I climbed out and followed the increasing sound of rushing water. We stopped at the edge of a drastic drop, looking down over a turbulent river.

I shuddered to think that, if Jenta hadn't woken me up, we would have rolled into that river and become another Montana statistic.

We were on the road again, after another emotional hug from me. Jenta didn't even squirm this time.

Day 4

The air was cooler on the steep mountain pass in Idaho. Jenta decided to claim "shotgun" for the rest of this trip, and sat upright, enjoying the view.

At the top of the pass, we stopped. Jenta found a freshly mowed patch of grass, which she rolled around in. With a doggy smile she invited me to join, but I declined, as it was in the pet relief area.



A retired rancher with an arthritic black lab stopped to chat with me while our dogs wagged their tails at each other. Before I knew it, I was divulging everything that had happened so far, berating myself for almost losing Jenta, the stoned hitchhiker, and the near-death-by-river experience.

Scratching his chin, he responded, "This trip sounds like it has been a true baptism by fire for you!" Just then, Jenta chose to come over and lean on the senior man's leg. He bent down, ruffling the soft fur around her neck.

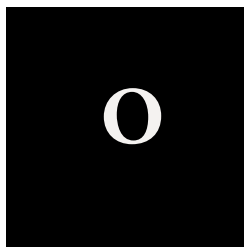
"If you just keep a good dog by your side, then no matter what happens, it will all be okay." Smiling appreciatively, I gave my husky a pat. We parted as travelers do, wishing each other a safe trip.

Sliding into the Javelin, I looked at Jenta, her bi-eyes focused on me as if to say "Let's go"! We drove out of the lot, heading toward our futures, together. ■

ROBERT RONNING

Mother of All Pet Resorts

Heading out of town, where to board our West Highland White Terrier? Born to fetch and tunnel—like all terriers, our Westie pup bristles with curiosity and thrives on anything that moves.



OUR JAKE was not much more than a puppy, when we were planning a trip out of town for a week. But we had to leave dear Jake behind. Where to board a hyperactive West Highland White Terrier? Terriers, aka

“terrierizers,” thrive on anything that moves. Westies are born to fetch and tunnel, and like all terriers, Jake bristled with curiosity.

Our search for a dog boarder got complicated as soon as we inspected a few facilities near our home. A typical lodging space for a small dog? Not much more than the size of a dog carrier—maybe a short outdoor dog “run,” but hardly enough room for a rambunctious terrier. Because outdoor kenneling is unacceptable in the Arizona heat, none of these facilities seemed right for a double-coated Westie.

In a quandary, we did a trial run: we checked him into a boarding house for a day. As wife, Kathy, and I were leaving the facility, I looked back and saw Jake in a temporary holding pen with other dogs. He spotted us driving away, and I could see him stretching his little front paws up against the heavy wire pen, barking for us to come back. As a new dog dad, it just about broke my heart.

By the time we got back home, we had already agreed that the test would not work out. We didn’t have a good feel for this dog boarder, and we returned and rescued Jake right away.

Uneasy and running out of time, a friend recommended a place called the Pet Resort, where he kennels his two dogs. We felt good vibes there immediately. The owner attached the kennels to his home in a large indoor garage next to the family kitchen . . . in case the dogs preferred a late-night snack, I liked to imagine? And each dog had a comfortable living space with a doggy door leading to a roomy outdoor run. The Pet Resort seemed surprisingly quiet, considering there were well over a dozen dogs being kenneled.

Like all resorts, human and animal, it’s all about amenities. The back of the Pet Resort had a large, grassy playground, like a small dog park. According to their size, big dogs and smaller dogs each had recess several times a day to frolic with new friends. (Next to the playground, there was a large swimming pool . . . but not for the dogs.) We left feeling Jake would become a part of the family. Little did we know how true our feelings would prove to be.

Reading between my lines, you might gather how anxious a dog dad I was. But we were leaving our Jake . . . *on his own for a week*. Soothing my fears, the Pet Resort was owned and managed by a canine-loving lady with three dogs of her own, ably assisted by adult family members. When I

asked if I could call during the week and see how Jake was getting along, Kathy rolled her eyes. The kindly owner said it would be perfectly all right; I could call and check on Jake anytime. (I never did, but being a worried dog parent, my mind played out a few sad outcomes.)

After what seemed to me a horribly long week, we returned to pick up our Jake. And I admit I acted a bit like a kid greeting my puppy after a week at summer camp. Okay . . . I confess I was ecstatic and teary-eyed that Jake remembered his new parents—but he seemed just as overjoyed as we were.

That's when we discovered something special that made the Pet Resort the mother of all pet resorts. The owner's niece casually mentioned that Jake spent many hours in the house with them and their dogs. This even included some nights when he'd jumped the gate from the family room to the hall leading upstairs to the bedrooms. (I often called him our Flying Wallenda, as he would leap back and forth across our living-room furniture.) It turned out that our dear little guy actually ended up sleeping several nights with the lady of the house. At home, he slept on our bed, and that's when we knew for sure we'd found the perfect pet resort—Jake's home away from home.

Jake spent many more vacations at the Pet Resort when we traveled. We took a wry comfort in knowing he would enjoy the best company at the mother of all pet resorts, because, to paraphrase the words to an old song: *When Jake's not near the ones who love him, he loves the ones he's near.* ■

Robert Ronning is the author of *Wild Call to Boulder Field*, an adventure novel and adult fiction finalist for Dog Writers of America's 2023 Contest. A sequel story will be out in 2025. Robert writes about canines, wildlife, and conservation, and considers his proudest achievements helping rescue lost dogs. Dog-rescues involve potent emotions and human-canine connections. More at www.RobertRonningAuthor.com.

MEMBER NEWS

NEW MEMBER

TARA CHOATE

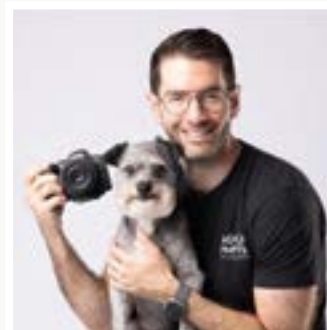
Tara Choate serves at the pleasure of her dog, Key, in Lincoln City, Oregon. She has been "involved" (read obsessed) with dogs since 1996 and has provided chauffeur services for her dogs to agility, obedience, and nose work. She has contributed occasional articles to Clean Run and games to "Agility Games" by Bud Houston. Her first book, *"Paw Prints in the Ledger"*, will be published early this summer. Readers can keep up to date with Tara, Key, and the rest of the household at www.tarachoate.com.



NEW MEMBER

ADAM GOLDBERG

Adam Goldberg is a professional pet photographer, in Tampa, Florida, dedicated to capturing the true personality of shelter animals to help them find forever homes. Adam and his wife, Mary, own AGoldPhoto Pet Photography, a full-service studio specializing in expressive, personality-filled portraits of pets. Adam is also the creator of the *Second Shot* program, which replaces intake photos with compelling portraits that dramatically boost adoption chances. Since 2016, he has volunteered his time photographing shelter pets at the Humane Society of Tampa Bay, helping thousands of animals get noticed—and get adopted. Adam also launched a line of greeting cards using his photography. Proceeds from the sale of greeting cards go towards future Second Shot photo shoots for shelter and rescue pets. Cards can be purchased online at <https://agoldgreetingcards.etsy.com/>



NEW MEMBER

MADELINE MALE

Junior writer Madeline Male lives in Kansas, and she writes in a variety of poetic forms and prose genres. Her works can be found in print and online publications, including Stone Soup literary magazine, Tiny Seed Literary Journal, and the Kansas Authors Club zine, Writing from the Center. Her poem "Therapy Dog" was a 2024 DWAA Writing Competition winner.



SUNNY WEBER

Adventures *with* Brillo Pad

ROAD TRIP *and* ANOTHER BOOK

I WORKED WITH fearful dogs. When I had a challenging new case I searched for books that might help but all I found were dog training books. Rehabilitating fearful dogs depended on building a solid relationship with a foundation of trust. Training came later.

I also lamented the limitation of being able to work with only one or two dogs at a time by myself, when shelters and rescues everywhere were inundated. Far too many dogs were euthanized due to limitations of resources and knowledge. If I could help more people, perhaps more dog lives could be saved.

I decided to write a book that would contain time-saving techniques, and help shelter/rescue workers, foster families, and owners communicate with their dogs. I planned a one month sabbatical and took my three dogs to the beautiful crimson Canyonlands of southern Utah. I rented a house

with a fenced yard in the little town Kanab and planned to write the first draft.

Lab-mix Jessie and Wheaton Terrier Bailey were excited to get into their places in the back seat of the car but tiny Lhasa-mix Brillo Pad cowered between them and trembled. Brillo hated to ride in the car. We were less than a mile from our house in Denver when his whining commenced. We were almost to the foothills when the barking started. I cranked familiar calming classical music on the car CD, instead of my preferred road trip music—John Denver, which I belted out in my own off-key voice.

Finally, Brillo fell asleep between Jessie's muscular thigh and Bailey's stub-tailed bum. We arrived in Kanab in the evening and I turned Jessie, Bailey, and Brillo loose in the sparsely grassed yard after I inspected the chain-link fencing and made sure there were no escape routes. I made dinner and we settled into our new, temporary home.

In Kanab, my days were filled with fresh air, dove song, and coyote howls each night. I slept when I wanted, wrote when I was awake, and found new love for Jessie, Bailey, and Brillo as we shared this wondrous experience. Together, we found freedom our city life could not have provided.

We discovered miles of open red rock ranges. Every day we hiked. I usually kept Brillo on a long leash because Jessie and Bailey stayed close to our pack unit without physical control. But my little adventurer had no sense of danger.

On one beautiful day we traipsed over an open valley of crimson sand and hip-high bluish-gray sage brush. The dogs chased each other through the clumps and crisscrossed in front and behind me. They waded in streams and climbed rocky outcrops.

We circled around on a rancher's rutted road and headed back to where I left the car. I decided Brillo knew our route and he could be off leash for a while. Thrilled with his freedom, he raced around Jessie and Bailey.

"Chase me!" Brillo's body language challenged. Jessie made a half-hearted lunge but Bailey took the bait and the two of them raced over the red sand, raising puffy pink clouds of dust.

Bailey returned, panting heavily. There was no anxiety, fear, or hesitation in her face. She glowed with glee and confidence that no one at the shelter would ever see. My heart leapt with joy to see the reformation completed and to know I was able to not only save her life, but to bring such euphoria to her.

Jessie stood nearby, calm, self-confident, and smiling. His former anxiety and franticness had faded. He too, had survived and matured into an outwardly stunning and inwardly loving companion.

I broke nature's silence when I called our missing family member. "Brillo, come!"

He always came when I called. He hated to be alone. But here we were, the three of us and no Brillo. I forged ahead, calling and clapping my hands into the air. "Brillo, this way!" Where had he gone? Had a coyote silently taken him? Had a hawk flown off with him? "Brillo! Come now!"

The breeze waved past me—was it giggling?

Far ahead I heard faint barking. Was it Brillo or a rancher's dog? Was he hurt and calling for help? I hollered again. The barking continued so I

headed in the direction it was coming from. I sped up my pace with Jessie and Bailey now behind me, fatigued and not nearly as worried as I was.

The vocalizations continued. I came over a dune and with the rise the bluster amplified. I could see the backs of several Black Angus cattle peaking above the sage. Yaps were coming from that direction. As I got closer I could see the tangled tops of cow tails switching. Where was that little monster?

I climbed a hill which brought me high enough to see the cattle clearly. They were in a close circle, heads out, tails swatting. Then, I saw a black flash on the left of the cattle. Then another on the near side to me. And another over to the right.

Brillo was HERDING the cows! Nothing in his breeding would have lent itself to an assumption that he had such instinct. But there he was, running circles around the bovines, barking commands.

I was torn between being furious out of worry, laughing at the spectacle, to a growing fear of what ranchers do to dogs who harass their cattle. Nor did I forget that other danger—one good cow kick could kill my bossy beast.

I grabbed my wayward shepherd-wanna-be in his return circle, and snapped his leash on. Brillo was open-mouthed panting with exhilaration. Never had he looked so thrilled. His bright black eyes barely took notice of me and continued to focus on the shaggy giants while I carried him away.

As I removed Brillo from his delinquency, Jessie and Bailey seemed to look at each other, then the cattle, and shrug. They could not fathom Brillo's bewitchment with the black bovine behemoths. ■

BY SEVEN

— Dictated to Susan Hartzler —

HOW I SPENT *my* SUMMER VACATION

Every summer has its magic, but for me, July is the most exciting time of the year. That's when Mom starts packing up the Subaru with all the essentials—some yummy treats, our favorite toys, cozy beds, and, of course, treats (wait... did I already say treats?)

A

AS SOON AS I see the suitcase, I know what's coming: our annual road trip to escape the chaos of the Fourth of July! We may live near a dog-friendly beach, but summer isn't exactly a walk in the park for

canines like me and my sister, Paige Turner. From Memorial Day through Labor Day, the skies erupt almost every night with loud cracks and booms—and around the Fourth, it's nonstop. Fireworks turn our peaceful neighborhood into a war zone. No matter how hard Mom tries to comfort us, the fear takes over. We shake, we hide, and it feels like the world is ending.

But Mom always gets us out of town before things get too crazy. I love curling up with Paige Turner in the backseat, the windows cracked just enough to catch the scent of the shifting landscapes as we set off on our annual adventure. That year, we headed to June Lake in the Sierra Nevada mountains. I loved watching the world change outside the window—trading palm trees and salty ocean breezes for towering pines and crisp mountain air. It felt like the earth was putting on a show just for us.

That summer, the mountains were more breathtaking than ever. Even in the heat, the peaks were still dusted with snow, their shimmering white caps glinting in the sun like frosting on a birthday cake. Speaking of birthdays—mine just happens to be on July 5th, and let me tell you, it's always a treat-worthy party. But more on that in a bit...

The best part about June Lake isn't just the breathtaking view, it's Grant Lake. Oh, Grant Lake! A true off-leash paradise where dogs like me can run wild and free. No fences. No leashes. Just



open land, refreshing water, and that perfect feeling of doggy bliss. Paige and I sprinted across the sandy shore, chased balls Mom threw into the water, and played until our legs turned to jelly. Every splash, every wiggle butt, every shake of my wet coat felt like a celebration of freedom.

When we weren't swimming, we relaxed in comfort. Mom's friend has a beautiful cabin perched high above Gull Lake, with views that stretch for miles. That cabin became our home base—a cozy retreat filled with laughter, good smells, and great company. Mom was overjoyed to reconnect with some of her childhood friends who'd flown in from Grenada in the Caribbean. I liked them right away. They smelled like sunshine and ocean breezes, and they brought treats. Not just any treats, either—homemade doggy snacks crafted just for my birthday! Chicken and peanut butter—two of my favorite flavors. They were pawsitively perfect.

Mom and her friends shared stories, reminisced about the past, and played games late into the evening while Paige and I relaxed after a full day of fun. I could tell these people were special to her, and that made them special to us, too. It felt like family.

The heat was intense during the day, too hot for long hikes—but we didn't mind. There's a lovely park by Gull Lake that's dog-friendly, with shaded spots to lounge and gentle trails to explore. We sniffed every tree and met friendly dogs from all over California and faraway places. Everyone seemed happy there. Maybe it's the mountain air, or maybe it's just the magic of June Lake.

But perhaps the biggest relief came on the 4th of July itself. There were no explosions, no sudden bursts of color in the sky, just a quiet evening



under the stars. We watched the sunset in peace, snuggled up beside Mom, safe and sound.

Mom told us how heartbreaking it is that so many dogs suffer from fireworks. According to my favorite channel, **DogTV**, 80% of dogs show signs of anxiety when exposed to fireworks. That's a lot of scared pups. I'm glad Mom is doing her part to help stop the madness. She's always looking out for us, and I love her for that.

After what felt like the most peaceful week of the year, it was time to head home. We were a little tired, a little sandy, and very, very happy. But once we got back to the beach, the nightly fireworks started up again—and would continue through Labor Day. Every night, Paige and I huddle close to Mom. She's been talking to city officials, trying to advocate for quieter celebrations and more dog-friendly alternatives. She's amazing like that.

Still, nothing compares to the serenity of June Lake. The mountain

air, the cool water, the cozy cabin, the friends, the treats, the quiet... it's everything a dog like me could dream of.

Until next time, June Lake. I'll be dreaming of your cool breezes and quiet nights. And I can't wait to see where Mom takes us this year. Wherever it is, I know it'll be pawsitively amazing—because everything we do together turns into an adventure. ■

Woof!

Love, Seven

MEMBER NEWS

NEW MEMBER

KATHLEEN (KATIE) KENNEDY

Kathleen (Katie) Kennedy was attracted to DWAA because it combines her two loves, writing and dogs. After living in a home with a series of family dogs, and the passing of her first canine soulmate Tucker, an American Eskimo Dog, Katie's father brought home Winston, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel his boss didn't want anymore. It was 1979 and she'd never seen one before so she started researching the breed. A kind gentleman with a Cavalier in his shopping cart led Katie and her husband to a breeder and a small Tricolor, Churchill (soulmate #2.) A responsible breeder, she always answered their calls, offered training tips, and introduced them to Obedience, and ultimately, breeding.

Balancing her work life managing a small office and serving as an executive assistant to a variety of senior leaders, Katie balanced her time by training and showing dogs, while also writing about them. Her writing career has encompassed publication of her op-ed columns in *Long Island Newsday* and a spread of articles about New York City that appeared in the *New York Times*. She has also edited the *News and Views*, the regional Cavalier Club newsletter, and *The Cavaliers of the Northeast* for four years, while also introducing new subjects, artworks and illustrations to the publication. She's also done a stint as interim editor of *The Bulletin*, the national Cavalier magazine. She continues contributing to that publication, while also publishing two children's books and working on a trilogy about a dog named Mulligan.

NEW MEMBER

DR. TOM LONSDALE

2023 DWAA Book of the Year winner, Dr. Tom Lonsdale BVetMed, MRCVS, considers himself a whistleblower on a mission to expose and rectify massive corruption and fraud in the vet/pet welfare space. He is a graduate of Royal Veterinary College in London, England and has been in practice for more than 50 years. He began his practice as a volunteer in Nairobi, Kenya and subsequently worked in farm animal, zoo animal and small animal private practice in the UK before emigrating to Australia in the early 1908s where he established a mixed animal clinic in Western Sydney. . He researching and writing about the pet food industry and its impact on animal health, human well-being and stewardship of the planet. His winning entry, Multi-Billion-Dollar Pet Food Fraud: Hiding in Plain Sight (2023) is part of the Raw Meaty Bones book trilogy, offering guidance to pet professionals and pet care givers. He is at work on another book and pens a monthly column in The European https://the-european.eu/?s=Lonsdale&post_type=post.

MADELINE MALE

my dream SUMMER DAY

At last, the summer is here,
School's no longer keeping us apart! Two
best buddies finally free to follow
Their own trail — Where should we start?

First, let's take a morning walk;
I'll lead you to my safekeeping spot
Where troves of treasure await:
Tennis balls, bones, and dirty socks.

We'll chase every squirrel,
Track every smell, dig every hole. When
we come back home, We'll eat treats 'til
we're full!

We'll fetch every stick, Bark at every cat,
Roll in the freshest mud — Splash, squelch,
split-splat!

Let's even start a neighborhood
barkorama And of course have everyone's
participation. These activities I've
meticulously planned out Are all so fun,
it's tail-wagging anticipation!

But my favorite thing Is the priceless time
We spend together in the summer:
Whether it's inside or outside,
Up top on a mountain, Or down by the sea,
I am with my person, my boy — Who's
most important to me. ■

MADELINE MALE

HAIKU

A fresh new doormat
Already with a paw print
I don't even mind

My Element

► Continued from pg 1

in the front seat and watch over all of us without a blink, and once off his self-imposed duty he would crash into a deep sleep when we were rolling again. I climbed in the back and slept in the puppy and cat love pile. Cedar on my right, Madison on my left, and Sage and Spencer at my feet. Cozy! What an awesome way to travel.

My entourage and I braved whiteout snowstorms through the mountain passes (Honda Elements have great all-wheel drive. I only had to use chains twice.), torrential downpours, and slick black ice. There was also a lightning strike that hit right next to my driver's door on the final hour of the long drive—the last leg—while on the ferry at one o'clock in the morning. The lightning bolt struck the water and blew out all the electrical circuits in poor Delbert. We all had frizzled hair for a week or so, and my mechanic dubbed me *“she who got struck by lightning,”* even though I technically did not.

Speaking of frizzled and frazzled: On one trip we had an oncoming pickup truck slamming into the center divider on a major freeway coming right at us about 70 mph and fortunately (for us) his back tire caught the concrete divider as he was airborne and stopped him from landing on us (phew!) he flipped over. As I was slamming on the brakes and dogs and cat were flying forward, his tire bounced over the divider and then over the hood of Delbert and into other lanes of traffic. I immediately called 911 and exited at the next off-ramp and pulled into a gas station, thoroughly checked all the animals and calmed us all down. Touching fur always calms me down. I gave a shaky statement to the police officer who told me he would hang out with me for a bit, which I thought was odd, but ok. Turns out that the gas station was going to have a drug bust in a half hour and he wanted to be sure I was safe before sending me off prior to the melee. Sheesh! It felt like I was in a bad movie!

When I got back on the on-ramp – a little shaky still – a calm came over me as approximately 2,000 migratory white American pelicans began landing in a large clearing right next to the highway. We pulled over with everyone else to see the majestic scene appearing out of the sky. From near disaster that shakes you to the bone to the healing magic of nature. What a beautiful distraction to settle and refocus all my bird loving dogs, cat, and especially me, the chauffeur.

I finally moved us all to Washington state, no more long trips up and down that crazy long coastline, no more comic tragedy replays, just whales, deep water, and a place that feels like home.

An ending note: Five years later Delbert was squashed by an irate person that had her gas pedal to the floor and backed straight out of a driveway while arguing with her boyfriend. The momentum threw Delbert up on the curb and ended his life as we knew it. I was not there for the gruesome scene but heard it was quite loud. By then Cedar, Spencer, Madison, and Sage had moved on over the rainbow bridge. Only Louie lasted for more life adventures with me and my new dog partners; he made it to 17 years old and still kept watch on me every night. ■

Elizabeth Anne Johnson has been working with the health and wellness of small, large, exotic animals, and wildlife for 35 years as a holistic animal healer, animal empath, veterinary technician, and wildlife biologist/rehabilitator. She is the author of *Know Your Dog's True Nature, Understanding Canine Personality through the Five Elements* (Findhorn/Inner Traditions), vice-president of Global Wildlife Resources, and a TEDx Speaker. She lives on an island in Washington State and is the nightly howling partner of Wilbur and Pretzel.

MEMBER NEWS

NEW MEMBER

PEGGY ROTHSCHILD

After losing their home during a California wildfire, Peggy Rothschild and her husband moved to a beach community on the central coast—where there are enough trails to keep her out of trouble for years. Her Molly Madison Dog Wrangler mystery series includes *A DEADLY BONE TO PICK*, *PLAYING DEAD*, and *LET SLEEPING DOGS LIE*. Her short stories have been included in anthologies and her one young adult adventure, *PUNISHMENT SUMMER*—featuring Queenie, the German shepherd, was published by Evernight Teen.

Peggy is a member of Sisters in Crime Los Angeles and National, and Mystery Writers of America. When not reading or writing at her desk, you can usually find her in the garden. You can learn more at Peggy's website, <https://peggyrothschildauthor.com>.



NEW MEMBER

CHARLIE WEIDIG

Charlie Weidig met his future wife and his first Cavalier Spaniel on the same night. Winston, his first Cavi, was a rescue who became the best companion. Over the next 45 years, the Weidigs purchased additional Cavaliers, competed in Obedience and Conformation and started a breeding program. Before he knew it, Charlie was a breed specialist judge in the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Club USA, where he also served on the Board of Directors and in various leadership positions.

After retiring from a 44-year career teaching Math, Charlie felt he could best serve fellow canine enthusiasts by sharing his knowledge and experience. In 2008, three weeks after the founding of YouTube, he created his own YouTube Channel centered on dogs. He published a 25-second video of 3 ½ week old dogs cavorting with each other so that friends and family could enjoy a cute fix from the pups. Noticing that the videos garnered hundreds of views, many more than the number of family and friends he intended to reach, he started adding narration, music, and titles to the videos, growing his viewership into the thousands. In 2018, Charlie's teacher-self took over. Just wanting to share his experience with fellow breeders, he published a video describing a hand-feeding technique he'd developed for neonatal puppies. That video went viral and today it is approaching 10 million views. His channel, [@chaskat35](#), now offers nearly 700 videos, ranging from cute puppies playing to such instructional topics as canine health issues, puppy training, care and grooming, conformation and fun activities with dogs.

Editor's Column

► Continued from pg 5

invite at RDeditor@dogwriters.org. In the meantime, I need to get back to packing. It's time to head to the mountains for new adventures with my canine companion.

Merrie Meyers

Merrie Meyers, Ph.D. APR, Fellow PRSA

Ruff Drafts Editor

Move

► Continued from pg 7

leave the hotel. I go to get my dogs out of the kennel, but the infamous Ivy has kennel cough that turns to bronchitis and pneumonia. The antibiotics aren't working. She is suffocating. The vet says I should be prepared that she may die. I sit down in the middle of the packing boxes and sob my heart out. I never make things this bad for my fictional heroines. If this isn't the darkest moment, I don't know what is.

However, I get Ivy the Afghan on new antibiotics. I don't complain when the husband must work on Mother's Day. The hero feels terrible, and the heroine knows it's been no picnic for him either. I won't make him feel any worse than he already does.

I'm rewarded for my courage. My sick dog responds to the new antibiotics and recovers. The rabbits and birds and other dogs recover from the stress of the move. My hero takes me and the kids out to a baseball game for a delayed Mother's Day celebration. And he makes me feel like I've been a real heroine after all.

Things are looking up. My editor calls me the next day. I've made another book sale! Hallelujah! It couldn't have come at a better time. Those awful past few weeks seemed surreal, somehow. Like they happen to someone else... like my inner heroine? Or maybe that's just wishful thinking. I'm just glad it turned out as well as it did.

Life with animals, and sometimes kids fall into that group, is what you make it. I pray that I was more heroic than spineless. And if not... I have got some great stuff to put in my next book! ■

President's Column

► Continued from pg 3

April. The writing competition received close to 600 entries which were judged by 95 judges. Typically, about half of the entrants are non-members, so there's a lot of potential for recruitment. Several of our new members are profiled in this issue.

Encouraging Young Writers.

Several members are conducting outreach to the schools in their area to encourage young writers to submit articles for our blog or Ruff Drafts, both of which will qualify as "published" for the 2025 Writing Competition. DWAA Board Member, **KAREN HARBERT**, has also sent queries to national youth organizations and Breed Clubs.

If you have a youth group or breed club that you can reach out to, or if you know educators that would be willing to receive writing prompts to encourage young people to write about dogs, please let me know.

Blog.

We've added several new sections to the blog. See the blog section of our website for specifics on how to submit. Agility is curated by **BETTY WEIBEL**. Flash Fiction and Bad Writing are curated by **ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE**. A poetry section has also been added.

Another new segment, Kissing Booth, featuring photos of you and your smooching pooches will be rolled out soon. And, we continue to profile

members who won regular and special categories in the 2024 writing competition.

Logo Wear.

Another new feature is the ability to create DWAA imprinted and embroidered products. You can choose what items you want created specifically for you. Visit our member area of the website for more information.

Ruff Drafts.

After receiving positive reaction to the "Second Chances," theme for the last issue of the newsletter, we have added it as a recurring topic for each issue of Ruff Drafts. We are looking for additional correspondents for columns about legal issues, history and biographies.

I know that you are busy, perhaps you haven't seen all the positive progress we are making. Our Board of Directors is working hard to help DWAA continue to prosper and provide members with access to benefits with a little more ease. If you have any suggestions, or would like to help, please let me know.

Therese Backowski

Therese Backowski

DWAA President

Corky

► Continued from pg 9

that caused my little puppy to be whisked away from my life. Worse, I was heartbroken because I never got to say goodbye to my best friend.

The next few weeks were filled with remorse and tears. Sweet dreams of happy moments of playing with my little dog were replaced by recurring terrorizing nightmares of Corky tortured by big farm dogs. Worse, I envisioned myself staring into his large brown puppy eyes and seeing him crying, as he missed me so very much.

Many decades later, I finally satisfied my longing for a dog by introducing a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel into our family. Living with one of these loving companion spaniels led to many more. When

I hold and snuggle any one of my Cavaliers, I hear my mom's displeasure with soiled floors and dust bunnies collecting everywhere. These memories only serve to solidify my present mantra which is "never to be dogless again!" ■

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

MEET THE DWAA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BILLIE GROOM

Meet Billie Groom, currently serving as Vice-President of the DWAA and Founder of The Institute of Canine Psychotherapy. Billie has dedicated over thirty years to her pioneering work with dogs over the age of six months, pet-industry professionals, and pet lovers. Her unique and extensive work in the field of canine psychotherapy has led to the development of a method that prevents abuse, neglect, surrender, and euthanasia of dogs due to behaviorally related reasons.

Billie possesses extensive hands-on experience working with hundreds of dogs internationally, including those from the fighting circuit, Korean meat market, backyard breeders, reputable breeders, and war zones, as well as discarded working dogs, and free-roaming dogs from Central America, Canadian northern reservations, and United States.

She has appeared on shows such as Roku TV, LA Tribune, and CTV, and was featured in Psychology Today Magazine. She is the winner of the American Best Book Fest Award for Pets/Narrative, Non-Fiction (2019) for her book *The Art of Urban People With Adopted and Rescued Dogs Methodology*.

Billie joined the DWAA in 2020 and shares that her membership has, “given me exposure to people with different experiences, interests, knowledge and viewpoints.”



To learn more about Billie and her work visit:
[Billie Groom a Pioneer of CCBT](#)
[Dog Training DisrUPted \(podcast\)](#)

MEET THE DWAA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

LISA BEGIN-KRUYSMAN

Meet Lisa Begin-Kruysman, author of fiction and non-fiction books that inspire, educate, and change the way we view not only our furry companions, but also ourselves. Her knack for writing heart-felt stories that make us laugh and cry (often at the same time) has made Lisa a popular addition to the Widow's Voice, for Soaring Spirits, International, a blogging site dedicated to enhancing the lives of widows through stories that share experiences, thoughts, challenges and wins, and of course, the impact of our dogs on our lives.

A long-standing member of the DWAA, currently manages the DWAA Facebook Pages, sponsors a Special Award in honor of her late sister for the DWAA's annual Writing Competition and has been a frequent contributor to Ruff Drafts. She encourages other writers, artists, and producers active in the canine community to explore the benefits of DWAA membership to make a difference in the welfare of all dogs and to promote the positivity of the canine-human bond.

Lisa hails from New Jersey and currently resides in Southeast Georgia and Florida with her three-year old Maltipoo, Quint, Australian Shepherd, Penny. Jackson, a lab-hound mix was adopted on Valentine's Day, 2024 from a rural central Florida shelter, and most recently little Winn-ie, a puppy she met in the parking lot of a grocery store. She believes the right dog is delivered to us when a mutual need presents.



Oscar

► Continued from pg 6

house. And all our dogs slept upstairs with us. Who would try to break in upstairs when they could use the first floor? I wasn't worried.

Then Oscar started barking. This woke up the two GSDs, and all three raced in full attack mode to the balcony door that led into my teenage daughter's bedroom. Whoever it was, quickly climbed back over the patio railing to the nearby tree. A tree limb cracked, and we heard our intruder fall two stories down. The next morning, blood all over the concrete patio told a frightening tale.

Even more frightening, we realized that the intruder knew exactly where my daughter's bedroom was. He'd ignored the others. That sent goosebumps down my spine. And the man—it *had* to be a man—had taken the large broken branch with him. We looked for it, knowing there might be more blood and skin traces for DNA analysis, but never found that branch. Trust me, my vengeful husband searched long and hard. We never found the intruder, either. Nor did the police. But Oscar had saved my daughter. Perhaps even all of us. And whoever tried to get to her never came back.

I learned a valuable lesson that awful night. I had foolishly ignored a dog who warned me of danger. I'd typecast him as a cute, rescued stray who slept on my pillow, and assumed that my GSDs would always save the day. Only they'd slept through the danger. Oscar had not. I was ashamed of myself for underestimating him. And so proud that, despite my commands for "quiet," he stood his ground, roused the other dogs, and overrode my stupidity.

My scrappy little Mexican street dog was afraid of nothing and no one. We loved our brave Tijuana transplant even more and now gave him the respect and admiration he deserved. He lived seventeen years. I never ignored his growl or bark again.

I'm not one who likes to write about any dog's death, especially my own. But just this once, I'd like to share Oscar's end, because he left our life just as unexpectedly as he came into it. Oscar developed a cancerous eye tumor. We went to the best eye vet around, and after surgery, his prognosis seemed cautiously hopeful. Before we were able to do his follow-up check, our vet disappeared. A few weeks later the police found him in Arizona, dead inside his burned-out car. We never learned if they found his killer, or why he was targeted. We were shocked and heartsick. We sadly found

“

**My little dog—a heartbeat
at my feet.”**

EDITH WHARTON

another vet, but Oscar's cancer had spread to his brain. It did to him what the Mexican streets and a dangerous intruder could not.

I think of Oscar often, even though he's been gone twenty-five years. Of all my dogs, he was the one I knew the least. In fact, during Oscar's life, I couldn't quite make him out. We loved each other dearly, but I never really "got him." Yet, we were definitely more than ships that passed in the night. Oscar wholeheartedly connected with me, but despite my efforts, I was unable to truly connect with him.

I've often wondered why and have never come up with an answer. That still makes me sad. I hope Oscar knew how much I loved him. And that I regret not recognizing at first what a special dog he was. Oscar is the only dog I've had who totally shaped his own life. He ignored all obstacles and boldly defined his purpose in our family. He was no pet. He was a *Protector*. Despite the misconceptions of others, Oscar stayed true to his chosen path until his very last breath.

We should all be so blessed. ■

Anne Marie Duquette is a multi-published fiction book writer who lives in Southern California. She's loved the many dogs in her life, including two treasured service dogs, who have inspired her stories. A 2023 Maxwell winner and 2024 winner of the "Second Chance" special category, her website Minigems.net contains free, all-dog short stories for her readers. Her credits can be found at Paperbackgems.org.



TIPS & TACTICS

LISA BEGIN KRUYSMAN

Don't Be Query Weary!

OF ALL THE ASPECTS of writing a novel or creating a nonfiction proposal to present to prospective editors and agents, the process of drafting a strong query letter may be the greatest source of angst among writers who wish to be traditionally published.

This poignant plea to be plucked from the Slush Puppy Pile is often the first step to getting your book project noticed by an “agent” of change. With each query sent, a tiny spark of hope emanates from your keyboard...until you find that gut-wrenching typo you swear wasn't there before you hit “Send”!

There are a multitude of workshops, courses and critique groups on how to create that perfect 300–500-word letter that you will send out asking (begging) for attention among the 500 plus queries most agents and editors receive on a weekly basis!

There are so many great articles (and templates) about how to write the elusive perfect query. In that short query letter you must include all the basics:

- Title and genre of your submission
- Proposed word count
- A paragraph that serves as a synopsis (but, you don't want to tell them how it ends, that's the job of the synopsis)
- Comparable titles (Readers of “X” will love your “Y”)
- A brief biography of your *writing* experience

Many literary agents now use Query Manager to receive queries instead of email. You will often see a link in their submissions guidelines

that will bring you directly to a page that has a form that must be filled out with several “blocks” to include your query, sample pages and bio, etc. To save time, you can set up a Query Manager Word document and just copy and paste into the QM form. You can always adapt and personalize for each, but you will save time for having your material “prepackaged”.

Professionalism and respect for the time an editor and/or agent must spend on reading queries on a daily basis is essential. Don't clutter them with questions. They want facts and answers. Don't inform them that your book is the next best-seller or better than a well-known writer's. That's for them to decide.

So often on sites like Reddit or around other Writerly “Water Coolers”, I see writers getting so caught up in the query writing process it squeezes out all joy of the process like a Husky trying to rock a Yorkie-sized sweater.

Yes. Your query is so important, but let it be filled with authenticity, let it be genuine. In essence, your query reflects *your* story as a writer with an update on *your* latest project and how a strong partnership will get it out into the world and sell. That is the endgame.

Don't despair, however. No matter how “perfect” your query is, you can't control the timing of the market, the mood and current status of the recipient. I've sent queries only to find out that in the course of a few days, that agent has left the industry or moved to another agency. You can't

See TIPS & TACTICS pg 45 ►

Sir Burton

► Continued from pg 19

I carefully studied the dog on our bed before asking, “Where did his owner live, Marie?”

“Somewhere in New Mexico, I think. Why? Should I check the paperwork?”

My hand wandered to the dog’s right haunch. I felt it repeatedly before I exclaimed, “Wally! This is Burton! He has the scar.” Wally’s hand snapped around as he too felt the haunch of this all too familiar creature.

Tears rolled down my cheeks. “It can’t be. It is a miracle. This is the answer to our prayers. This guy is back with us. Oh, Marie, this is a dog we once rescued in Albuquerque...doesn’t sound possible, but yes! Yes! This is Burton. Please let him be ours again, forever.”

We cancelled our Southwest flight, rented a car and cautiously made the trip back home with both Burton and Oscar. New Jersey had just experienced a crippling blizzard, and we were not accustomed to traveling in such. Although the road conditions required our undivided attention, our silence was constantly interrupted with the phrase, “I just can’t believe we found him...impossible!”

Although our actions with Burton now had a legal stand, I occasionally felt the nagging of my Jiminy Cricket type psyche until I received a surprise phone call from Viola, asking for my assistance in rehoming a free dog they had recently

gotten. “Carlton and I had always believed that our boys really needed a dog to teach them responsibility. This labrador pup is the sixth dog we have had since our move here and it finally dawned on us that our therapist is correct, ‘A dog is not the answer. Their sense of responsibility must come from us parents.’” It was rewarding to find her lil’ lab cross a new forever home. My ailing psyche was now guilt-free.

In high spirits, Wally and Burton returned to the courts for their “tennis workouts”, an enjoyable weekly occurrence that came to a sudden halt in 2019 when Wally, my honey heart of 57 years, suffered multiple critical hospitalizations, resulting in a sudden move in 2023 to Colorado for healthcare. Our lives were turned upside-down. I suddenly was dependent on Burton’s emotional empathy to reduce my stress level and muster the strength necessary to tend to the sudden needs and critical care required for Wally. From the time that Wally entered the hospital in Albuquerque until Burton succumbed to liver cancer just short of my 86th birthday, he seldom left my side unless we were at a medical facility. His devotion was a humbling reminder of how blessed I was to be granted such a remarkable guardian angel, my Sir Burton. ■

Emmett

► Continued from pg 24

At our hotel in New Jersey, he cajoled a tiny little girl into gently patting his nose by lying down in front of her so she couldn’t physically step around him without patting him first.

The entire trip presented Emmett with opportunities to make new friends around every turn. And that’s how he lived his entire life.

When we received Em’s terminal diagnosis, my husband and I decided that we would do whatever it took to make his final time with us full of love, life, and joy—and cheeseburgers, pizza, barbecue, hot dogs, gumbo, and whatever else he wanted.

My goal for our road trip was to visit all his favorite people and places. Always great in the car, Emmett gazed out the window or slept. He took his pills like a champ. I bought him a room service pizza and ice cream from a street vendor. We went

to the beach in New Jersey, and he pranced in the waves as they lashed his paws. He saw friends at every stop along the way, and when we arrived in DC, he immediately knew our old building. We threw him a big party, and he wore a bowtie and was loved on by his favorite people. Our time in New York was spent with two cats—a first for him—and my oldest, dearest friend and her family. By the time we turned around to drive back to our current home in Louisiana, my heart was full—and so was Emmett’s stomach!

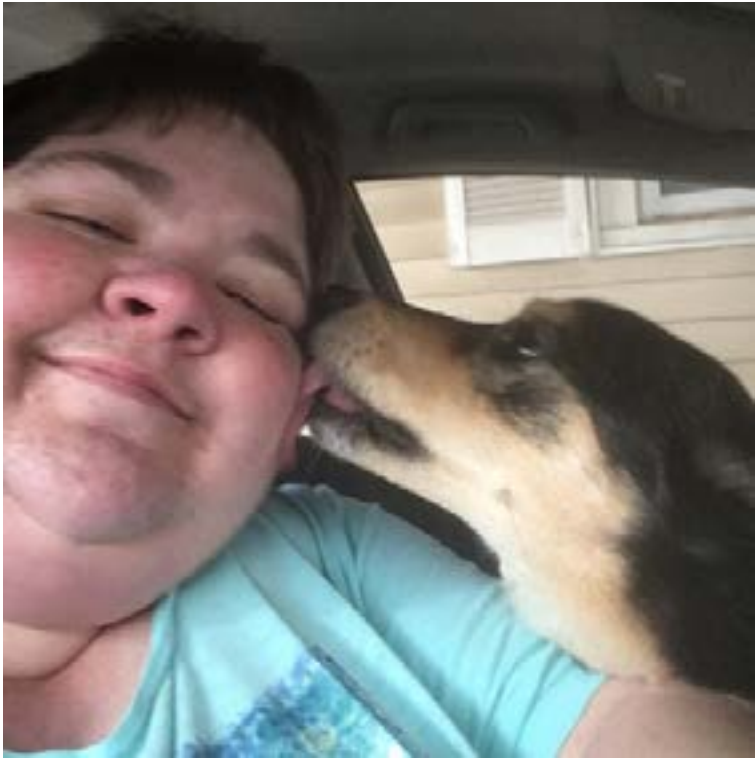
We drove, him and I, for eight days and about 3,100 miles.

Was it crazy? Sure.

But it was also worth it. ■

TARA CHOATE

Birch, Anise, *and* Clove



Tara and Key on their road trip. Think Thelma and Louise.

A FEW YEARS AGO, me and my dog, Key, traveled to Sequim, Washington (Sequim is pronounced ‘squim’) for a long weekend with a secret agenda: to get Key certified for nose work.

Key and I had been taking nose work classes. The basic idea of nose work is that the dog learns to find particular odors and gets a reward (CHEESE!). Before a dog can compete in a trial, they need to be certified that they can find an odor.

Key had been to a fun match and was doing well in class. I felt it was time to make him official. Unfortunately, no odor recognition trial was coming up in my area. I decided to use the trial as an excuse for a short vacation.

Our Friday start was delayed until 10:30 due to a doctor appointment, but we still pulled into Sequim around 3:30. Having arrived, we visited Railroad Bridge Park to give Key an opportunity to blow off some steam.

An hour later, Key would have loved to keep going, but it was dark and we needed to check into our Airbnb.

Saturday

Saturday morning, we work early and got in a hike before the trial. I wanted to go to the Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge, which has a spit and good birding. Because it didn’t allow dogs we settled on the county-run Dungeness Recreation Area nearby.

The birding wasn’t bad, but it didn’t yield any exotic species. Key didn’t mind and was ready for a nap by the time we left for the trial.

A short nap was all that was needed, and once at the trial, Key was ready to go. Our first search came up quickly, and Key surprised me by needing some time to “settle” into the game. He had been doing practice searches quickly, but he required multiple passes at the boxes here. Reminding

myself that I trusted my dog, I focused on what he hadn't searched thoroughly and waited for a change in behavior. Of course, it feels like forever while you are waiting, but we had three minutes to find one box out of twelve.

Sure enough, after a few times through, Key's nose engaged and he gave a nice, clear alert. I felt proud. The volunteers and staff complimented him on being "a good little hunter" and "so enthusiastic!" "He really likes this" the judge told me at a break! "Good little hunter" must be some kind of instructor code because our instructor uses the term too.

Key settled into searching a more quickly with each subsequent search, and at the end of the day we celebrated a "hat trick" of being certified for all three scents: birch, anise, and clove.

We ended the day by going to the John Wayne Marina and Washington Harbor before calling it a night.

My plan for our return was to go west along the Sound, cut down south along the coast, then head east again through the Olympic Forest. This was a long day, but I thought the scenery would be worth it.

The scenery was gorgeous, but the weather got progressively worse as we moved north and west.

I wanted to reach Neah Bay, but I was concerned about time, and the weather continued to deteriorate. When the downpour turned to snow, we changed direction to head south.

Once we got back to 101 and headed south, the weather turned from windy, cold, foggy, and rainy to drizzly. When we stopped at Ruby Creek, midway along the Washington coast, the weather had improved to overcast.

Once again, the day was getting late and we needed to be home to prepare for work tomorrow. I would have loved to go down to the beach and explore (and I know Key would have been game), but I decided to play it safe and mark it on my list of places to go again! ■

Tips & Tactics

► Continued from pg 42



control the fact that they "don't like dogs or dog stories" (GASP) after you've sent them the BEST DOG STORY EVER! I had an agent thank me for my query, but he was afraid of dogs! Who knew?

Which brings me to another point: Always try your best to research the agent/editor to whom you plan to query. Check sites like Query Tracker, Manuscript Wish List and Browse Members for free on Publishers Marketplace. Bonus. It is always nice to personalize your query suitable to the recipient. Let them know you've done your homework. Still not quite sure, query them anyway. For the most part these days, the worst thing that will happen is you'll never hear back!

So, don't be weary. Be cheery. Be tenacious like a terrier but laid back as a lab as you search for your potential match. Enjoy the learning process as you grow as a writer and soon-to-be published author. ■

MEMBER NEWS



CINDY OJCZYK

DWAA member Cindy Ojczyk, was featured on CBS Morning News Minnesota and WCCO radio ahead of National Pet Day, April 11. She was interviewed by morning TV news reporter Shayla Reaves, discussing adoption and fostering against a backdrop of cats and dogs in need of homes at a local shelter. Cindy spoke with Vineeta Sawkar and the WCCO radio audience while her reactive dog, Shiloh, bounced from staff member to staff member for treats and played ball under the tall tables. Shiloh's barking added authenticity to the conversation about rescue and fostering and had the staff in stitches. The media spotlights celebrated Cindy's Maxwell Medallion award from the 2024 DWAA writing contest.

France

► Continued from pg 23

I knew it couldn't last. The minute she put the hat on me, I knew we were leaving. I thought I was going to live here forever! Definitely a step up.

"Boo, come," I said. Grudgingly, she jumped off the bed and followed us to the car. Twenty minutes down the road was Nice. Nice is nice. Boo stood on the marble floor of the Negresco Hotel, checking out her surroundings. I could almost hear her voice her approval.

Surprise! We weren't going home. We went to a big fancy hotel that had a Little Mystery Room. (I remember Little Mystery Rooms from Dog Shows. You go in, the door closes, when the door opens . . . you're in a totally different place!). This place was beautiful. I looked around. "This'll do," I said to myself.

Eze was fun for Boo, but it was Nice where she claimed the attention. Everyone wanted to meet her. The housekeeping crew, giggling, spoke to her in French. The front desk spoiled her with biscuits when she passed and posted her photo

on their website. The people staying in the hotel would exclaim, "We should have brought our Bitsy," or "Mitzie" or "Max."

People! They all talked to me, but I couldn't understand a word they said. They were all nice, but they sure talked funny. My favorite thing was walking along the long beach. There were lots of pigeons, so I could chase them. Sometimes we had lunch there. Sometimes we'd meet other dogs. I met a very nice Papillon. Sometimes we'd just walk along the water's edge. Mommy asked, "Boo, do you like France?" I'm not sure what France is, but if this is France, I love it.

When Mommy said, "We're going home," it was OK. I had so much fun, but I did miss Tag and Apple. We got back into the big plane, but it wasn't as fancy as the first one. There was no bed, so I couldn't sleep on Mommy's head but I was able to sit on Mommy's lap. Mommy and Daddy didn't get to lie down either. There was one good thing . . . I didn't have to wear that silly red hat. ■



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