

# RUFFDRAFTS

the DOG WRITERS ASSOCIATION of AMERICA

SPRING 2026



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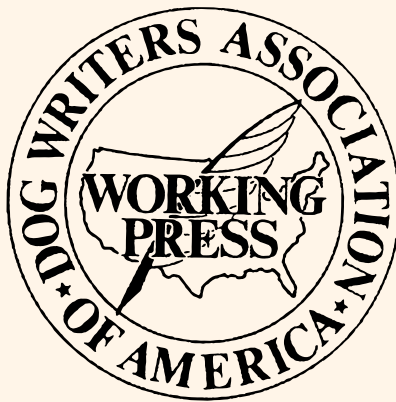
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*Old Dog,  
New Trips*

PATTI ANDERSON



THE  
TRAVEL  
ISSUE



## Ruff Drafts

Send all material to Merrie Meyers at: [rreditor@dogwriters.org](mailto:rreditor@dogwriters.org)

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



I HAVE TRAVELED with my pets far more than the average person.

Chihuahuas, Parrots, Poodles, Airedales...they've all flown or driven just about everywhere in the United States with me.

Often some of the animals that I lived with and loved came with me- speaking engagements, trade shows, dog shows, television commercials and endorsement projects all demanded my physical presence. I did it all and they came along, in part to keep me

company, but sometimes they were working too. I am grateful that I was able to share my world with them, and that they genuinely seemed to enjoy the extra time with me.

Though it is a bit tricky to haul animals around the country, and certainly requires a lot of planning, when they are well behaved and healthy, it is a pleasure. It's sort of like having teen-age children; when they're with you, at least you know what they are up to.

It's also nice to share experiences with a furry family member. Sharing a companion animal with the rest of the world is, in addition, an opportunity to educate the general public about their care and training.

Of course, there were some memorable experiences. I will never forget Spanky, my Amazon parrot who would yell, "help, help, fire!" at the worst possible moment during trade shows. (I didn't teach her that.) And then my Standard Poodle Lyle, who refused to sleep anywhere but right beside the door in hotel rooms so that he could guard me from intruders.

Lyle was the same dog that prompted hotel staff in Texas to move me to a different floor and room, because they were certain that the men who offered to buy him while they watched us interact, might try and steal him later, since I refused to sell the dog. So, there is some danger in taking your friends with you, but caution and common sense will help you overcome most of it.

My traveling menagerie days are likely over, but yours may be just beginning. Travel well and safely my friends, I hope to see all of you soon.

*Therese Backowski*

**Therese Backowski**

DWAA President

▲  
Therese Backowski and her dogs, Lucy and Hank

# RUFFDRAFTS

SPRING 2026

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

## How To Get Ready *for* Next Year's Competition, Now!

AS WE ENTER THE FIRST quarter of 2026, another DWAA Writing Contest is in the record books. There were so many great items submitted for the judges' consideration.

One of the hallmarks of DWAA's writing contest is that each entry has to be published prior to submission. Not every contest requires this and sometimes articles don't qualify for judging because they weren't published. Usually, the material is beautifully written and interesting to read, it just lacks a platform. To reduce the number of people who get turned away, because even one is too many in my mind, here are some tips on how to get your content published so that it qualifies for submission in next year's contest.

DWAA members can submit articles for publication on our [blog](#). The blog is updated on an ad hoc basis, so if you have something that can fit in one of the 23 different categories, send it to me, [RDeditor@dogwriters.org](mailto:RDeditor@dogwriters.org). We even create new ones as the need arises. Last year we added sections on Agility, Poetry and Pet Therapy. What is your area of interest? For Young Authors, we waive the membership requirement and post their work on the blog to help them get a leg up.

Of course, we also publish member-submitted work in *Ruff Drafts*. You can find RD's quarterly submission and publication schedule on the [newsletter](#) home page, underneath the link to the current issue.

If you're not a member (and why not?) then you might want to approach other canine-related businesses, non-profits or people you know about possibly publishing your content on their websites, or blogs. Does your vet have a website that could use a boost?

Several of DWAA's members are prolific social media influencers with a large digital footprint. Program hosts continuously look for people to interview or material to post. Perhaps you have a good story to tell? It doesn't have to be a personal experience, just one that you share with the audience based on your research. As the storyteller, you serve as the bridge between the platform, host and audience. Not only will this give you an opportunity to share your material with a potentially new group of readers or listeners, but you'll also be providing value-added content to the platform. With Search Engine Optimization (SEO) you can increase the audience further.

Of course, you can also start your own social media platform. There are even social media publishing programs that were designed for people like me who lack the tech gene. Although it may take time to create a version of YOU in digital form, building your own platform provides you with total control over your content, provides you with an around-the-clock presence, boosts your credibility and creates a following for your work.

One of the great things about DWAA members is that we support each other's learning curve. If you need help, or are seeking a home for your content, post a query to our DWAA members-only io email group. Like our members-only Facebook page, it gets a good amount of traffic and response.

What are you waiting for? The next contest will begin before you know it. You owe it to yourself to get the recognition you deserve. Don't let your content remain unseen or unheard. Publish, ASAP and when the time is right, Submit!

*Merrie Meyers*

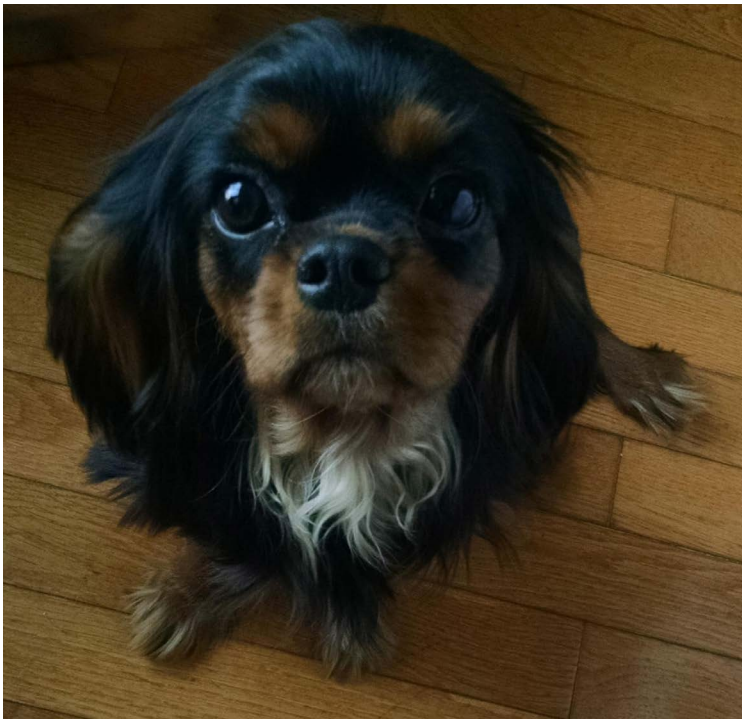
**Merrie Meyers, Ph.D. APR, Fellow PRSA**

Ruff Drafts Editor



Merrie Meyers  
with Mojo and  
Danny

BARBARA E. MAGERA MD

TRAVELS *with* JACKIE

**A** longtime friend lost her husband of 30 years. A week later, her beloved Cavalier died. Her grief was beyond tears. She begged me to find a young Cavalier to ease her pain. Initially, her heart was set on adding a Blenheim to her household. My search was a failure because most Cavalier puppies were promised a forever home at Christmastide. After exhausting my contacts in the U.S. and Canada, a nearby breeder friend reached out to me. She owned a black and tan Cavalier bitch who was beautiful and structurally sound but rather small. Having recently become a widow herself, she understood my friend's pain and decided to place little "Jackie O" with my grieving friend.

Luckily, the breeder socialized Jackie to the busy world of conformation. Although she never competed in any AKC sporting events, Jackie

learned to tolerate crowds, noise and the usual chaos associated with dog shows.

What I didn't share with the breeder was that my dear friend was married to a Fortune 500 CEO of a major corporation. This couple traveled extensively around the world in their private jets and owned homes, villas and properties on many continents.

Within a week, Jackie's pastoral life in rural Georgia morphed into hopscotching around the world with the social elite. Her new owner, Mrs. E, was an esteemed art collector who routinely gave seminars and lectures in New York, Paris and many key European cities. Jackie accompanied Mrs. E to these exotic places and was quietly present at every art seminar and showing. Generally reserved for only the privileged few, Jackie's eyes viewed treasures sold at exclusive art auctions.

Because of her owner's active social schedule, Jackie routinely traveled to New York City and accompanied Mrs. E to many prestigious social and philanthropic events. In short, Jackie met numerous movers and shakers within the art collecting world. Jackie and Mrs. E were regular attendees at Christie's, Sotheby's, Bonham and Phillip auction houses.

At a casual meeting, Jackie mesmerized the CEO of a major cosmetic company. Mr. Lauder, son of the famous Estée Lauder, was a shy man who immediately bonded with Jackie. He later described Jackie as "The most gentle and well-behaved little Cavalier whose big beautiful dark eyes could read my soul". Mr. Lauder and Mrs. E were friends for decades, having participated as expert art panelists at many worldwide

▲  
Photo courtesy of  
Barbara Magera

venues. Additionally, Mr. Lauder frequently visited Mr. and Mrs. E's sprawling Lowcountry plantation located just minutes outside of downtown Charleston. Mr. Lauder was so enthralled by Jackie that he wanted the Estée Lauder marketing department to incorporate Jackie into their spring cosmetic ad campaign. Mrs. E abruptly terminated Jackie's modeling career because she was concerned that stardom and the paparazzi may place unnecessary stress upon Jackie. "Better to live in ambiguity than fame" quoted Mrs. E.

Jackie and Mrs. E were inseparable. Even on worldwide trips, Jackie had her own entourage of personal groomers, trainers, chefs and dog walkers. Jackie flew in private jets with Mrs. E to many foreign countries to meet with heads of state, ambassadors and other dignitaries.

For many years, my husband and I celebrated holidays with Mrs. E and Jackie. Routinely, we would prepare elaborate dinners and transport the four-course meals to Mrs. E's historic home in downtown Charleston. We celebrated Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, Easter, birthdays and even some made-up-fictitious holidays. We patronized many restaurants, eateries, yacht clubs and local family-owned establishments in Charleston and the barrier islands. We savored the gastronomic fare, but the real purpose of our meeting was to celebrate the joys of friendship. Jackie was included in these cherished events.

One day, a recurrent thought dominated my mind: "Read the newspaper". Within hours, my intuition grew more intense. Then, I received a text that casually mentioned "as you probably know". I had no idea the reference was the untimely death of Mrs. E. My husband and I were shocked and heartbroken. We felt an overwhelming sensation of intense remorse and guilt as we were planning a "dinner out" with Mrs. E at her favorite eatery.

When the belongings of the wealthy are distributed, cherished memories are replaced by legal language often unintelligible by common folk. Dispensing property by will and trust attorneys becomes complicated.

In legal terms, Jackie is considered property of Mrs. E's estate. This little heart throb Cavalier is legally defined as chattel. Nothing more. Upon the death of Mrs. E, her various employees were abruptly dismissed. Jackie was immediately placed

with an unknown person identified by a settlement officer of Mrs. E's estate. Worse, no provisions were outlined in Mrs. E's will to guide the placement of Jackie. We are emotionally devastated. Jackie's heart condition requires multiple medications and continuous evaluation by a Veterinary Cardiologist. Her specialized care and drugs are costly and time consuming. Her future will be decided by the lawyers and settlement officers. Presently, there are no trust funds to pay for the complicated medical care Jackie requires.

We pray Jackie will not be placed in a local shelter. Her breeder has long passed. The current dog walker voiced an interest in assuming Jackie's care; however, her limited financial resources preclude her adoption of Jackie.

We believe Mrs. E's wishes would be to place Jackie with humans who knew this little dog and whom she trusted. It is important that her forever family has the financial ability to provide Jackie with the best specialty care possible to ensure her a loving, healthy and optimal quality of life.

We plead with the settlement officers to strongly consider placing Jackie under our care. We are both physicians and we are experienced with the critical care Cavaliers with MMVD require. We have a special bond with Jackie as we cared for her when Mrs. E was hospitalized or recuperating from various ailments. Jackie plays and frolics with our Cavaliers. Her transition into our family would be easy for Jackie.

Our major regret is that we did not engage in a serious discussion with Mrs. E about Jackie's future if Mrs. E became incapacitated or died.

This story serves to urge all canine owners to provide written directives including a trust fund for their beloved pets should something unexpected occur. Relying on family members or close friends may not completely fulfill your wishes as a canine owner. ■

**Barbara E. Magera MD, PharmD, MMM (Caracaleeb) is a Cavalier fancier, exhibitor, photographer, and writer who lives and practices medicine in Charleston, SC. She blogs at [Caninescribbles.com](http://Caninescribbles.com)**

EMELISE BAUGHMAN

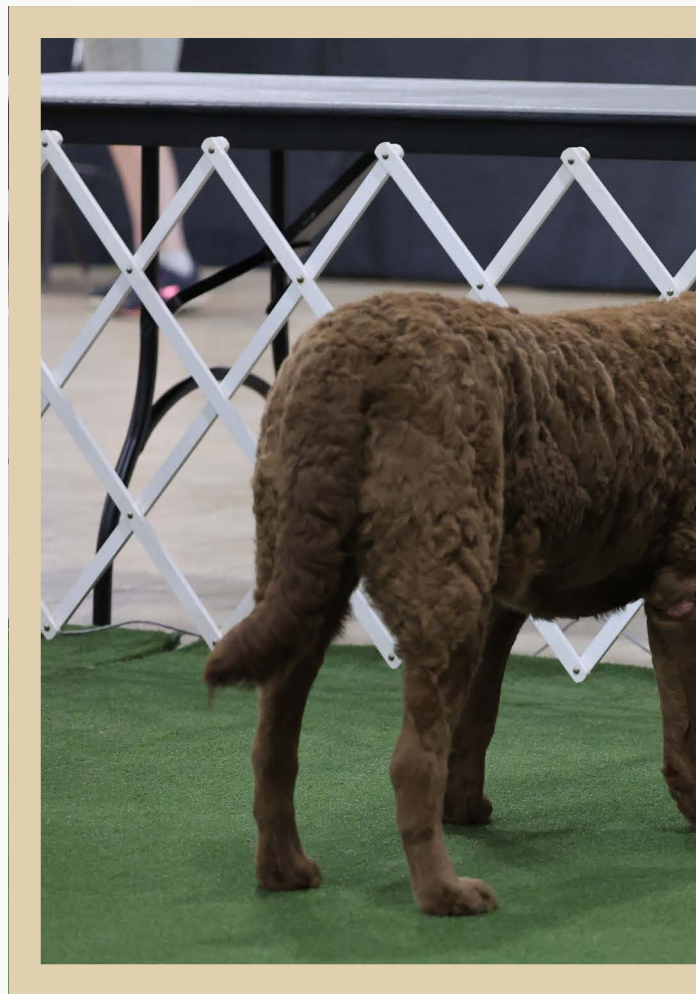
# The Reluctant Traveler

When I travel, it's usually with blondes. Not always, of course. Some of my Chesapeakes are standard brown, but the blondes seem to take me to the important places.

B

LONDE CHESAPEAKES are called deadgrass, perfectly descriptive. Some years ago, my deadgrass, Logan, was a hair away from finishing his championship and I really wanted to take him to a show in Colorado. It was an eight-hour drive, my husband couldn't go, but no problem. There was no championship for Logan but there was one for brown Diesel, and we got to explore the stunning Garden of the Gods. Sixteen hours of driving in two days, piece of cake. This was some years ago.

Years later, my daughter said I had to bring her favorite blonde, Marshall, to the National Specialty Show in Ohio. No, I'm too old, it's too far, it's a two-day drive, absolutely can't do it I told her. This daughter once talked me into getting her a pet rat. I was powerless. So, with fears tamped down and my husband's assurances, I loaded blondie and all our gear in his big Explorer, packed a peanut butter sandwich for lunch, arranged a few snacks (Twizzlers keep me alert via chewiness), and carefully lifted 10-year-old Hazel onto her bed in the back of the car. No crate, she gets stiff. Hazel was to be my little granddaughter's show dog,



entered in the old ladies' class, while rat-daughter showed her beloved Marshall.

Oh, the places I went! I live surrounded by corn and hay fields, but after the easy interstate of Nebraska and Iowa, the GPS and I were making our way in scary traffic through city after city. I knew I had to drive the best I'd ever driven and keep my precious cargo safe. At rest stops, they were happy to get out and stretch, and so was I. Then on the road again, I found the motel I'd reserved. I laughed when I saw a fellow lounging against the wall, just down from my room who quickly retreated when he saw me and Big Blondie strolling out to the grass. I felt very safe. That pretty boy slept right beside me to keep it that way.

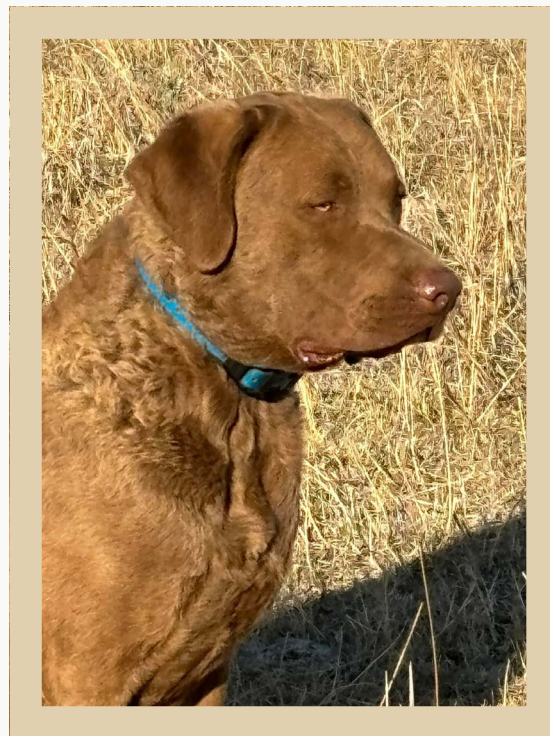
On the second day, there was more scary traffic, but I was having fun! I relished managing the satellite radio to hear all my favorite songs, went through my Twizzlers, and started feeling rather proud of my old self for doing this. I was elated when I pulled into the specialty host hotel. I'd done it! When my daughter and grands pulled in later, I was rather smug, but they were thrilled to



Clara and Hazel



Dean



see the Chesapeakes and me. The Marshall-daughter reunion was heartwarming. They were somewhat amazed that I'd taken the trip by myself, but I was modest about my incredible achievement!

Then followed the Specialty Days. It was such fun to see old friends, meet new people and dogs, and enjoy the atmosphere of excitement and celebration. The dogs loved getting to be with their people, along with the pampering and extra treats. The grounds had an expansive, fenced dog run where our big guys could really romp. Marshall was ecstatic, since although he lives with us and loves us too, his heart expands to match my daughter's when they are together. Sadly, no ribbon for him, but 7-year-old Clara capably piloted my old girl to a second in a big Veterans class. She then jumped and almost exploded the photographer's flowers in celebration. It was a wonderful time, but soon it was time to pack the Explorer again.

My daughter brought her brown boy Dean so he could live at our house in Nebraska. She finished his championship, but his energy level

was too big for their busy active-duty-Navy-with-two-kids-lifestyle. He needed the consistent, active field training my husband is so good at. But Dean had crazy eyes, the strength of Hulk Hogan, and bless-your-heart boy obedience. My daughter loaded him up, said goodbye to him, and we all cried. Then I was back on the road. Traffic, mile after mile of road construction, and white knuckles when everyone was driving so fast and mad at me because I wasn't. It just wasn't quite the fun adventure anymore. Plus, it turned out even Dean can't ride two full days without getting out to take care of nature. Fear of the road was nothing compared to my fear of letting Dean out of his crate to air. Still, I added Dean to my list of accomplishments this trip, and we made it to the same motel for the night.

This time the motel was extra fun. I brought Hazel inside first, putting her in the bathroom so I could bring in my bag and a crate. But when I returned, Hazel had locked herself in. I went to the desk to explain my predicament to the young

BETH DIXON

# Accidental Travel

**S**OMETIMES THE PLACES we go with our dogs are surprising and unpredictable. This kind of travel is accidental, inspired by circumstances we do not intend or expect. When things do not go according to plan, we are likely to think more deeply about what has happened. Perhaps we stretch our imaginations in these cases, creating the mental space for seeing things differently and uniquely.

The three of us arrive at a marked trail through the woods in early spring. Chuck, my husband, and I believe we can finish a 20-minute walk before it really starts raining. Maggie, my dog, is just along for the ride. She doesn't care whether or not she gets wet. The snow is mostly gone but the trees have yet to sprout their new leaves. I like this time of year because you can still see through the woods to spot wildlife or other hikers. Maggie can be off leash because we can usually see what's coming and *usually* short circuit any dog tangles. The trail is wet, but we have our rain boots on. No problem. The loop we are walking through winds different kinds of trees, curling one way and then another. What is distinctive about this trail is that on two edges of the property there is a steep drop into a valley with a pretty stream running through it. The trail loop we are walking on has a connecting spur that leads into this valley, crosses the stream and continues up the other side. But the valley route is too wet and long for us to tackle on this particular day.

The accidental part of our walk begins when we spot some turkey tracks on our trail. Maggie gets the scent immediately and heads off to the side to investigate. At first, I think she is nearby, just off the trail. But my whistles and calls don't bring her back. We stopped walking and called some more. No Maggie. How could she disappear so completely and suddenly, I wonder. We retreated back the way we came, still calling. Now I'm starting to get worried because we are on the side of the trail that drops off rather steeply into the

valley. Maybe she went down there? That would not be ideal.

Then very far off in the distance I hear a dog barking. It doesn't sound like Maggie, but it could be other hikers with dogs that she has discovered. I hope not because while she is a sweet dog she can create chaos in an instant. So, I hurry along in the general direction of the barking, still calling her name and whistling. Soon enough, I am off the trail and slogging through the brush and leaves, with fallen trees and branches. I'm tripping and falling over this debris, which is making me irate but I'm gradually getting soaked because at this point it is raining steadily. The whole search is making me furious. The main reason is that Maggie is not coming to me. The closer I come to her location, the barking is louder. The more I think, "Oh, you disobedient dog." She can surely hear me calling if I can hear her constant barking.

Finally, I reach the edge of a steep hill. I know now that she is at the bottom of the hill even though I can't actually see her. "Bark, bark, bark"—but she *still* doesn't come to me even though I am calling her loudly and insistently. I am forced to stumble down the incline, slipping in the mud, and grabbing onto limbs just to stay upright. As I reach the bottom, the first thing I see is a large turkey sitting on a tree trunk that stretches across the stream. Maggie is standing in the stream, facing the turkey and still barking furiously. But this astonishing scene barely registers because I am still trying to call her to me. And she still won't come! I'm forced to wade into the water to grab her collar. As I prepare to haul her out of the stream, I glance upwards. The turkey is literally 12 inches from my face. It cocks its head to eye me more carefully, but it is frozen in place. I remember hoping that it hasn't injured itself trying to flee from my crazy dog. But I get the impression that it is just shocked into immobility by finding itself in the middle of this domestic squabble—barking and yelling on all sides.

Maggie with  
Turkey Feather

I leash Maggie and drag both of us up the steep muddy hill, clamoring over fallen trees, tripping over rocks, and gripping branches to pull us along. By the time we reach the car there is no part of me that is dry. Mud everywhere. But what I remember most clearly is that I am still agonizing about how my dog did not come to me when I called. I just can't give it up, at least not right away. It takes me several days to think more deeply about our adventure. And this is what I believe now. Maggie is a herding dog. She saw this huge bird flapping up and down on the ground and through the trees. Turkeys are not spectacular flyers, especially in a rather dense forest. It is understandable that she gave chase to a bird that needed direction; it needed to be put somewhere. When she finally brought it to a stop, she told me. Maybe "bark, bark, bark" means "I've got it! I'll hold it here! Hurry, I have it all under control. Just hurry and see what I did!"

Perhaps what I initially believed to be disobedience was really a magnificent display of herding prowess: wrangling a wild bird, bringing it to bay, and beckoning me to witness her skill. This shift in perspective is accidental traveling of the imagination. ■



## Chesapeakes

► Continued from pg 9

man in charge. He found some kind of lock-opener and went back to my room to help. He was afraid of dogs, though, so he got the door open from as far away as his arm could reach and immediately high-tailed it back to the desk. Hazel was happy to see me.

The next day, the euphoria of going home as a successful, independent traveler who had kept our Chesapeakes safe was kicking in, and by the time I got around the cities to the rural interstate, I was singing along with the radio again. I sailed on home to our little piece of heaven in Nebraska, where I was greeted with brays from our mini donkeys, along with some barking from the ones who stayed home. Best of all, I got a hug from my proud husband, who said he knew I could do it! And my heart swelled with gratitude when he took over Dean. ■

►  
Becky kissing  
Marshall



J. WYNN ROUSUCK

## Go (South)west, Young Pup, Go (South)west

*Juno is a seasoned, intrepid traveler. Most of her trips are to a small town on a barrier island on the Gulf coast of Florida. There she vacations in a fashion that suits her perfectly. Her people own a very small condo that's just her size. She basks in the sun, chases the occasional lizard, and waters foliage that doesn't exist in her hometown.*



D

ONE REASON Juno is such an excellent traveler is because she loves anything that moves — cars, elevators, moving walkways and, of course, airplanes. She always flies Southwest Airlines. A

few years into her Southwest journeys, she wrote the airline a letter, which is reproduced here:

Dear Southwest Airlines,

Although I am not a Rapid Rewards member, I am one of your happiest and most frequent fliers. I especially enjoy catching up on my sleep during flights. (You might say I take cat naps, but that would not be my choice of words.) I'm such a good napper that there have been times when the other passengers seated in my row claim not to have known they were traveling with...a dog.

I travel in my own little home-away-from-home, and I look forward to flying on Southwest so much that as soon as one of

my people takes out a suitcase, I run into my wheeled Sherpa carrier, eager to be on my way. I keep my crate stocked with toys, a collapsible water bowl and a few treats, so it doesn't take much time to pack. I'm always ready for takeoff.

For the record, I am a 10-pound female Boston Terrier from one of your busiest hub cities, Baltimore. One time when I was traveling on Southwest, there was another Boston Terrier onboard, vacationing with his person, a Southwest flight attendant. We would have compared notes, but I'm afraid I snoozed.

I am writing now to offer my services as Southwest's official "spokesdog." As a Boston Terrier, I am one of the few all-American breeds and therefore well-suited to represent the airline that serves the largest number of domestic U.S. passengers. (Needless to say, I am also fully domesticated.)

I am available for photo ops, commercials and interviews. I am always fashionably dressed in my black-and-white, tuxedo-patterned fur. (A photo of Juno was enclosed.)

By the way, my people tell me that my ticket sometimes costs more than theirs does. When that happens, feel free to crate them under a seat and give me their seat instead.

And should you decide to enroll me in your Rapid Rewards program, I hope I'll be at the top of the list.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Your loyal canine customer,

Juno Rousuck

PS - Have you ever considered handing out small packets of Milk-bones as well as pretzel snacks?

Time passed. More time passed. Juno went from eagerly pulling the mail out of the mail slot every day to feeling perturbed about, well, forgetting the whole thing.

Then one morning a FedEx delivery man rang the doorbell. He was carrying a large box, which he set outside the front door. Juno positioned herself at the sidelight window and stared diligently at the box. When her people came home from work and brought the box inside, she gave it a few sniffs and knew it was for her.

She wanted to open it herself, but her people took over. The box contained a collar and leash in Southwest's official blue, red, and yellow colors, and each was adorned with the airline's blue, red and yellow heart-shaped logo. Best of all, the package also contained a LARGE box of Milk-bones. Oh, yes, and there was a letter addressed to Juno. The tone of the letter was charming, but it also said that Southwest was not looking for a spokesdog.

As disappointed as Juno was, she refused to regard this as a rejection. To the contrary, she wrote a thank you note, and the next time she flew Southwest, she wore the collar and leash. These were such a hit with the Southwest personnel that the gate attendant took a photo with Juno to include in the employee newsletter.

Juno continues to fly Southwest — with only one exception. A few years ago, a snowstorm closed the Baltimore airport, where she had patiently waited for three hours. Refusing to give up their vacation plans, Juno's people rented a car and drove to Florida, with Juno happily in her crate. The drive, which should have taken 15 hours, took 20. Juno didn't mind. She caught up on her sleep and made the most of the scenic stops along the way. On the whole, however, the experience only reinforced her loyalty to Southwest. An optimistic dog by nature, she remains confident that one day, the airline will recognize the error of its judgment and hire her as its spokesdog. ■



KATHY MANDELL

# Traveling Dog Lady

**W**HERE DO MY DOGS like to go? Anywhere, as long as they're with me! Last year, my husband and I took a cross-country trip with our dogs. It took us more than a year to plan the trip. We kept changing our minds about whether to bring Charlie Brown, 14, and Petey, 10, along for the ride. It has always been my dream to go on a road trip across the country with my dogs, except I thought it would have been with my previous dogs, Hobie and Hector. Life had other plans.

Charlie Brown  
and Petey along  
for the ride

When our third dog, Cooper (Charlie Brown's litter mate), died unexpectedly in 2024, my husband suggested that now would be the time to travel with the dogs, partially in honor and memory of Cooper, who was handicapped and wouldn't have been able to handle the trip as well as his brothers.

We ironed out all the details, deciding which states and sites we wanted to see, and which vehicle we would take. Would we camp, stay in hotels or rental accommodations? Since we're retired, we

decided to travel in the fall, after Labor Day, to avoid the summer heat and crowds.

We were on the road for almost the whole month of September. Our journey began where we live, near Myrtle Beach on the South Carolina coast. We started on a southern route through Georgia and Alabama, then we touched upon Mississippi and Tennessee. I was so excited to cross the Mississippi for the first time (other than in an airplane).

Along the way, I used the BringFido app to book dog-friendly accommodations. The original plan was to camp in our tent at campgrounds and balance that with some hotels. It did not work out that way at all. We camped for three days at the Grand Canyon's Mather Campground. It was lovely, but temperatures skyrocketed during the day into the 90s and plummeted at night down to 30. At one point, in the middle of a particularly chilly night, I looked over at the dogs who were sleeping in their dog beds. They were both shivering! I quickly covered Charlie Brown with an extra blanket. I cuddled with little Petey inside my sleeping bag. We were very worried about Charlie as I had never seen him shiver in our 14 years together! Petey, being part chihuahua, is a professional shiverer.

It ended up that the Grand Canyon was the only place we camped during the whole tour. So, we had lugged along sleeping bags, the tent, two cots, and more for just that brief stint. The rest of our time was spent in hotels. I have to say BringFido does a fabulous job of making sure the properties they list are up to date with good reviews. I added my own reviews after each stay, too.

Both dogs, Charlie Brown and Petey, have traveled with me extensively. Charlie used to go with me to dog events all throughout the northeast and New England when I lived in that region. Charlie was the first dog I brought to Myrtle Beach when I was considering relocating there for my retirement. Charlie is a great traveler!

Petey has been all over the east coast with us: Florida, Virginia, Maryland, New England, the Carolinas. Therefore, both dogs did great on this trip. They were well-behaved and enjoyed seeing the new sites, picking up on all the various scents.

We took them to dog-friendly destinations, such as Standin on the Corner Park in Winslow,

Arizona; Cadillac Ranch near Amarillo, Texas; Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, and Wall Drug in Wall, South Dakota. The dogs did great at all these places. When we visited the Breaking Bad Store in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Petey got reactive with another dog who was in the store, so I had to bring him outside and hide around the corner until the other visitors left. The store is TINY, so having three dogs in there at once was a debacle. We visited several National Parks and always complied with dog rules (requirements can be different for each park).

I was amazed and happy at how well the dogs did on the trip. I overcompensated on dog food, though. I had heard that sometimes certain brands of food aren't available in other states, and of course we all know that changing a dog's food is not recommended. The only problem was, just like humans, dogs don't eat as much while traveling. By the time we got home from the trip, Charlie had lost some weight, and that was a bit concerning. My vet had me add special food to his diet to help him gain a few pounds.

This year, we are planning another trip. We aren't sure of the destination yet, but both dogs will be coming along. ■

*Kathy Mandell is a retired travel industry executive who writes the blog [travelingdoglady.com](http://travelingdoglady.com). She self-published her memoir, "Dear Hobie: Letters to My Heart Dog" in 2025. Kathy lives in the Myrtle Beach, South Carolina area with her husband, Brad, dogs Charlie Brown and Petey, and beloved kitty cat, Tux.*

ED AND TONI EAMES

# They Fly *with the* Greatest of Ease!

WHEN MOST PEOPLE HEAR the word “fat,” they conjure up images ranging from fried chicken to double chocolate cake. On the other hand, hearing the word “FAT,” conjures up images for us of suitcases, ticket counters, security check points and airplanes. As travel addicts, we cannot resist a stir of excitement on arriving at Fresno Air Terminal (FAT) accompanied by our frequent flyer Golden Retriever guide dogs Echo and Escort.

As blind travelers, we find FAT, with its gates located along a straight corridor, an easy airport to navigate. Passing through security, the Golden boys stroll down the narrow hallway until we arrive at the gate. Along the way, we smile and the dogs wag their tails as passersby comment on how beautiful and well-behaved the Golden boys are. While waiting in the lounge for the boarding announcement, fellow passengers are permitted to pet Escort and Echo as long as they remain in a Down Stay.

For most of our trips, transfers have to be made in Dallas, Los Angeles or Salt Lake City. Faced with a long layover, we take the opportunity to get the dogs out for relief. As a result, the safest and most convenient relief areas at these and other airports have been scouted out.

Until recently, the dogs used the only weed patch at the Los Angeles airport complex. To our and the dogs’ dismay, on our last trip, we discovered the area had been upgraded by removing the weeds and replacing them with flowers. Not realizing this transformation had taken place, we permitted our canine partners to relieve in this newly beautified area. On the way back to the terminal, we were told the gardener was standing nearby, glowering at the desecration of his hand-

work! Next time, an alternative relief area will have to be found!

Our canine assistants are not only a source of independence and pleasure for us, they also delight and distract other passengers. A favorite story involved a little boy on a Delta flight who was restless and noisy during our cross-country trip. As he and his mother were leaving the plane, little Johnny, observing the Golden Retriever guide dogs loudly exclaimed: “Mommy, look! Those dogs were on the plane and nobody even knew it!” Sighing with exhaustion, she replied, “Yes, Johnny! But everyone knew you were on board!”

On a U.S. Air flight, we were fortunate to be bumped up to first class and were sitting in the middle section of a wide-bodied plane with lots of space in front of us. A family traveling with three-year-old twins asked if the girls could pet our dogs. Our guides will remain in a DOWN STAY position in order to enjoy the benefits of the caresses of admiring fans. The children sat quietly for over an hour petting and cooing over the dogs. It was a mutual admiration society! The parents were so delighted with their temporary respite from childcare; they jokingly suggested we coordinate our flights with their future travel plans!

Because of the dogs’ presence, we sometimes meet celebrities on our travels. On a flight to New York, we met Carroll O’Connor and had a chance to chat with him. To our delight, the head flight attendant announced Mr. O’Connor was on board as well as celebrities Escort and Echo! While waiting to pick up our luggage, Carroll and his wife came over and took the opportunity to pet and chat with the boys.

On the last leg of an extended business trip, we were feeling the effects of being on eight planes in eleven days. After dozing for most of the flight we got up to stretch our legs and use the facilities. Ivy and Kirby were asleep under the seats in front of us, a place generally used for carry-on luggage. Apparently, during the few minutes we were away, an unexpected adventure took place. Not realizing a gluttonous Golden Retriever was curled up under her seat, she placed an open box of expensive cookies in that space. Imagine Ivy's delight when, without having to move a muscle, she was presented with this delectable treat! Imagine the passenger's consternation when, reaching for a cookie, she found a slimy empty box!

Returning to our seats, a distressed flight attendant reported this infraction of guide dog etiquette. Despite the fear of chocolate toxicity, we were so tired and giddy, we could only laugh. Before pulling ourselves together and apologizing to the passenger, several silly scenarios were conjured up. In one, the passenger was entering a baking contest. She had worked for years developing the perfect cookie and was on her way to enter her confections in an international cookie fair. However, in one gulp, Ivy destroyed her years of work. In the other scenario, the passenger's husband adored the cookies sold by a particular bakery in Florida. She only traveled to Florida once every three years and always brought back a box of his favorites. We empathized with his disappointment as she walked off the plane, empty cookie box in hand.

On a nonstop cross-country flight on United, a flight attendant asked what would happen if our dogs needed to relieve themselves during the trip. We responded in a serious tone, "The pilot would simply have to land the plane." Quite startled, the attendant replied, "I'm so sorry. That simply isn't possible!"

While changing planes in Los Angeles, an Air Canada counter clerk inquired about the dogs' weight. "Aren't we scheduled to fly to Montreal on a 747?" we inquired. "You certainly are," responded the clerk, "but this information is required to balance the plane." Recognizing we were dealing with an official immersed in rules and regulations, with straight faces we endeavor-

ed to provide accurate weights for our guides. After all, we didn't want to be responsible for the plane tilting to one side!

People always ask where the dogs fly when they go on board with us. When we pre-board and have the dogs go under the seats in front, passengers cannot believe two large dogs can fit in such a confined space. Since they are neatly tucked away by the time other passengers board, we are frequently asked what happened to them. To tease some of those who inquire, we'll sometimes say we folded them up and put them in the overhead compartment! Of course, we then point to the boys lying contentedly at our feet and dispel the mystery!

For us and our fellow travelers, the Golden act as a social icebreaker. Many people who would not think of talking to a stranger feel no qualms about approaching us and our canine assistants. Since the dogs are usually tucked away when other passengers board and based on the cookie caper, we usually warn the passengers in front that two dogs are under their seats. On more than one occasion, this exchange has resulted in great benefit. Going to a veterinary conference in Tulsa, it turned out the person in front of Ed was a veterinarian attending the same conference. He owned three clinics in Tulsa and asked us to speak to his staff.

Thus, the magnetic canine personalities we travel with continue enriching our lives in a multiplicity of ways. ■

MADELINE MALE

# From Rescue Dog to Therapy Dog

*Toby is a miniature poodle with an unknown backstory. When Jane Allen adopted him, he was a sick and scared rescue dog. “And now he’s a therapy dog,” Jane smiles. “He’s a pretty special little guy. He really is a story of resilience.”*

Weston, photo  
courtesy of  
the author



AFTER TOBY was settled in for a while at his new home, the veterinarian gave Jane the idea that Toby could be a therapy dog, a well-behaved dog that can visit people and brighten their day. “I was very surprised and

pleased,” Jane says. “I always figured he’d be too this, or too that.” But she decided to give it a try. Soon everyone agreed that “Toby was born to do this” — including the volunteer that conducted his temperament test, an evaluation that helps to verify that therapy dogs are easygoing.

Nowadays, when Jane pulls out Toby’s therapy dog collar and bag, Toby knows they’re about to go visit the retirement home. “He’s so excited . . . He’s ready to go. It’s . . . his favorite thing to do,” Jane says. In the memory care unit, Toby has been able to get people to become verbal when they’ve not been verbal for a while, and he inspires the residents to sit up and smile. “We love it,” Jane says. “It’s good for Toby, for me, and it’s good for the people we go see.”

“Even when Toby’s not on the job, he’s just looking for people he can go cuddle with. You just don’t know people’s stories . . . A lot of people are going through a lot of things nobody knows about.” Jane says more people would benefit from therapy dog visits, but they don’t know how great they are.

Kim Southard also feels that therapy dogs are important. “Prior to doing this, I don’t think I understood how meaningful it is,” says Kim, the executive director of “Pets for Life,” a therapy dog organization.

Like Kim, more and more people have been realizing just how important therapy dogs are.

“

Even when Toby's not on the job, he's just looking for people he can go cuddle with. You just don't know people's stories . . . A lot of people are going through a lot of things nobody knows about.

JANE ALLEN



Consequently, the number of therapy dogs has been increasing in the last two years, Kim observes. Scarlet Ross, a volunteer who provides temperament testing for therapy dogs, sees the increase as well. She used to get a request for a temperament test about once every three months — now it's twice a week.

If volunteering as a therapy dog team is a good fit for a handler (owner) and their dog, then they might visit places like schools, libraries, hospitals, and retirement homes. “It's not limited, except by your imagination and what's in your neighborhood,” says Margaret Eggers, the Vice President of Love on a Leash®, a national pet provided therapy organization.

Just like Toby, Margaret's first dog was also a rescue dog who became a therapy dog. “I adopted Weston, and he was a little on the crazy side. He was reactive to everything, so I got connected with a trainer.” After a lot of work, the trainer said, “You know, he might make a good therapy dog.”

“We trained and worked together really hard, and he turned into the best therapy dog.” Margaret says. “I get to take this cute little waggy-tailed smile maker around and see how they make people happy and how they brighten their day. It truly is a gift that goes both ways.”

One time, there was a particularly meaningful connection Weston made with a rehab patient. “The man just hugged him and hugged him and petted him and was so sweet. And then he got out his wallet and showed me a picture of his own dog, who he hadn't been able to be with.”

The man's dog was a little schnauzer, just like Weston. “We went back to see him several days. For Weston to be able to provide that happiness . . . was a very dear thing to me.”

The great work of therapy dogs is supported almost entirely by volunteers: handlers, people who conduct temperament tests, and organizations that certify the dogs and help coordinate visits. “They do

it in their community and they do it to give back,” Margaret says.

For rescue dogs like Weston and Toby, becoming a therapy dog revealed a new purpose: providing comfort and spreading smiles to everyone they visit. Who knows if the next rescue dog could also become a therapy dog? ■

▲  
Toby, photo  
courtesy of  
the author

JAMES COLASANTI JR.

# WITH A BANJO

## *on* MY KNEE

FOR SOME DOGS, it's the beach. For some, it's the mountains. But for others, especially those in a hurry, it's the potty. When you gotta go, you gotta go! You just can't get out the door fast enough. That's usually the way it is for most dogs. It's the little things that make life and living so enjoyable for our four-legged friends.

Sometimes the Call to Nature has to be instilled in the resident canine. It's not always automatic. For some, this is easy. For others, not so much. And that my friends was true for our dog, Banjo.

Banjo was all-black, likely from the match-up between a black Labrador Retriever crossed with a very small dog that had a stocky, pork-barrel build. He was a twenty-five-pound resident at our local animal shelter.

Banjo was an older dog with a lot of love, but everyone, including me, passed him by. No takers; no adopters.

I had gone to the shelter to adopt a female dog who was a blonde, long-haired Dachs-hund. We already had a blonde boy named Dagwood, and we thought "Blondie" would make a great addition to our pack. We would have a matching pair.

Always the inquisitive type, I asked Robin, the shelter director, about Banjo. She said he was about six-years old, and a very loveable dog who always wanted to be around people. The problem was, he was not house-trained nor leash-trained according to the family who surrendered him. And they had no extra help at the shelter to work with him. In addition, his time at the shelter was running out with only two days remaining.

"You know," she added, "you have several dogs already, and if you take him, the other dogs will train him to go outside, and you can work with him on a leash on your own time.

He really is a good little dog."

The next day came and went, but Friday morning Robin called and said, "If you come get Banjo, we'll waive the adoption fee."

"I'll be right there," I replied." After all, one can never have too many dogs, now, can we?"

The little boy jumped into the cab of the truck, proving to me that he knew how to ride. All the way home he kept his left front paw on my right leg, also proving that he was very grateful I came to extradite him from the shelter. You could see the sparkle in his eyes as he stared at me during the long drive home.

For the first few days, I let him go out with the group. And he was good, with no miscalculations or accidents in the house. But then I started calling him first, and he jumped up with his front paws on my knees, tail wagging a mile a minute, as he was excited knowing we were going out.

He always headed to the blue-flowered hydrangea bush. He could scoot under the branches and do his business in private. It was also a plus for me as I always knew where to clean up his spot.

Banjo made his home with us for another six years as part of "our gang," always devoted, always loving.

One morning he did not ask to go out. A piece of my heart wedged in my throat, confirming what I already knew had come to pass. Banjo had gone over the Rainbow Bridge to wait for his friends who had taken a chance on him, giving him that good doggy life.

I cried a lot that day because that is what you do! He was not just any family member, but one who appreciated every single day he was with us ■

LESLIE BROWN

# Salty Stories *from* Sea Creatures

— *from her Blog* —

## A DOG AND A KEYBOARD

IF YOU'VE BEEN TAPPING your paws wondering where I've been, I promise I didn't fall asleep on the delete key. I traveled with my mother to the beach. Before this, I had only been to the neighbor's yard and to the park down the street.

My mother said I could splash around in smelly water, sniff for stinkbugs, and hunt for sand crabs.

She put my favorite things in a suitcase. My brown teddy bear, my cuddle blanket, and my tennis ball. I dropped my sunglasses in there too.

When we got to the beach the air tasted like salt, the wind tried to get into my ears, and the sand followed me around everywhere.

While my mother read her book and watched the waves, I tried to hear stories from sea creatures.

There were stories in seashells and seaweed, in gull cries, and in starfish. I listened carefully and tried to remember what they said.

There was a seahorse in a shallow puddle. He looked scared and like he had a story to tell. I listened while he told me about the big wave that

carried him away. And then the other waves that brought him back.

I also saw things on the beach that looked mysteriously like punctuation. A shell shaped like a comma, a piece of seaweed that looked like a sentence, and a stick that seemed like it could draw words in the sand.

When we got home, I was pretty sandy and tired, but I was full of salty stories.

It was time to wake up my keyboard. ■





# TIPS & TACTICS

ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE

## Plot Breakdowns *for* Fiction Writers

UNDERSTANDING YOUR BOOK'S **plot** and **characters** is a necessity for publishing a strong fictional story. This becomes easier when you know your character's external and internal conflicts. Once this is done, a strong plot will emerge. To start your plotting process, keep this in mind

In storytelling, **motive** is based on conflict and is the "why" behind a **character's** actions. The characters power the story/plot. That is, the steering wheel [characters] drives the car [the story.] You can't go anywhere in a car without a driver! I use a "character reference sheet" and complete one for my main characters and secondary characters before I put "words to paper." Writers and readers need to know these people in depth. I use the "Character Info Sheet Template" online and the "Character Reference Sheet: The Basics," but there are many other templates to choose from.

Back to driving our "story car." The direction the journey takes is driven by **conflict**. There are two aspects to conflict in fiction.

**Internal and External Conflicts.** Here is an example.

**The Three Little Pigs.** All three are afraid of the Big Bad Wolf. This is the **External Conflict**. The younger two pigs don't trust the oldest brother when it comes to building a home. This is the **Internal Conflict**. When the two pigs come under attack—back to the **External Conflict**. The two younger brothers set aside their mistrust and turn to the third brother and his brick house,

dealing with their **Internal Conflict**. This leads to the **Apex (Darkest Moment)** of the story. When BOTH types of conflict are resolved at the **Climax**, your story is, for all intents and purposes, *finished!* (Unless you want to add an epilog, currently popular with readers.)

Here's another example. Picture a dog and a bone. No conflict, no story. Picture two dogs with one bone. Now we have an **External Conflict**. Who gets the bone? But the writer must add an **Internal Conflict** too. Is the dog hungry? Is it a female dog providing for her litter? Is it a dog marking his territory? Is it a dog trying to move upward in the pack by showing dominance? We need to know.

Without **Internal and External Conflicts**, you have NO fictional story. If these conflicts are strong, you will have powerful characters to drive your story to completion. Not having them means less editor/reader engagement.

This brings us back to the **Story**. Two well-known authors have broken down the basic plots. There is a 2004 publication named "**The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories**" by Christopher Booker. **The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations** by Georges Polti (yes, his first name is spelled with an S) written in 1895 lists even more.

Below is the Booker's plot list, then Polti's. I have edited the latter for ease of reading and updated the examples.

### The Seven Basic Plots:

- **Comedy** - (Helen Fielding)
- **Overcoming the Monster** - Example: Harry Potter (J.K. Rowling)
- **Rebirth** - Beauty and the Beast
- **The Quest** - Example: Raiders of the Lost Ark
- **Tragedy** - The Great Gatsby (F. Scott Fitzgerald)
- **Voyage and Return** - Example: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (Lewis Carroll)
- **Rags to Riches** - Example: Cinderella. (Interesting fact: Most cultures have their own version of the Cinderella story.)

Politi's **The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations** - goes into greater detail and covers more storylines (plots). They are listed below in alphabetical order.

**Abduction** – an abductor; the abducted; a guardian. The abductor takes the abducted from the guardian. Example: Helen of Troy

**Adultery** – Two Adulterers; a Deceived Spouse. They conspire against the Deceived Spouse. Brothers (2009 film)

**All sacrificed for passion** – a Lover; an Object of Fatal Passion; the Person/Thing sacrificed. A Lover sacrifices a Person or Thing for the Object of their Passion, which is then lost forever. Example: Breaking Bad

**Ambition** – an Ambitious Person; a Thing Coveted; an Adversary. The Ambitious Person seeks the Thing Coveted and is opposed by the Adversary. Example: Macbeth

**An enemy loved** – a Lover; the Beloved Enemy; the Hater. The allied Lover and Hater have diametrically opposed attitudes towards the Beloved Enemy. Example: Tybalt in Romeo and Juliet

**Conflict with a god** – Mortal; an Immortal. The Mortal and the Immortal enter a conflict. Example: War of the Titans/Greek Mythology

**Crime pursued by vengeance** – a criminal; an avenger. The criminal commits a crime that will not see justice, so the avenger seeks justice by punishing the criminal. Example: Les Misérables

**Crimes of love** – a Lover; the Beloved breaks a taboo by initiating a romantic relationship. Example: Cersei and Jamie Lancaster in Game of Thrones

**Daring enterprise** – a bold leader; an object; an adversary. The bold leader takes the object from the adversary by overpowering the adversary. Example: The Lord of the Rings

**Deliverance** – an unfortunate, a threaten-er, and a rescuer. The unfortunate has caused a conflict, is threatened, but the rescuer saves the unfortunate. Example: Lois Lane, investigative reporter, and Superman

**Disaster** – a vanquished power; a victorious enemy or a messenger. The vanquished power falls from their place after being defeated by the victorious enemy or being informed by the messenger. Example: Star Wars/the Empire kills the Jedi students

**Discovery – the dishonor of a loved one.** Example: A Discoverer; the Guilty One. The Discoverer discovers the wrongdoing committed by Guilty One. Example: Detective stories

**Enmity of kin** – a Malevolent Kinsman; a reciprocally hating Kinsman. The Malevolent Kinsman and the Hated or a second Malevolent Kinsman conspire together. Example: As You Like It (Shakespeare)

**Erroneous judgment** – a Mistaken One; a Victim of the Mistake; a Cause or Author of the Mistake; the Guilty One. Example: Murder on the Orient Express

**Falling prey to cruelty/misfortune** – an unfortunate; a master or a misfortune. The unfortunate suffers from misfortune and/or at the hands of the master. Example: Job (biblical figure)

**Fatal imprudence** – the Imprudent; a Victim or an Object Lost. The Imprudent, by neglect or ignorance, loses the Object Lost or wrongs the Victim. Example: The Lord of the Rings

**Involuntary - crimes of love** – a Lover; a Beloved; a Revealer. The Lover and the Beloved have unknowingly broken a taboo through their romantic relationship, and the Revealer reveals this to them. Example: Oedipus

**Loss of loved ones** – a Kinsman Slain; a Kinsman Spectator; an Executioner. The killing of the Kinsman Slain by the Executioner is witnessed by the Kinsman. Example: Braveheart

**Madness** – a Madman; a Victim. The Madman goes insane and wrongs the Victim. Example: The Shining (novel)

**Mistaken jealousy** – a Jealous One; an Object of Possession; He is Jealous; a Supposed Accomplice; a Cause or an Author of the Mistake. Example: Gollum in Lord of the Rings.

**Murderous adultery** – two Adulterers; a Betrayed Spouse. Two Adulterers conspire to kill the Betrayed Spouse. Example: Double Indemnity

**Necessity of sacrificing loved ones** – a Hero; a Beloved Victim; the Necessity for the Sacrifice.

## Tips & Tactics



► Continued from pg 23

The Hero wrongs the Beloved Victim because of the Necessity for their Sacrifice Example: *Sophie's Choice*

**Obstacles to love** – two Lovers; an Obstacle.

Two Lovers face an Obstacle together. Example: *Romeo and Juliet*

**Obtaining** – a Solicitor and an Adversary who are refusing an Arbitrator & opposing parties. Example: Widowed woman in the Bible seeking her rights from a corrupt judge

**Pursuit** – punishment; a Fugitive. The Fugitive flees punishment for a misunderstood conflict. Example: *The Fugitive* (movie)

**Recovery of a lost one** – a Seeker; the One Found. The Seeker finds the One Found. Example: *Cinderella*

**Remorse** – The Culprit; a Victim or the Sin; an Interrogator. The Culprit wrongs the Victim or commits the Sin and is at odds with the Interrogator who seeks to understand the situation. Example: *The Bourne Supremacy*

**Revolt** – a Tyrant; a Conspirator. The Tyrant, a cruel power, is plotted against by the Conspirator. Example: *Julius Caesar* (play)

**Rivalry of kin** – the Preferred Kinsman; the Rejected Kinsman; the Object of Rivalry. The Object of Rivalry chooses the Preferred Kinsman over the Rejected Kinsman. Example: *Wuthering Heights*

**Rivalry of superior vs. inferior** – an Inferior Rival bests a Superior Rival and wins the Object of Rivalry. Example: *Godzilla vs. King Kong* for dominance

**Self-sacrifice for an ideal** – a Hero; an Ideal; a Creditor or a Person/Thing sacrificed - the Hero sacrifices the Person or Thing for their Ideal, which is then taken by the Creditor. Example: *Joan of Arc*

**Self-sacrifice for kin** – a Hero; a Kinsman; a Creditor or a Person/Thing sacrificed. The Hero sacrifices a Person or Thing for their Kinsman, which is then taken by the Creditor. Example: *King Arthur*, *Gwenivere*, and *Excalibur*

**Slaying of kin unrecognized** – the Slayer; an Unrecognized Victim. The Slayer kills the Unrecognized Victim. Example: *Star Trek's The Wrath of Khan*, Kirk's "secret baby" son is murdered

**Supplication** – a Persecutor; a Suppliant; a power in authority whose decision is doubtful. The Suppliant appeals to the Authority for delivery from the Persecutor. Example: Mark Anthony interceding on behalf of Cleopatra to Rome

**The enigma** – a problem; an Interrogator; a Seeker. The Interrogator poses a problem to the Seeker and gives a Seeker better ability to reach the Seeker's goals. Example: *The Sphinx Riddle*

**Vengeance taken for kin upon kin** – two entities, the Guilty and the Avenging Kinsmen, are put into conflict over wrongdoing to the Victim, who is allied to both. Example: *The Hatfields and McCoys* and intermarriages

Your story should mirror one of these plots. If you can't match up your story, then you have "A Slice of Life" piece, not a story. Rework your ideas with your own special voice. Combine a template, your character worksheets, your internal and external conflicts, and you should have a sturdy framework for your plot. It will make your writing stronger, easier, more marketable, and will engage both readers and editors alike—a worthy goal indeed! ■



◀ Working At Home, submitted by Dawn Secord



◀ Ballard and Yoda in Illinois

◀ Ballard and family visiting the Vermont Capital

PATTI ANDERSON

## Old Dog – New Trips!

**S**OFT BROWN EYES, a bit rheumy with age, gazed up at me in anticipation of another scent walk around our yard. Ballad, my 16 ½ year old Cairn Terrier (the spittin’ image of “Toto”) enjoyed this enrichment activity as his sense of smell was still very strong.

Ballad retired from therapy-dog work about two years before. His body was wearing out in increments, but not his terrier’s tenacity for life.

Ballad was re-homed by his breeder at age two, for crooked teeth, which we both had. He jumped up on the worn sofa and snuggled in right next to me the first time we met.

Ballad quickly became my very best buddy from that day on. As a Pet Partners evaluator for several species, Ballad assisted me in testing over 350 animals as the neutral dog. He would trot nonchalantly by my side past dogs of every breed, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, miniature horses and llamas, never hesitating to do his job.

In addition to his testing job, he was the “United Nations” on four paws. This little Scottish therapy dog embraced everyone he met, no matter their size, age, clothes or political affiliations.

During the first summer of the worldwide pandemic, when everything was locked, my husband and I faced a conundrum. Our son was turning thirty a month away, on July 30th, in Vermont, several states away from us, and we wanted to drive out there from Minneapolis to celebrate with him. The length of time we hoped to take was ten days.

We also had two active Siberian Huskies that could stay with the breeders where they were in husky heaven. They weren’t set up for other breeds, though. What would we do with Ballad?

He wouldn’t do well, at his age with all of his senior needs, having a house sitter (plus a sitter was hard to find during the pandemic). I was also worried that the emotional stress would take its toll on him if we were separated for that long, especially after being together day in and day out during the pandemic.

My husband and I tried to do some brainstorming, such as maybe one of us would travel to Vermont with the other staying behind with him, or maybe we should just cancel the entire trip. I grappled with a solution I could live with, as ultimately the final decision was mine.

I have never been a supporter of “convenience euthanasia” for any of my animals throughout the years. People I have known in the past that were planning for one of those “save the date” events, such as a wedding, a family reunion, or a vacation, would “put their dog down” right before leaving for somewhere whether their dog had more life to live or not.

I would wake up in the middle of the night agonizing over what to do about Ballad. Everyone’s stress level seemed to spike during the pandemic, so in addition to anxiety about Covid for this trip, I had a long list of why we shouldn’t take our beloved old dog to Vermont too.

Here is a condensed version of my worry list of the “what if’s”:

1. What if the trip was too much for Ballad and he was miserable?
2. What if we couldn’t find an emergency vet along the way if needed?
3. What if the car broke down in the extreme heat we were having?
4. What if the constant car movements caused nausea or pain for Ballad?
5. What if Ballad died on the trip?

Number five on the “what if” list helped me decide. Ballad was my confidant and partner for many years, so if the worst was to happen, at least I would be there with him. Eventually I did a “shake-off” of the gloom-and-doom-type thinking and started planning our trip.

I purchased a doggie cooling pad, a roomy traveling kennel and stocked up on treat toys. His new kennel was anchored in the back seat of our Subaru Outback. One of us would sit next to Ballad at all times, for a total of 4,000 miles.

See BALLAD pg 33 ▶

SUNNY WEBER

# ROAD TRIP

## *with* THE GANG



Jessie, Bailey,  
Brillo at sunset  
in our field

I

NEEDED A VACATION. Planning a one-month sabbatical from my businesses, I left the cats home with a sitter and took my dogs, Brillo, Bailey, and Jessie to southern Utah. I rented a house with a fenced yard in the town called Kanab.

The dogs and I discovered miles of open red rock ranges. Every day we hiked. I usually kept little Brillo on a long leash. Jessie the lab mix and Bailey the Wheaton terrier stayed close without physical control, but my little adventurer had no sense of danger. I had to keep him with us until I knew the areas we discovered.

On one flawless day we repeated a hike over an open valley of crimson sand and hip-high bluish-gray sagebrush. The dogs chased each other around the clumps and crisscrossed in front and behind me. They waded in streams and we climbed rocky outcrops where I took in the view. Being dogs, they had no appreciation for views; their noses were always to the ground. I was sure I missed as much fascination in intriguing scents as they did in my visual enjoyment of distant sorrel rock vistas and wispy cream clouds set in the topaz blue sky.

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

"Chase me!" he demanded. Jessie made a half-hearted lunge at him, then returned to his own trek. Bailey took the bait and the two of them raced over the red sand, raising puffs of strawberry-colored dust behind their galloping feet.

I laughed and headed in the same direction they disappeared in. After several minutes Bailey

▶  
Jessie

▶  
The All-Star Lineup

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 rejoiced in her reformation and to know I was able to not only save her life, but to bring such euphoria to her. I gave breathless Bailey some water from my pack in the bowl I carried for them.

Jessie stood nearby, calm, self-confident, tail wagging in a relaxed curve, and smiling. His former anxiety and franticness had faded into a composed leader with wise inner strength. He, too, had survived and matured into an outwardly stunning and inwardly loving companion.

But Brillo was nowhere to be seen. I looked around. I listened. The vast prairie only whispered a feathery breeze. My worry escalated to panic.

“Brillo! Brillo, come!”

He always came when I called. He hated to be alone for any length of time. But here we were, the three of us and no Brillo. I forged ahead, calling and clapping my hands in the air.

“Brillo Pad, this way!” My voice did not echo, for the hills were now far behind us. The flat, sandy plain absorbed my voice. Nothing. Where had he gone? Had a coyote silently taken him? Had a hawk flown off with him?

“Brillo! Brillo Pad! Come now!”

A hot, dry gust engulfed me—was it giggling? Increased volume in my voice made no difference. My calls broke apart behind us.

Finally, far ahead I heard faint barking. Was it Brillo or a rancher’s dog? Was he hurt and calling for help? Wafting softly on the incoming drafts, it sounded like Brillo’s voice. I hollered again. The barking continued so I turned in the direction I thought it was coming from, although on the flat plain, undulations of sand, and in a slight dip between the dunes, I might



have been miscalculating. I sped up my pace with Jessie and Bailey now behind me, obviously fatigued and not nearly as worried as I was.

The canine vocalizations became louder. If those were ranch dogs, they might tear Brillo to pieces if they considered him a threat. If from a coyote, Brillo would be dinner. I climbed over the top of a windy wave of soil, and with the rise in elevation the barking bluster amplified. I saw the backs of several Black Angus cattle peeking above the leafy sage tops. The yaps were coming from that direction.

As I approached, I saw the hairy, tangled tops of cow tails switching. The cattle stood close together and were not moving. I sped up, my hiking boots sinking in the deep dirt. Where was that little monster?

I climbed one more hill, which brought me high enough to see the cattle clearly. They were in a close-knit circle, heads out, tails swatting. Then, between the tall sage clumps, I saw a black flash close to the ground around the cattle.

Brillo was herding the huge cows! Nothing in his supposed toy/terrier

See ROAD TRIP pg 33 ▶



SUSAN HARTZLER

# Dog-Friendly Carmel-by-the-Sea

**F**EW PLACES in the United States embrace dogs the way Northern California's *Carmel-by-the-Sea* does. Often cited as the #1 Dog-Friendly Town in America, this quaint coastal village has a fairytale feel — storybook cottages tucked behind hedges, hidden courtyards, and white-sand beaches framed by windswept cypress trees. It is not just dog-welcoming; it is dog-forward. From legendary pet-loving hotels to off-leash beaches and a civic culture that openly celebrates canines, Carmel draws two- and four-legged visitors from around the world to its charming one-square-mile footprint.

My most recent visit to Carmel held special meaning. Years earlier, I'd received an Angel on a Leash Award from the Dog Writers Association of America — back when that was still a category in the annual awards celebration. The honor recognized a short story about my first therapy dog, Baldwin, and his inaugural visit to County USC Medical Center — the moment when a hospital room, a Muppet-looking black rescue dog, and a fragile child just out of chemotherapy quietly altered the trajectory of my life.

It marked the beginning of my public writing about the human–animal bond. I reshaped that story and entered it in the City of Carmel's Pawlisher Prize contest. It won, so I can officially claim the title of Pawlisher Prize winner. But the true reward wasn't the recognition. It was watching my Australian Shepherds, Seven and Bliss, revel in pure, unrestrained joy.

It would become one of the last trips I took with Bliss before she passed. Watching my beautiful blue merle girl run free along Carmel Beach, playing in the gentle waves as the sunlight caught her mismatched eyes, felt like a full-circle moment. A story that began in a hospital room ▶



brought us to a place where dog love is not explained — it is simply lived.

### Where to Stay

For me, there's only one place to stay in Carmel: the iconic, dog-friendly **Cypress Inn**. This historic boutique hotel, once co-owned by actress and animal-welfare advocate **Doris Day**, carries forward her legacy — one that has permanently shaped its enduring dog-loving spirit.

Dogs of all sizes are greeted with genuine warmth. Water bowls, treats, blankets, and thoughtful amenities are standard, not special requests. The staff speaks fluent dog, treating them as naturally as they do their human guests.

And what did Seven appreciate most? The treats. There were treats at check-in, treats waiting on the bed each evening for turn-down, and nearly every friendly face seemed to have one tucked away in a pocket, ready to reward a polite sit.

The atmosphere feels less like a policy and more like a philosophy: dogs belong here.

### Carmel Beach: Off-Leash Freedom Done Right

I'm always looking for the perfect place where my therapy dogs can get a little TLC of their own, a way to reward their good work in hospitals, schools, and care facilities. They give so much of themselves to others. It matters to me that they also get time simply to be dogs.

**Carmel Beach**, with its wide sweep of white sand and a dramatic Pacific backdrop, is exactly that place. There are no hospital corridors, no wheelchairs to navigate, no need to "hold it together" for anyone else. Just wind, waves, sand, and open space. Watching Seven and Bliss play along the shoreline, splash into the surf, and circle back to me with salt on their whiskers reminded me of something essential: dogs with jobs need freedom, too.

### Scenic Road & Mission Trails: Nature at Every Turn

The accessibility of nature here is not an afterthought. It is woven into daily life. Running parallel to Carmel Beach, **Scenic Road** offers a coastal walking path ideal for leashed strolls. The views stretch toward Carmel Point, Point Lobos State Natural Reserve, Pebble Beach, and the region's sculptural, wind-shaped cypress trees. Don't miss **Mission Trails Park**, which offers 37 acres of meadows, oak groves, and pine forest where dogs can explore freely with their humans.

### Dining, Shopping, and Everyday Inclusion

Carmel's dog culture extends beyond open spaces. Water bowls and treats are stationed at nearly every business in town, while most boutiques and **restaurants** welcome well-behaved pooches. It is entirely normal to see a dog lounging under a café table or accompanying a shopper into an art gallery.

The town's deep affection for dogs extends into its art, where four-legged subjects are treated not as novelties but as worthy muses. Many independent galleries and locally owned shops showcase dog portraits, animal-inspired paintings, and sculptural tributes to beloved companions.

### A Community That Celebrates Dogs

What sets Carmel apart is not mere permissiveness, but intention. **Carmel Poodle Day** may be the most visible example of the town's canine enthusiasm, drawing poodles and poodle mixes to the beach for a lively annual gathering. But beyond organized events, the canine culture remains steady year-round.

It's also one of those rare places where nearly every corner feels photo-ready — from white-sand beaches and dramatic bluffs to charming courtyards and storybook storefronts. Whether you're snapping your own photos or hiring a local photographer, Carmel offers an idyllic coastal backdrop for creating a frameable memory you'll treasure long after the sand has washed away. In this town, dogs aren't accessories — they're family.

### A Full Circle Moment

Taking Seven and Bliss to Carmel was more than a celebratory trip. It was a reminder of the thread connecting my life and work: therapy visits, storytelling, travel, and the steady presence of dogs. Carmel-by-the-Sea does more than merely allow dogs. It welcomes them with intention, infrastructure, and affection. For dog writers, therapy handlers, and devoted pet parents alike, it offers something increasingly hard to find: a place where the human-animal bond is not questioned but understood.

And sometimes, that kind of understanding is the greatest luxury of all. ■

## Ballad

▶ Continued from pg 27

▶ Ballard Visiting  
cousin Scott in  
Indianapolis

Ballad perked up immediately as we set off, sensing excitement in the air. He never needed reassuring, but we did and doted on him for the entire trip. Ballad had a blast and so did we! Best decision ever!

Along the route, I would put a Star Wars toy of Yoda next to Ballad at different stops in order to take some commemorative photos. I had been a teacher in elementary school that had incorporated the “Flat Stanley” project with her class. It was about a flat paper cut-out of a boy named Stanley traveling inside written letters to relatives and friends of our classmates, from around the country sharing his “adventures” and photos of where he had been. The Yoda toy was an adaptation of that project and posed in all of the various places we went with Ballad. Ballad technically was in five states on his last road trip ever with Yoda photos to commemorate his travels.

Some of the highlights of this trip for Ballad were visiting my cousin Scott along the way in Indianapolis, staying at dog-friendly hotels, being a special guest at a Vermont backyard birthday barbecue, seeing our son again (2 years since they had seen each other), visiting the state capital (Montpelier), greeting many new people at all the rest stops, and of course an abundance of new scents to smell wherever he went!



Three months after we returned home, two weeks after his 17th birthday, Ballad passed away. I had no regrets about the end of his life and valued the precious memories of our last trip together.

To my beloved Ballad: “May the Force Be With You,” forever... ■

## Road Trip

▶ Continued from pg 29

breeding would have lent itself to the assumption that he had such an instinct. But there he was, running circles around the bovines, barking orders.

I was torn between being furious out of worry, laughing at the spectacle, and a growing fear—one good cow kick might kill my bossy beast. Quickly I slid down the sandy slope, grabbed my wayward shepherd-wannabe on his return circle, and snapped his leash on.

Brillo was open-mouthed, panting with sheer exhilaration. Never had he looked so thrilled and excited. His bright black eyes barely took notice of me and continued to focus on the shaggy giants as I dragged him away. I glanced around to see if an angry rancher was headed in our direction. The

view from my tall human perspective remained only open red range, unbroken blue sky, sage shrubs, the clump of cows, my three dogs, and me.

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. ■

Sunny Weber — Behaviorist, Trainer, Humane Educator, Author

 [sunnyweber.com](http://sunnyweber.com)

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## MEMBER NEWS

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### NEW MEMBER

#### JOAN MERRIAM

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New Member **Joan Merriam** has been writing about dogs since 2012, when her first column appeared in the local northern California newspaper. Since then, she's published columns on life with dogs for three other newspapers in California and Colorado and continues to write for two. She became a contributing writer for *Whole Dog Journal* in 2024, with nineteen articles published under her byline to date. Merriam is also the author of the nonfiction book, *Little Girl Lost: A True Story of Shattered Innocence and Murder*, and in 2021 published two award-winning mystery novels. In other areas of her life, she is a freelance fundraising consultant for a community nonprofit animal rescue organization

and formerly volunteered as a home placement advisor for Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue. Merriam taught communication studies at a local community college for over 20 years, and is «mom» to a beautiful 4-year-old Golden Retriever rescue, and an 11-year-old Maine Coon cat. She writes, "I'm thrilled to be a new member of DWAA!"



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