

# RUFFDRAFTS

the DOG WRITERS ASSOCIATION of AMERICA

SUMMER 2026



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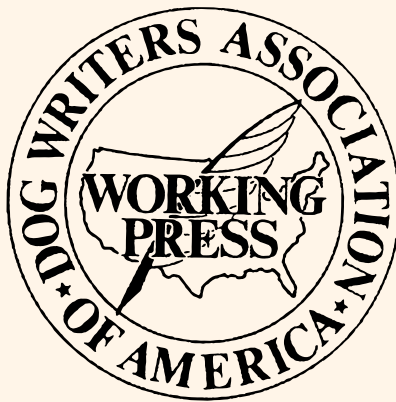
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## Ruff Drafts

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DOG WRITERS Association of America... What is that? On the surface, the name says it all. We are people who write about canines and have joined together as a group. But, for what? Is it to promote knowledge? Is it to make friends? Or are we here to promote ideas, share writing opportunities, express deep emotional feelings, or perhaps to make friends? One thing is certain; this isn't a club. We are powerful as a group, if we choose to be.

▲  
Therese Backowski and her dogs, Lucy and Hank

Before we attempt to answer that DWAA, “for what?” question, I believe we need to understand why we write in the first place. It isn't for the money. I don't think writing is a way to get rich quick. When we consider the lag time between acceptance of our work and the limited rate of pay, writing is not often a fiscally responsible career. I can assure you, there are many more poor writers than rich ones. So, what is writing?

Essentially, writing is a way to express our ideas, convey knowledge, mark past experience, and sometimes vent. The work that we do makes a difference to both humans and canines. I am certainly no expert on human psychology, but I do know that when a writer doesn't write, they are often miserable.

That is why I am so concerned about AI. I think of it as “alternate intelligence. When we stop using our brains to their utmost capacity, we are dooming ourselves to ignorance. I am a firm believer in the adage, “use it or lose it.”

If we rely upon AI to do our work for us, we open a world of possible misinformation. In addition, we lose necessary human interactions and real and tangible experience. How can we write about what we know when in fact, we don't know it?

Please don't be fooled, and don't accept any substitutes for the real thing. Our brains are not replaceable.

Please use this organization and your pen, to promote real thinking, knowledge, and honest journalism. Contribute your ideas and a small bit of your time to make DWAA the best it can be. Volunteer, vote, and above all, keep writing, blogging, drawing and using your brain to teach us all about our glorious dogs.

*Therese Backowski*

**Therese Backowski**

DWAA President

# RUFFDRAFTS

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*a note from your humble*

## EDITOR

When you send us your submissions, we reserve the right to edit them for clarity. While we make every efforts to preserve whatever style guide you prefer (AP, MLA, Chicago, etc.) we do try and make your work flow. You know what you want to say, but it may not always be clear to others. If the editing is significant, we will reach out to you. If it's something basic, typos,

punctuation and such, we've got your back. Everyone who edits Ruff Draft is a volunteer and our small but mighty team comes from various disciplines. Sometimes we may not know the correct phrasing for something. If we change the meaning of your work when we edit, first, we apologize. Second, let me know. As we are an online publication, changes can be made.

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

DEAR READER,

The theme for this issue, “How and Why You Choose the Dogs You Do,” checked off a lot of boxes. We heard from those of you involved in your breed, and those of you involved in rescue. It’s always great when a topic appeals to the broadest number of people because we get a wonderful diversity of thought. If you have a suggestion for the theme of an upcoming issue, we want to hear from you.

For me, this was a hard question to respond to. Prior to my current situation, I have always been “gifted” older dogs or dogs who needed new living quarters. The dogs seemed to find me; sometimes through serendipity, but often through the someone-who-knew-someone referral process.

I received my first dog, Corky, a wire-haired fox terrier pound puppy for my 10th birthday. As a single parent who worked long hours, my mother opposed the addition of the dog to our household and already stretched family budget. My great aunt and great uncle- the gift givers and diehard dog lovers- convinced her, using the well-worn promise, “we’ll help take care of him,” which thankfully they did. Thanks to their intervention, Corky lived a good, long life despite eating a hole in our one-of-a-kind designer sofa, tracking

grease from under the neighbor’s car into the house and the occasional accident on the carpet.

Fast forward to a demanding job and a busy professional schedule. I didn’t consider having a pet because my work schedule was erratic and I lived far from family.

At 37, I married a man with two kids, ages 10 and 11. He enjoyed shared custody with his ex, so it was a package deal, which I didn’t mind. It was great to become part of a ready-made family. One day, the kids found a Jack Russell Terrier roaming in the woods and they asked if we could keep him. Charlie joined our pack and quickly left his pawprints on our hearts. As a JRT, Charlie had a lot more energy per pound than other dogs I’d known. I often found him relandscaping the yard or chasing lizards and opossums up trees.

Charlie was the first in a long line of Jack Russell and Parson Russell terriers. Along the way, my pack has also included Lucky, a Berger Picard, and a Rough-Coated Tri-colored Collie, Bailey, who became the “spokesdog” for the in-school pet-assisted reading program. The larger dogs quickly learned that size didn’t matter. Terriers ruled the roost. My last terrier, Sunny, passed in 2024 at age 17.

These days, my home is headquarters for Danny, a 16-year-old Bichon Frise I agreed to foster for two weeks- five years ago- and Mojo, a 15-month-old Standard Poodle puppy. After a lifetime of adopting older dogs, I pivoted. I adopted this puppy-with-a-purpose to become my guide dog. About a year ago, I lost sight in my left eye. Monovision means you have no depth and spatial perception, which presents some basic challenges with mobility and balance. Hopefully, Mojo will help me become better at judging distances, avoiding potholes and navigating other obstacles.

Mojo’s training is a work in progress. Regardless of whether he becomes a service dog, his personality has already endeared him to family and friends, who enjoy his sense of joie-de-vivre and circus-dog antics. Stay tuned for more updates.



Merrie Meyers  
with Mojo and  
Danny

*Merrie Meyers*

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

Ruff Drafts Editor

ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE

# DOGGY POTPOURRI

German shepherd dogs, Irish setters, Labrador retrievers, Afghan hounds, terriers, dachshunds—what a combination this senior citizen has owned over the past decades!



ET THE REASONS for picking them are as varied as the breeds. Except for one instance, all my choices seem to have been serendipitous...or karma...or fate.

My parents brought home a German Shepherd puppy. My mother had grown up with beagles, but her training experience with them in no way prepared her for a GSD male with extremely protective instincts. After biting my boyfriend and almost biting another friend, Jade was given away to a farmer to use as a guard dog. Thus ended my short relationship with my first dog. I was heartbroken.

Five years later I got married. When my military fiancé asked me what I wanted for a wedding present, I said, “a dog,” and his promise we would never leave my dog behind. He agreed. After the honeymoon, we headed to Massachusetts “Dog Orphans.” I still missed Jade, so I asked if they had any GSDs. The answer was no. I then asked if they had any hunting dogs, as my husband was a hunter.

And although it seems “cruel” and rouses “haters,” the population of deer, birds, and other species is a serious concern. Their natural habitats continue to shrink due to human population, crowding too many wildlife species onto a land that cannot support them all. This lack of resources causes sickness, starvation, and the inability of wildlife to successfully reproduce. To counteract this, the Department of Fish and Wildlife allows and regulates the number of permits to hunt and fish annually, reducing the animal population just enough so that



Suzu and Niko. Photos by  
AMDuquette

JADE



BRANDY



SCARLETT



IVY



BARON



STRIKER



OSCAR



TIVVY



SHEBA



SMOKEY

## My little dog, a heartbeat at my feet.

EDITH WHARTON

the diminished habitats can support those animals that remain. The culled population remains healthy as opposed to ALL the population suffering or dying. What the public also doesn't realize is that the license fees for hunters and fishers are used for wildlife protection and conservation, *not* for profit.

At Dog Orphans, I was told they had an abused, starving Irish setter that was still in quarantine, but we could see him if we wanted. He was skin and bones and skittish around the men, but he allowed me to pet him. Then he threw himself against the door, popped it open, ran through a full fifty car parking lot, and jumped through the open window of my car! Brandy had made his choice! Dog Orphans let us adopt him, and with the vet's help, we nursed him back to health. He had such a sweet personality and was so good with my children that I wanted another. The price was prohibitive,

even though we, oddly enough, had recently moved to an apartment right across the street from a breeder. One day I saw a sign that said, "Free Irish Setter Puppies." The wife's husband had died, and she was closing up the kennel. Irish Setter Scarlett O'Hara joined our family.

Our dogs got older, and my military husband moved. I found yet another new job. Guess what was on the way to work—a dog rescue organization! I could see the dogs in their kennels every day I passed by. I was repeatedly warned by my spouse NOT to bring any home. And I resisted...until one day I saw this little black lab puppy standing with his paws against the kennel cage, looking right at me as I drove by. I thought about him all day. On the way home—well, you can guess what happened. We now had a new Lab in our lives.

I lost one of my Irish setters to old age, and the other soon followed. I decided I wanted another of these happy, boisterous breeds, and was delighted to hear that a friend at work had a new litter of setter puppies. He brought me a female, and she was all black, not red! This was no Irish setter;

it was an Afghan hound puppy! But Ivy was sooo cute...and into the back of my car she went. Ivy grew as our black Lab Baron aged and left us when he was thirteen. We planned to get another Lab, but my grief-stricken daughter couldn't bear the thought of a "replacement" Lab. She picked out Tivvy, a small white terrier of dubious parentage at the dog shelter.

At one time we had four dogs of varying ages and breeds in the house but lost two more dogs to old age. I then decided to come full circle and get a GSD. Only this German shepherd was no rescue. We deliberately purchased Striker from an AKC military breeder. The K9s were *huge*, and all black for night ops. We trained my 110-pound powerhouse as my mobility service dog. Now a three-dog family, we were content.

BUT... One day our big-hearted cleaning lady from Mexico brought us a young, stray dachshund from Tijuana. "He won't live long on the streets. Please take him or find him a good home," she begged. Oscar, a breed new to us, joined the pack. We were back to four dogs. Then GSD Striker, my mobility service dog, left me after thirteen years at my side. I was too sad

See POTPOURRI pg 46 ▶



ANNEMARIE O'BRIEN

# BETTER *a* HUNDRED FRIENDS

I

▲  
Dasha.  
All photos  
courtesy of  
the author

I BOARDED THE PLANE for Moscow certain of one thing: I would find a borzoi before I returned home in four months. Ever since reading *War and Peace*, I couldn't separate Russia from those tall, narrow hounds—speed and elegance racing across open fields in pursuit of wolves. Borzoi belonged not only to the country, but to something deeper: the Russian soul, where pride and sorrow, beauty and brutality lived side-by-side.

I thought I knew Russia from Tolstoy and Chekhov. Yet when I stepped off the plane at Sheremetyevo Airport in the summer of 1989, Moscow resembled nothing I had read. The air felt bruised. It smelled of smoke, exhaust, and something stale, as if the day itself had already been used. Heat rose from the pavement, engines idled on the tarmac, crowds pressed too close together, and the terminal tightened around me.

While I waited for my bags, I began asking about borzoi. Some people looked away. Others

became guarded. One man stiffened so sharply I wished I could pull the words back from the air.

Misha met me after I cleared customs and passport control.

"I need your help finding a borzoi," I said.

He took me aside. "Anna Maria," he whispered, "What do they teach in America?" He rolled an unlit cigarette between his fingers. "When they murdered the Tsar, they didn't stop with him. His wife. His children. His doctor. His servants." He paused, then looked away. "His bulldog. His spaniel. Even his borzoi."

"No, they're the symbol. Are there none left?"

Misha looked at me for a long moment. "In Russia, it isn't simple."

I nodded, pretending to understand, though the question became larger than the dog. I dug through my bag and pulled out a postcard. A borzoi was on the front. Moscow, 1983 was on the back.

I showed it to Misha. "At least one survived?"

His shoulders lifted, then dropped. "The answer belongs to history."



▲  
Dasha with her Russian family (l), 1989

I had imagined a simple path: find a breeder, choose a puppy, take it home.

Instead, Russia moved through favors and obligations, friends and cousins, drinking buddies and former classmates, whispered names passed hand-to-hand like contraband. Without *blat*, I was on the outside.

Misha's friend introduced me to Igor. We met in a hallway of a Stalinesque building that smelled of boiled cabbage and cigarette smoke.

"I'm looking for a borzoi puppy," I said, my voice lower than I meant.

"Americans usually ask for caviar or Cuban cigars," he said. "You ask for ghosts."

"Can you help?"

He studied me, as though weighing the risk. "I know someone who knows someone."

The next day Igor gave me a name: Vova Kovalev.

"That was fast," I said.

Igor shrugged. "Here, it's better to have a hundred friends than a hundred rubles."

But Vova didn't have puppies. "My friend has a four-month-old available," he said.

"Only one?" I asked.

"We're lucky to have any at all," he said. "During the Revolution, many were killed. Those who survived were inbred or crossed with other dogs."



◀  
The author in Moscow, 1989

Elena invited us to her home in Udelnaya, a village outside Moscow, to meet the puppy.

Vova's friend drove. We listened to Soviet pop that faded in and out. As Moscow faded away behind us, apartment blocks gave way to wooden houses with sagging fences. At a bus stop, a woman stood with a chicken tucked beneath one arm and dill spilling from her bag. She watched our car pass, her expression flat.

Eventually, the radio crackled with static, then went silent.

We turned onto Chekhova Street. Birch trees lined both sides, their white trunks striped black, leaves whispering overhead. When the car stopped, everything felt quieter.

A borzoi stood at the gate, my first apart from books and a postcard. White with apricot patches, she leaned against a small, slender woman. They shared the same narrow face, the same dark eyes—shaped by the same life.

"Privet," the woman said. "I'm Elena. This is Pava."

We stepped through the gate. A small log house stood in the center of the garden. Sunflowers leaned against its walls. Under the apple tree, a smaller version of Pava spun in circles, chasing its tail. Something in me loosened.

"That's Dasha," Elena said.

At the sound of her name, Dasha froze, looking at me, head tilted, measuring something I couldn't see. Then she shot forward, fast and certain, like an arrow released. Before I could move, she hit my chest and settled against me, warm and still, her narrow head tucked beneath my chin.

Misha. Igor. Vova. Elena.

Each one led to the next.

This was how I came to Dasha.

Was this how the borzoi survived too? ■

### Author's Note

I left Russia with Dasha and questions I couldn't answer. They stayed with me for years and led me to research the history of the borzoi and the families who bred them before the Revolution. That search became the foundation for my novel, *Lara's Gift* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

DEDE WILSON

# Bull Terriers & Minis:

## INHERITED FIRST, CHOSEN FOREVER

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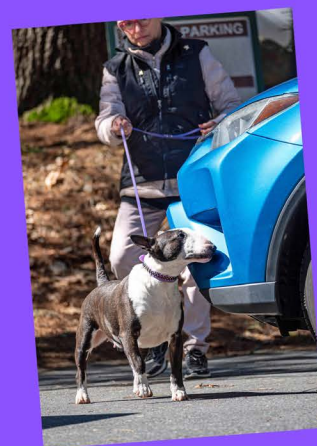
ome people inherit a family business, a favorite recipe, or a sense of humor. I inherited bull terriers. More specifically, I inherited my father's certainty that bull terriers were the right dogs for the collective "us," long before I had the language to explain why. In the beginning, it may have looked like he made the choice. In truth, he only opened the door. Once I walked through it, I never looked back. We are now a third generation bull terrier and miniature bull terrier family.

During WWII, my father was a pilot and had the opportunity to see General George S. Patton and his white bull terrier, Willy, at an air

base. My father was smitten, and right then and there decided that someday he would have a bull terrier, too. He was taken with their head profile and larger-than-life personality, but also that if they were good enough for Patton...

Fast forward to the late 60s and early 70s. My father was in England on business and had the opportunity to visit with Eva Weatherill, who worked with Raymond Oppenheimer, the primary figure behind Ormandy Kennels. He was the visionary. She was at the core of the hands-on execution of their well-regarded bull terrier breeding program.

Images courtesy  
of the author



My father asked for guidance in finding a bull terrier in the US. She suggested that he contact Mickey Sottile of Alaric Kennels in Somerville, NJ.

I was 9-years old. I remember it was a weeknight and I had a spelling test the next day. We drove from Manhattan to NJ in a friend's borrowed Volkswagen van to pick up Patches, the little fawn and white bitch puppy my father had already reserved from Mr. Sottile. My mom changed her name to Lily. And just like that, we became a "bull terrier family."

I was an only child and Lily was my best friend. I had wanted a pony, so I taught her to jump over the wire grates in the city sidewalks, as I cantered along with her, pretending to be "on" the horse. Basically, she did whatever I wanted. I dressed her up in hats, pearls, and chiffon. I posed her upright on the couch. She pulled my sled in the winter and shared my bed. She knew she only could get on my bed and no others, and she complied. I had long conversations with her when I could speak with no one else. Even when I was at sleepaway camp, I took long walks and "spoke" to her long distance. I knew she heard me because she answered.

Decades later, when I graduated from college, I bought my own bull terrier. It never occurred to me to buy any other breed. They are bold, funny, stubborn, affectionate, and a little ridiculous in the best possible way, and my world did not feel complete without one.

My three children grew up with bull terriers. My daughter now owns a Belgian Sheepdog, and I sometimes joke with her that she is a "traitor." One son has gone to the cat side, but it is only because he cannot fit a dog into his lifestyle at the moment. His twin brother just got his first dog, a Miniature Bull Terrier.

Now in my 60s, I have downsized and now own and breed Minis. They are a separate American Kennel Club (AKC) breed, though some of it feels quite arbitrary, as they still interbreed in various parts of the world. They share the same general breed standard as the bull terrier, including their personality and structure. They are smaller, yet no less absurd and insanely loving. Some will argue this point and say that Minis are

"more," but I maintain that much has to do with genetics and rearing.

As a child, our breed selection felt like an identity, even though bull terriers were never an easy choice. No one brings one home looking for simple or predictable; you learn that the first time they destroy something you didn't even know needed protecting, like a kitchen table, a linoleum floor, or a cabinet door. They ask for humor, a bit of backbone, and an ability to roll with whatever the day brings. That was part of their appeal, and we were proud to be the kind of family who embraced it.

My father knew I would appreciate a dog with opinions. If you like your life a little unpredictable but deeply rewarding, this breed makes perfect sense. They are mischievous (not just in expression), have a stubborn streak, and absolutely no intention of asking permission. That's probably why I never wavered. This is a breed built on incongruity and heart in equal measure.

As I got older, I began to see them more clearly. People who haven't lived with bull terriers often notice the surface—the shape, the antics, the intensity. But underneath is sensitivity, intelligence, and a depth of connection that reveals itself over time. That contrast of strength and softness is what stays with you.

People sometimes ask when you know a breed is "yours." I don't have a dramatic answer. There wasn't a single moment, but after years of living with them, I realized I wasn't looking anywhere else. I am now over 55 years into this connection. It was first Lily (in 1970) and then Joey, Beckett, Hope, Sylvia, Belle, Violet, Java, Dominique, Baby Huey, Rose, and others, and now Minis Nora, Ava, Dora, Beauty, Ebi, and Betty (here in 2026).

My father introduced me to bull terriers, but the rest unfolded on its own. When it came time to choose my kennel name, Legacy was the only descriptor that made sense—a reflection of the generations before me and the ones still to come. ■

**Dédé Wilson is a contributing editor to SHOW-SIGHT Magazine, Corresponding Secretary & New Member Chair MBTCA, and a lifelong Bull Terrier and Mini Lover**

DEBBIE JACOB

# Having Hart: What One Dog Taught Me *about* *the Dogs I Choose*

My dogs always have a telling tale, and if you dig deep enough, it's clear there's a definite type of dog I invite into my life.



F

ROM ROCKY, my dad's clueless, black cow-herding border collie who needed someone to appreciate his misguided enthusiasm, to Rambo, the loving brindle pitbull misjudged as a vicious dog because of his big head and scary head tilt, I have always played the role of protector for imperfect dogs.

In between Rocky and Rambo, I championed Capone, an all-white, deaf bull terrier who communicated with me through hand signals I invented for us. I have an affinity for underdogs, humans, and animal versions, like Blu, a mostly black German Shepherd with memory and learning issues because she hadn't been breathing when she was born. My heart goes out to the dogs who might be overlooked, including my latest dog, Hart, a high-energy Belgian Malinois.

Life hasn't been the same since I adopted Hart, a former star in the Trinidad and Tobago K9 section. In the 14 years I spent with the police dogs doing research for *Police Dogs of Trinidad and Tobago: a 70-Year History*, published by McFarland & Company Inc., Hart had somehow slipped under my radar.

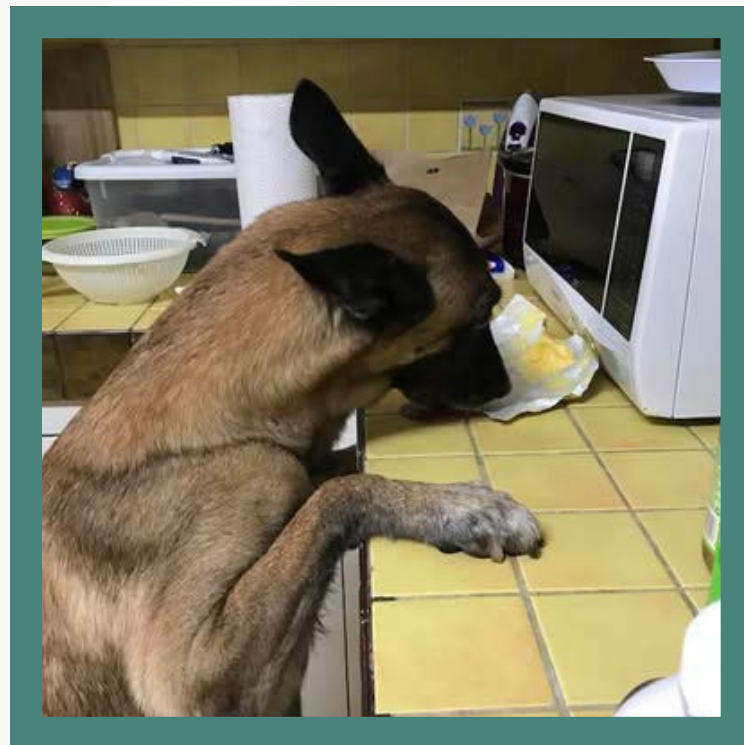
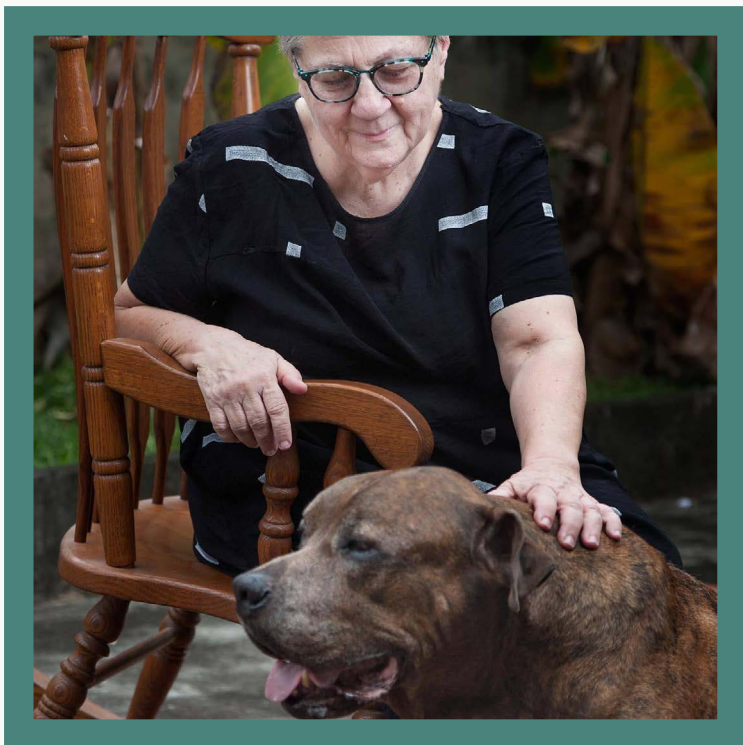
▶ Hart, photo courtesy of the author

Then one day, I called the police K9 headquarters in central Trinidad, and Cpl. Akil Bernard said, "I am going on an assignment with Constable Sean Bailey and the blind dog. We're trying to retire him, but he doesn't have a home."

In 2014, the US Embassy bought Hart in Slovakia, took him to the US for testing, and brought him to this twin-island nation just seven miles from Venezuela. Here, Hart thrived as a detection dog for illegal drugs, guns, and ammunition. When Hart went blind at 7-years-old, his eye specialist, Dr. Williams, asked the canine police to retire him gradually and allow him to work in a safer environment, like the airport, so he wouldn't become depressed about losing his job.

When I heard about Hart, I didn't know his name, breed, temperament, or age. But I knew I wanted him after seeing him spinning in circles at the back of his kennel. Certainly, no dog deserved a home more than Hart.

He once had the speed and grace of the red deer he was named after. There was nowhere he wouldn't go to find contraband. Hart had served



this country well, often having the most gun and drug finds in a month. I wanted to give Hart a good ending to his career, so I asked the superintendent of the Mounted and Canine Branch for him.

I had a two-week bonding period, when I learned Hart's commands and how to give him eye medicine, before taking him home. Hart struggled to reach me whenever he heard me calling him as the kennel master led him across the parking lot.

When the canine section's dog trainer, Corporal Shane Chase, heard Hart was going to me, he issued a stern warning, "Don't pity Hart, and don't baby him."

I didn't know what to expect of Hart as a retired police dog. Surprisingly confident, he was bold, independent, joyful beyond measure, and driven. He chased balls in my yard with the same eagerness as when he collected his rewards for finding contraband on police exercises. Hart slept near me, surrounded by his beloved balls. Before sunrise, he sat outside listening to birds sing and dogs bark. He stole butter from the counter and acted like a guard dog.

Hart attacked life with confidence and perseverance, challenging himself to negotiate new spaces and steps. He became a teaching dog for Mt. Hope Veterinary Hospital, where his eye specialist worked. After he searched the examination room for drugs and guns, he stoically settled for veterinarian students to examine him and learn about blindness.

I wanted everyone to experience Hart. I found the perfect opportunity when a chance encounter with the Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association (TTBWA) led to Hart becoming the first animal to join the association. He became the symbol of resilience for blind and visually impaired children. His induction ceremony included blind children, canine police officers, and former US Ambassador Candace Bond. She said Hart's drug finds on boats, in bonded warehouses and homes made this island and the US safer. The media followed Hart like paparazzi, posting videos of him on the news.

After this, Hart starred in my nine-episode audio series, *A Touch of Hart: Adventures of a Blind Police Dog*, about being a police dog. Enthusiastic students from the University of Trinidad and Tobago recorded nine episodes that show confidence, empathy, perseverance, reinvention, and standing up for yourself. The folklore episodes deal with tradition, change, and bullying. Schools use the series, and TTBWA is sharing it with blind welfare associations in 61 countries.

The National Library and Information System Authority (NALIS) of Trinidad and Tobago is putting Hart's audio series on their platform and translating my book, *A Touch of Hart: Call My Name*, into electronic Braille. This, and a version for visually impaired and sighted children, will go

▲  
Rambo (l), and Hart  
stealing butter (r).  
Photos courtesy of  
Debbie Jacob

CAMI SMALLEY

# Fresh is the New Fit

FEED FRESH FOR VARIETY AND DIGESTIBILITY

**O**NCE YOU HAVE your new dog, there's a lot to consider. Nutrition is a big part of the relationship you build with your four-legged family members. As a Functional Nutritionist for both pets & people, and a career spanning 25 years in the pet food and veterinary industries, Cami Smalley has a lot to say about food choices for our companion animals. Here are some of her thoughts:

## Fresh and less-processed food enhances health and longevity for dogs

The dry pet food model represents a gaping deficiency in freshness, with specific deficits in digestibility and hydration. These fast-food diets leave dogs in a state of low-grade, chronic dehydration. Yet the solution can be as easy as A, B, C. Stay tuned...

First, picture your own diet: dry cereal for breakfast (no milk), fast food for dinner (highly processed, lacking color, vitality, and moisture). If this was your daily routine, how might your body respond?

## For millennia, dogs didn't eat "dog food" They ate our food: fresh, varied, and shaped by the seasons.

Today, our dog's meals face four primary challenges.

### 1. LOW MOISTURE CONTENT

Dry food kibble contains just 10% moisture, inherently requiring animals to consume significant amounts of water to properly digest their food. For example, a large dog eating four cups of kibble may need to drink a gallon of water to adequately absorb and assimilate that meal, while still maintaining sufficient hydration for other organs to function optimally. Yet many are in a chronic state of dehydration, as their water intake falls short of meeting

physiological demands. This places a considerable burden on organ systems, particularly the kidneys, liver, and the detoxification pathways.

In contrast, whole foods, table scraps, and canned foods offer 70-90% moisture, more in line with the fresh diets companion animals used to consume.

## Shelf-stable convenience has replaced biological compatibility

### 1. ULTRA-PROCESSED FOOD

Ultra-processed food is defined by things like industrial formulations, the use of additives, multiple processing steps, and foods manufactured with ingredients that have been extracted from other foods. Advanced Glycation End products (AGEs) are compounds found in pet food, formed when proteins and fats are cooked at high heat with sugars present. Because these glycated sugars cause inflammation, they are linked to chronic disease, cancer, and premature aging in human and animal studies. AGEs can literally *AGE* a body and have become a biomarker implicated in many other chronic diseases.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of dry food kibble is cooked at 350-500°, with the slurry reaching upwards of 1000° as it passes through the red-hot, die-cut needle—a machine part during one of the last steps of the extrusion process (how pet food is made), that cuts the food into a specific shape.

At such extremes, naturally occurring nutrients are negligible, leaving manufacturers no choice but to sprinkle synthetic vitamins and minerals back into the mix; nutrients born not of the earth, but in laboratories.

If you've ever stepped inside a pet food manufacturing plant, as I have several times over my 25 years in the pet food industry, the smell alone tends to linger, and with it a quiet reconsideration of feeding dry food as a dog's sole diet.

## 2. LOWER DIGESTIBILITY

Dry food kibble has a digestibility of just 60-80%.<sup>1</sup> Premium brands with higher protein content often outperform grocery store options, thanks to higher ingredient quality and sourcing.

**Shelf stable = body stable**

## 3. HIGHER TOXINS, PRESERVATIVES, BYPRODUCTS

Preservatives such as BHA, BHT, ethoxyquin, propyl gallate, propylene glycol, and TBHQ are added to pet foods to prevent rancidity and prolong shelf life for up to two years, yet not all additives are required to appear on the label.

Think of food in your pantry with such staying power: canned beans, maybe pasta, or an unopened jar of ketchup. However, these foods do not make up 100% of your diet.

## Feeding fresh and less processed dog food

Feeding fresh, less processed food is on the rise. Fresh and frozen raw pet food saw a 16% increase in 2024. Freeze-dried and dehydrated foods jumped by 21%.<sup>4a,b</sup>

Raw and minimally processed food also boasts far superior bioavailability. Nutrients are more easily absorbed, and digestibility rates top 93%. Even a 10% difference can have tangible benefits for their metabolism, immune function, and long-term health. Premium brands with higher protein content often outperform grocery store options, thanks to better ingredients and sourcing.

What can you do to enhance your dog's digestion, improve hydration status, and support longevity?

**Simple solutions...easy as A, B, C**

### A. ADD MORE FRESH FOOD

Consider including fresh, less processed, whole foods, with more enzymes, moisture content, and vitality. Foods from your own kitchen, such as zucchini, tin fish, cucumber, coconut oil, cilantro, carrots (limit due to high glycemic index), broccoli, blueberries, and more. Email me for a Longevity Love list of ideal ingredients, how to prepare them, and which ones to avoid.

### B. WATER THAT KIBBLE

- Add (filtered) water to the dog bowl
- Let it pre-soak for 5-10 minutes
- Soak overnight in the fridge

This simple step can create more digestible food. Low-sodium broth (especially from pasture

or grass-fed animals) is another healthy addition. Avoid broth with onions, as they are toxic to dogs.

### C. ADD RAW

Top the kibble with some raw meat, or dehydrated freeze-dried food. Most animals are equipped to digest raw foods due to shorter digestive tracts, a very acidic stomach pH, and bile acids, which are capable of killing or neutralizing many pathogens. Immune-compromised and older dogs may do better on cooked, dehydrated, or freeze-dried food. Consult a trusted veterinarian.

This food also has fewer recalls. Despite some claims that raw food is "unsafe," the data suggests otherwise. When recalls are adjusted for the most risk to all pets, ten years of recall data showed the following:

Canned food accounted for 37.8% of the recalls, dry food kibble 35.6%, treats 20%, and commercial raw was just 6.7%.<sup>3</sup>

When pathogen-related events, often tied to handling risks rather than direct harm to the animal, are excluded, raw diets comprise only a small fraction of remaining recalls. Safe food handling and basic dish hygiene should be standard, whether you're feeding your pet or yourself.

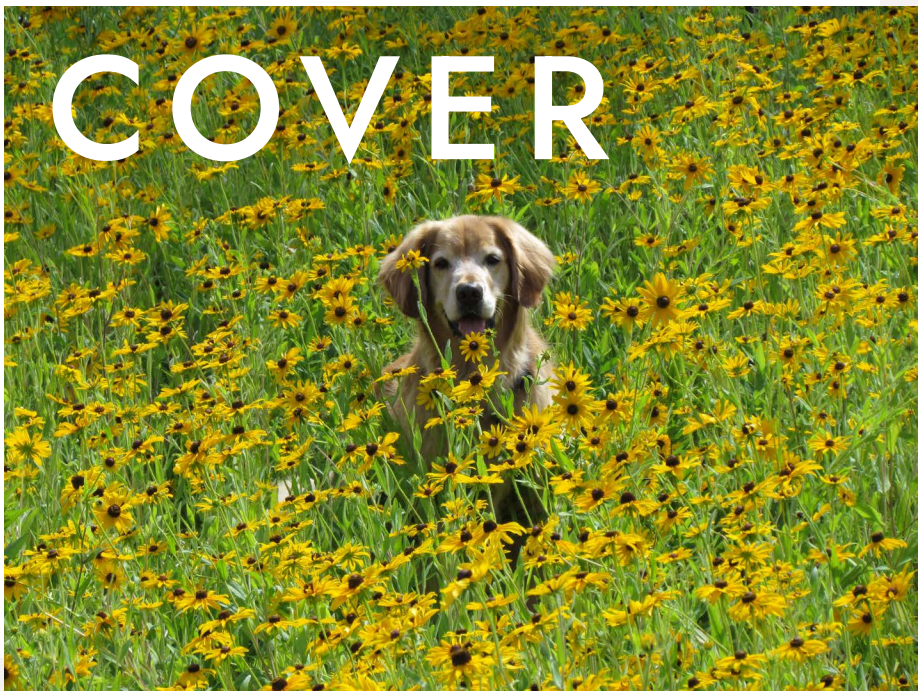
**No bowl should contain *primarily* processed food ■**

See FRESH pg 47 ►

*on the*

THANK YOU TO CAMI SMALLEY FOR THIS ISSUE'S COVER PHOTO OF MAKAI IN THE BLACKEYEDS

COVER



BARBARA E. MAGERA MD

# A Comfort Spaniel



storm brews off the South Carolina coast. Heat lighting heralds the onset of a summer storm. As wind and rain edge closer into Charleston harbor, rumbles of distant thunder increase in intensity.

With each flash of lightning followed by earth shaking vibrations of thunder, seven-year-old Sasha trembles in her bed.

Her small hands clutch a religious icon, a memento from her parents. She fervently prays to God and the Holy Mary for safety.

Noel, aware of the little girl's anxiety, tiptoes closer towards Sasha. With outstretched soft paws, Noel touches Sasha's face. A wet nose nuzzling her owner's cheek elicits a soft giggle. Calmed by her puppy's presence, Sasha buries her face in Noel's fur. The storm's fury diminishes into a gentle steady rain. The fragrance of puppy breath soothes the little girl's mind as both drift off to sleep.

Suddenly, a thunderbolt of lightning cracking overhead jolts Sasha from deep sleep into a panic. Her mind vividly replays the sounds and sights of flashing bombshells, exploding buildings, shattering glass and screams of mothers with their babies racing towards underground shelters. Whenever sirens blare, her routine instincts are to run for cover in an underground train station.

Learned maneuvers during wartime dominate her childhood memories. Recollections of childhood games and play are replaced by survival skills she learned in warring Ukraine. War stole her childhood innocence and those of too many other children. Nostalgic scenarios of family life and playtime with friends are replaced with visions of violence and death. Her dad, a Ukrainian patriot, died in the earliest wave of the war defending his homeland. When the Russian soldiers marched into her town, her teenage sisters simply "disappeared." Sasha's Mom clearly understood the lustful desires of drunken soldiers. She could only pray that her daughters, approaching womanhood, were

murdered quickly. Whenever the Russian troops stormed her neighborhood looking for Ukrainian civilians, Sasha squeezed into a hiding place only large enough to accommodate a small child. There she remained motionless and quiet for hours.

"Please survive and beg for God's mercy" were the last words Sasha heard before a fatal bullet struck her Mom.

Sasha's heart is pounding with fear when the storm intensifies. Noel senses the terror tormenting her little girl. She wraps her soft paws around Sasha's neck then licks the stream of tears rolling down the little girl's cheeks. Sasha tightly hugs Noel and stops sobbing. At least for now, her Cavalier's presence dampens her anxiety. Over the next hours, the storm subsides allowing the little girl and her dog to catch some needed sleep.

Dawn gently streams across their faces. Sleepy eyes are comforted by the sun's warm glow. Sasha climbs out of bed and peers cautiously through her bedroom window. Large tree branches and debris cover the street outside her home. Her neighbor's fence is destroyed but the roofs of adjacent homes appear intact.

As a comfort spaniel, Noel instinctively understands when fear and anxiety overwhelm Sasha, a Ukrainian orphan. Her adoptive American family chose a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel for Sasha because of the gentle temperament of this breed. These loyal and loving spaniels were specifically bred to provide enduring comfort to their owners and family. Cavaliers are known to calm and facilitate the healing process of traumatized children.

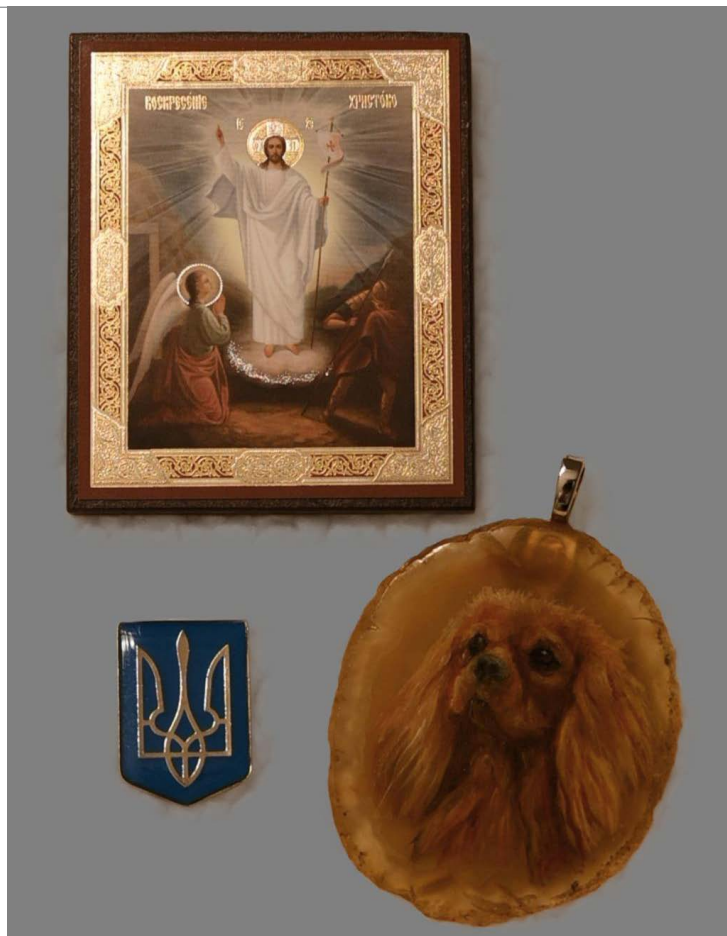
Noel is trained as a support canine for Sasha. Noel will routinely accompany Sasha to school and be with her in all other activities of Sasha's young life. Noel will be present to support and provide Sasha the courage to adapt to her new American home.

When the school bell startles Sasha, Noel will be present to calm her. When the screaming

ambulance sirens trigger flashbacks of wartime in Ukraine, Noel will be present to provide her courage. When nighttime tears overwhelm Sasha's mourning for the horrific loss of her family; Noel will comfort her with cuddles and hugs.

Hopefully, Noel will be present to help Sasha grow into a confident teenager. As bonds between a little girl and her puppy grow, their love and loyalty will continue to strengthen. Noel's ever faithful presence will comfort and assist Sasha as she progresses from child to womanhood. The atrocities she, her family and friends suffered during the Ukrainian war will never be erased; however, the comfort provided from her Cavalier may, with time, lessen the pain of this little girl's childhood memories. Her Ukrainian heritage, Orthodox faith and loyal Cavalier will guide her to a successful future. ■

Barbara E. Magera MD, PharmD, MMM is a Cavalier breeder (Caracaleeb), exhibitor, writer and photographer who lives and practices medicine in Charleston, South Carolina. Her blog is [Caninescribbles.com](http://Caninescribbles.com)

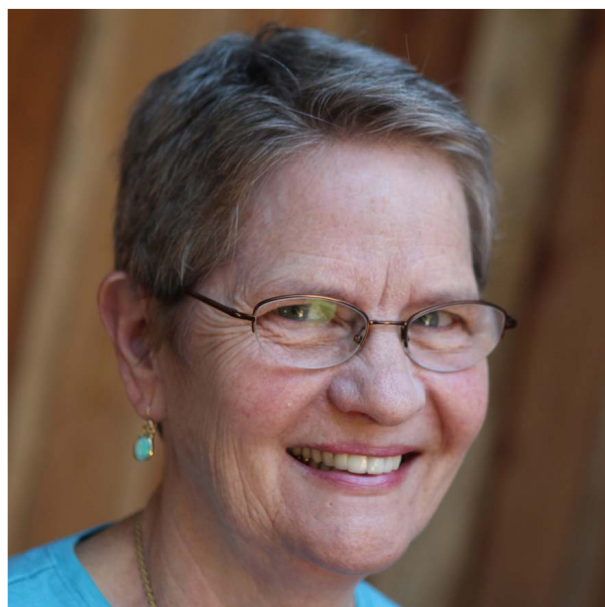


## MEMBER NEWS

### NEW MEMBER

#### AMRITA SKYE BLAINE

Amrita Skye Blaine develops themes of impermanence, disability, awakening, dogs, and the state of our world. In 2003, she received a prose MFA from Antioch University, and in 2024, a PocketMFA in poetry. She has published a trilogy of novels with a sighthound as a main character. Her fiction is published under Skye Blaine, her poetry under Amrita Skye Blaine. Two poetry collections came out Spring 2025—*every riven thing* from Finishing Line Press, and *strange grace--the ending season* from Berkana Publications. She has been published in sixteen poetry anthologies in the U.S. and internationally, numerous literary magazines, and is a 2025 Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net Anthology nominee.



SUSAN BULANDA

## How *and* Why do you choose the dogs you do?

In my adult life, I have owned over 25 dogs, and each one was picked for a specific activity or job. Although work was their primary purpose I would occasionally show them in conformation and obedience, but it was for fun only. Here are the jobs that I did with my dogs:

1. Bird hunting
2. Personal Protection
3. Drug detection
4. Toxic mold detection
5. Search and Rescue
6. Dog sled racing

I have purchased dogs both locally and from across the United States and have imported dogs from other countries. If I could not personally evaluate the litter, I had someone I trusted do it for me using the formula that I developed, as well as their method.

On more than one occasion, by selecting an outstanding line and breeder, the litter was often uniform and it was easy to select a puppy.

The formula that has worked for me is to select the breed best suited for the job and then the individual dog. I would research the different breeds to see which ones had a history of doing what I had in mind, or if not specifically that job, something similar. I considered the dog's size, life expectancy, temperament, how biddable the breed is, and known medical issues. For example, my first SAR dog was a Border Collie at a time when they were relatively unknown. Only sheepherding people owned them. The reason I picked that breed was because in their native countries, in the winter, sheep would huddle against rock walls and become entombed by snow. The shepherd would send the Border Collie out alone to find the sheep. When the dog found the buried sheep, he would break them out of the snow and drive them back to the barn. Airscent SAR dogs are required to search an area, find the missing person, go back to the handler and give an alert, and then lead the handler to the missing person. I felt that a Border Collie was a natural for SAR work. As it turned



out, I was the first person to have a SAR Border Collie in the US.

The next step was to research breeders that only bred working dogs. Since most of the dogs I owned were non-AKC this was not difficult. I interviewed breeders to be sure that their breeding stock was tested for any diseases associated with that breed, as well as the general testing that a breeding dog should have. Then I studied the lines of a planned litter and talked to people who owned dogs from those lines. I would also meet and evaluate the sire and dam of the litter to see that they had the temperament I wanted. If the sire was not available, I would do my best to get reports about him. The most difficult part came next: to wait for the litter to be born.

When the litter was old enough, alone, I would enter the room with the puppies and see which one rushed to me first, or if any hung back. Then I would walk around the room and see which puppy followed me the longest. That is the puppy I would select. The puppy that rushed to me first was the “bully” in the litter and was not necessarily interested in people. The one that hung back was usually shy and not an ideal candidate for work. The one that followed me the longest was the puppy that was most focused on and interested in people.

Of course,

I would handle the puppies and observe them on more than one occasion to further evaluate them. This formula has worked for me for most of the dogs that I have owned. On two occasions the formula did not work for reasons that were impossible to determine. No method is foolproof. ■



Gunny,  
courtesy of  
Susan Bulanda

ELIZABETH ANNE JOHNSON

# Five Reasons Why I Always Choose Rescue Dogs...

**R**ESCUE DOGS are my center of gravity. I've had many. Some have come from shelters and some were on their way to shelters and were fortunately intercepted by yours truly. Some were hideouts slated for euthanasia because they bit the postman one too many times. And they were all misunderstood and just needed a different life, a place in the world to be good and do good. Each dog eventually showed me who they truly were beneath their rough furry coats - incredibly wonderful beings who were just trying to be dog heroes!

I have been fortunate to live on a few large, fenced acreages next to open space that allowed these misfit dogs to decompress and just be dogs. They could stretch their legs, minds, and hearts, learn how to breathe in nature, feel like they belonged to a family pack, follow their instinctual interests, and find out who they truly are. They could curl up in a warm cozy bed at night with a full belly and know they were safe. No bars, no concrete, no all-day crates, no chains, only love, appreciation and companionship. I wish I could take them all home...

My five reasons...

1. My big, open heart. I know I can give them a solid, fun-loving home full of acceptance of who they truly are.

2. I believe all beings should feel love and stability... and I have lots to give.

3. I love learning about their unique personalities and watching them reveal who they really are and what gifts they give to the world.

4. I speak animal and feel their sadness, pain, wants and needs, and I carry a tender understanding for those who are misunderstood.

5. I gently celebrate with them when they finally discover themselves and feel safe.

Many times, I've asked myself - who rescued who?

Not only have many of my dogs rescued me when I needed it, but they've also rescued other people, animals, plots of land, and all sorts of sentient beings. Here are some snippets from just a few of my own rescue dog heroes and heroes who have made big differences in the lives of many.

**Cedar** – She was the last pup of a litter, a very shy 10-week-old lab/German shorthair that was being chased around with a broom all day. The broom beater woman had her in a closed box in the back of her car and was packing up to take her to the shelter. Thankfully, her brother called me with the news. I hurried over and asked if I could give the pup a home. Smiling and tearful, I held this wee little black puppy next to my heart the whole way home. She was incredibly intelligent, gentle, and became my “heart dog”. We all have a dog in our life that’s “the one”, and that was my little black girlie. Cedar had an amazing nose and an incredible work ethic, always right by my side. She became my search and rescue dog and worked with me in the field on wildlife surveys. Her amazing nose found an endangered species that saved a huge portion of open space that was slated for the development of 14,000 homes. She went everywhere with me for 15 years being her humble hero self. And yes, she was credited in that final survey report as finding a wee mouse that saved an entire landscape and ecosystem that held many other lives.

**Sage** – She was a yellow Lab mix puppy that came to me in a dream. I was staying at a conference hotel at the time. In my dream she asked me to come get her and her sister out of their cages. I went to the hotel desk that next morning and asked if there was an animal shelter nearby. Turns out it was one street away. And there she was. We took her home and what a treasure she was. After arriving home with the other dogs, Sage was stressed. She ate numerous pillows and

See RESCUE pg 48 ▶

TARA CHOATE

# Finding *a* Corgi

*Many moons ago, when I first entertained the idea of getting a dog, I picked up a book on raising a dog (Superpuppy by Daniel Pinkwater and Jill Pinkwater) and discovered a pet shop is not the place to acquire a pet.*



Maggie, photo courtesy of Tara Choate



THE ONLY ethical places to get a dog are a reputable breeder or a rescue. Truer words have never been written.

Over the years people who know I am a mildly knowledgeable dog owner have asked

me questions about getting a dog. I've counseled many people that if they want a specific breed to go to a breed rescue, but shelters and other rescues are a great resource as well. Dogs come through rescue for lots of reasons, most of which have nothing to do with the dog itself.

A few years ago, I tried to take my own advice. I was searching for a new dog, preferably a corgi. Over the years, I applied to the Columbia River Pembroke Welsh Corgi Club (Oregon) and Cascade Pembroke Welsh Corgi Club (Washington). Corgis are not thick on the ground, so I wasn't expecting to get a dog immediately. But I have never received any communication about my application or being placed on a waiting list.

As time marched on, I also applied to Golden Gate Pembroke Welsh Corgi Fanciers (Northern California) and Cardigan Welsh Corgi National Rescue Trust (national) and even the Corgi Connection of Kansas. Only Corgi Connection of Kansas contacted me back; their first question (logically) was, "how are you planning to get a dog all the way to Oregon?"

A new group, the Portland Oregon Corgi Meetup, posted a picture from a local rescue, Herd U Needed a Home, that had a corgi. Within minutes I filled out an application. I waited 48 hours



(the amount of time the website recommended) and then called. I waited another couple of days and called. And emailed. On the rescue's social media, it said the dog had an adoption "pending." The dog went off the page of adoptables. Then he reappeared. I called again. Finally, I got an email that said, "He has been adopted."

I have no desire to point fingers. I am sure this group is doing good work and was just over busy. They are volunteers doing this in their spare time for the love of dogs. But it does indicate that the advice I've been giving to people for years about going to a breed rescue and being patient doesn't seem to be good advice. At this point, I did some soul searching about "do I really want a corgi".

I decided to comb through Oregon's dog shelters for a corgi. The

idea proved to be challenging. I contacted 73 rescue organizations and municipal shelters spread out over 36 counties in Oregon. As I was setting up to begin this larger-than-expected task, I came across "Shorty" at the (now defunct) Three Rivers Humane Society.

He was (and is) adorable. He was listed as good with cats and other dogs, so I filled out an online application. They called first thing this morning to confirm he was still available, so we got in the car to go meet him.

Sweet and cuddly, he was about three and my adoption marked his fourth home. He wasn't perfect. He turned out to be dog reactive, weird with selective groups of people, completely untrained, and stubborn. He discovered the couch and various dog beds in less than thirty seconds

and settled into the household within a couple of days.

"Key" is now thirteen. He has lost most of his hearing, and he has more gray on his face. His back hurts him a little, as well as one paw, on occasion. He's titled many times in scent work and gone on thousands of walks like a champ. His flaws have stayed with him, and he's been one of the most challenging dogs I've worked with.

I wouldn't have him any other way. ■

Tara Choate lives in Oregon with her menagerie and is the author of *The Canine Accounting Capers: Paw Prints in the Ledger*, *Ruff Justice*, and *Balancing the Woofs* (coming this summer).



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



SUSAN HARTZLER

# Why I Choose Australian Shepherds

**H**OW AND WHY DO WE CHOOSE THE DOGS WE DO?

For some, dogs seem to choose us. For others, the decision is more intentional, influenced by experience, lifestyle, and the kind of partnership we seek. For me, it has been a little of both.

Over time, one breed kept calling me back: the Australian Shepherd. At this point, it's no longer a question. Whenever I see an Aussie, it's love at first sight. But that connection didn't happen by accident.

## Where It Began

My first Australian Shepherd was Bliss. She was the puppy of Shiloh, a dog owned by the woman who first introduced me to therapy dog work. I met Bliss shortly after she was born and watched her and her littermates grow up, long before they went off to their new homes.

There was something about her from the beginning. That heterochromatic beauty—one blue eye, one brown—was impossible to ignore. But it wasn't just her looks. It was her demeanor. Even as a puppy, she had a commanding presence. When the time came, she became mine.

Looking back, I see that Bliss didn't just introduce me to the breed; she shaped everything that followed. She showed me what this kind of partnership could be. And once I experienced that, I kept choosing it.

## Connection Comes First

Australian Shepherds are known for their intelligence and energy. But what draws me to them isn't just what they can do; it's how they connect.

There's an attentiveness in an Aussie that's hard to explain until you've lived with one. They



are aware of you—your movement, your mood, your energy—in a way that feels almost intuitive.

In my work with therapy dogs, that matters. I don't need a dog who just follows commands. I need a dog who is truly present. A dog who can read a room, detect a shift, and respond without being told. A well-socialized Australian Shepherd does that naturally.

## Trainability That Feels Like Partnership

I'm not a professional trainer, but I have trained my own puppies for therapy dog work and a variety of jobs in the entertainment industry.

Aussies make that possible. They are:

- highly trainable
- quick to understand
- eager to engage

Training doesn't feel like a task; it feels like a collaboration. They want to get it right. They want

Photos on previous page, clockwise from top left; Seven and Page Turner, Therapy dog in actions, the author with her two dogs. All photos courtesy of Susan Hartzler

to work with you. In the professional dog world, it's called *biddable*—a dog that is willing to work with their handler, respond to cues, and learn quickly. That willingness makes everything easier.

### Smart—and Easy to Live With

People often think that highly intelligent dogs are hard to live with. However, that hasn't been my experience. With proper structure, Australian Shepherds are very adaptable for those brave enough to get through their puppy years (which can last until they are four years old). My one piece of advice is to keep them busy and give them a job. A tired puppy is a good puppy!

With positive training, Aussies learn to settle when it's time to settle. They work when it's time to work. They adapt to your rhythm. That balance is important in both daily life and therapy dog settings.

### Joy Is Part of the Job

Australian Shepherds naturally bring fun. They are expressive, playful, and engaging. In hospitals, schools, and other places I bring them as therapy dogs, these qualities matter.

Wherever we visit, people smile. And that moment—small as it seems—opens the door to something more.

### A Bond That Deepens Over Time

All dogs are capable of love. But Aussies form bonds that feel deeply personal. They don't just attach—they stay engaged, and that connection deepens as they mature. In time, Bliss could even read my mind.

They check in. They stay close. They respond in ways that feel intentional. That consistency builds trust—not just for me, but for the people we visit.

### Seven and Paige Turner

Today, that therapy dog partnership continues with my current pack of Australian Shepherds, Seven and Paige Turner.

Seven brings a calm, steady presence that allows him to settle into almost any environment. Paige Turner offers a different kind of connection—engaged, expressive, and deeply attuned in her own way.

Each of them reflects something I first saw in Bliss. Different personalities, same underlying connection. They meet people where they are. And they do it without effort.

### And Then There's the Face

Of course, there's also this: Just look at Seven. His face alone has started conversations, opened doors, and created connection.

There's something about the way Australian Shepherds look at you—focused, expressive, completely present—that draws people in. They don't just accompany me. They elevate everything I do.

### A Choice Shaped by Experience

At this point, choosing Australian Shepherds is not experimental. It's based on years of working alongside them in real-world settings. I've seen what they can do:

- in hospitals
- in schools
- in moments where people need something steady and real

And I've seen how consistently they show up.

### The Right Dog for the Life You're Living

There isn't one perfect breed for everyone. The right dog is the one that fits:

- your lifestyle
- your energy
- your expectations

For me, Australian Shepherds meet me where I am. They match my work. They match my pace. They match my need for connection.

My work with therapy dogs—and my upcoming book *Teaming Up With Therapy Dogs: Skills to Build Healing Partnerships*—is built on this partnership. They've also inspired me to bring what I've experienced with them out into the world in a more intentional way. Through my *Sit With Me* meditations, which I share on my [Substack](#), I invite people to experience what I see every day—how simply sitting with a dog can help us settle, reconnect, and feel supported. In many ways, my dogs are the true guides in that work—and in my life. ■



# TIPS & TACTICS

MERRIE MEYERS  
*Editor Ruff Drafts*

## Writer's Groups

WRITING CAN BE A SOLITARY JOB. Often, the only interaction we as writers have is with our keyboard. If you're like me, an introvert by nature, working on your own may appeal to you and networking with other writers might be a bit scary. However, moving out of one's comfort zone can offer some wonderful benefits.

A few years ago, I saw a notice someone posted on Nextdoor, the hyper-local communication platform, seeking writers interested in forming/joining a writer's critique group. He'd recently moved to town and was looking to find or create one locally. Although I regularly shared my work with trusted friends to review and give feedback, I'd never asked perfect strangers. However, at that point I'd been suffering from writer's block, so I thought, "Why not meet for coffee and hear what it's all about?"

A writing group can take several forms. Some are like a class where only one person reviews the work, others are peer-to-peer efforts. When I taught at the university level, I led the former. Ours was definitely the latter.

That "coffee" turned into a monthly get-together to discuss one of the member's work in progress. Attendance varied between four and six over time, but there were three of us who started with the group and stayed on to its natural conclusion. Although some members were more prolific than others, everyone was highly supportive, offering thoughtful feedback and suggestions for moving a piece forward. Two members self-published three books during our four years together. One member used her involvement in the group as motivation to self-publish her memoir. She finished it about

a year after we stopped meeting, and we held a surprise party to celebrate. While I wrote a lot of short stories, which I submitted for critique, I was the only group member who did not publish during the time we met- unless you count 10 years of Ruff Drafts.

In addition to the cheering squad, I gained other benefits from being in the group. I learned from the more tech savvy members about platforms and services that could help with editing and page and cover design. I saw how a book could be adapted into a screenplay or a live performance piece.

Listening to how others managed the creative process helped me figure out what worked and didn't work for me. In addition to the constructive feedback, group membership also helped me keep a much more consistent writing schedule. As a former journalist and public relations practitioner, I'm largely a nonfiction writer. Support from the group gave me the impetus and encouragement to try new genres. Some of my efforts were epic fails (I won't be writing science fiction anytime soon). Most of my work is still in process.

Maybe you've been thinking of building a writing group. If so, here are some tips for getting started:

**Start local:** Attend writing workshops, library events, or local chapter meetings for organizations like Romance Writers of America or Sisters in Crime. Our local public library holds a writer's workshop annually. That's a good place to meet people.

**Use technology to your advantage:** We learned during COVID that local can be enabled

**JEREMY COHEN**

*Boston Dog Lawyers*

# What to Know Before You Sign

## A PET OWNER'S GUIDE TO ADOPTION AND BREEDER CONTRACTS

BRINGING HOME A NEW PET is one of the great joys of life. Whether you've spent months on a rescue's waitlist, fallen for a face at a shelter event, or carefully chosen a breeder for a specific dog, the day you finally take that animal home is the day everything changes — your routine, your couch, your sense of who's waiting for you when you walk through the door. It's exciting. It should be.

It's also the day you sign a contract that will govern your relationship with that animal and with the organization or person who placed them with you for the rest of the pet's life. And with all the excitement of car rides home, first nights, and picking out a name, that contract tends to get initialed where you're told to initial, then it gets tucked into a drawer and forgotten — until something goes wrong and the contract comes back out.

As an animal law attorney who has handled hundreds of pet ownership disputes, I want to encourage every adopter and buyer to slow down long enough to read the contract before the pen hits the page.

### **Adoption contracts: what to be aware of**

Rescue organizations design their contracts with the well-being of the animal in mind. The vast majority of provisions exist for good reason — spay and neuter requirements, for example, often originate not with the rescue itself but with state regulators (in Massachusetts, the Department of Agricultural Resources). A rescue that fails to enforce those requirements can lose its license. Courts tend to uphold those provisions as a matter of public policy, and they should.

Where adopters get into trouble is with the provisions that feel minor at signing but matter enormously later:

### **The right of first refusal.**

Most adoption contracts require you to return the animal to the rescue if you can no longer care for it — not rehome it to a friend, a family member, or an adult child. If the rescue discovers you've placed the animal elsewhere, you may be in breach. Read this clause carefully and ask questions if the language is broader than you're comfortable with.

### **Strict lifestyle conditions.**

I've represented owners whose rescue demanded the cat back after the owner posted photos on social media of the cat enjoying an enclosed outdoor Catio. The contract said, "indoor only." The rescue meant it. Many organizations actively monitor adopter's social media, and a moment of pride on Facebook can become a demand letter. If a condition in the contract doesn't match how you actually intend to live with your pet, raise it before you sign, not after.

### **Legal fee shifting.**

Some adoption contracts allow the rescue to recover attorney's fees if they have to enforce the agreement. That changes the math considerably if a dispute arises.

None of this is a reason to avoid adopting. It is reason to read the contract like the binding document it is, and to negotiate where a term doesn't fit your circumstances. You have more power at the signing table than you think. There is far more demand than supply for good homes.

### **Breeder contracts: where the leverage flips**

Breeder contracts deserve a different kind of scrutiny. The conditions they impose on

See **CONTRACTS** pg 50

PAM ATHERSTONE

*The Bowl*

## WE DRINK FROM

Do not pity them.  
 Those who walk slowly in the morning field  
 with the empty leash in their pocket,  
 or the one whose house  
 still holds a bowl on the floor  
 as if the earth itself might grow thirsty.

You think they are trapped in a cycle of madness.  
 Architects of grief,  
 builders of small lives  
 measured in twelve bright years  
 and one dark winter.  
 But you are mistaken.

They are the brave ones,  
 the keepers of the fire of devotion.  
 They know from the beginning  
 how the story ends.  
 How the silver thread  
 that binds breath to body  
 will one day loosen in the quiet afternoon,  
 or beneath the dim lamp of a vet's room  
 where the air smells of alcohol and kindness.

They know a silence will enter the house  
 wide as an ocean.  
 And still, they open the door again.  
 Somewhere a dog is waiting  
 in a metal cage,  
 or a muddy yard,  
 or in the deep meadow of the not-yet-met.

They go out like pilgrims.  
 They return carrying  
 another warm shadow,  
 another beating lantern of joy  
 with ears like small flags  
 announcing the kingdom of Now.

For ten, twelve years  
 they kneel in the temple of ordinary days,  
 walking the same paths,  
 throwing the same stick  
 into the golden grass of afternoon.  
 They learn devotion the way rivers learn the sea.  
 Then the breaking comes.

Yes, the heart splits open  
 like a fallen tree struck by lightning.  
 But look closely.  
 Inside that wound, there is light,  
 and running through it  
 the bright footprints  
 of every creature who ever loved them back.

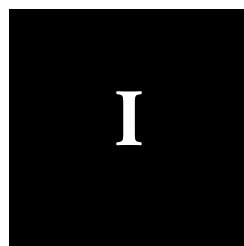
These people understand that sacrifice is the medicine  
 they gladly surrender to every decade.  
 They allow their hearts to be shattered  
 To ensure a dozen good dogs get a taste of Heaven.  
 It is a sacred trade  
 for grief is the tax paid for the purest love in the Universe.

It's a secret the desert cannot teach:  
 that safety is a lonely country,  
 and the soul was not made  
 for drought.  
 So, they drink again  
 from the same deep bowl of  
 grief, joy, grief, joy  
 as the earth itself drinks rain. ■

RIANA ODIN

# HOW *and* WHY DO YOU CHOOSE THE DOGS YOU DO?

During the fall of my senior year of college, I went home from Boston to Connecticut for Thanksgiving break. My uncle had found a dog at a nearby rescue that my grandma was interested in meeting, and I decided to tag along to weigh in on the decision.



HAD ABSOLUTELY no interest in adopting a dog for myself at that point, with a whole semester left of school and no income to speak of. As much as I had always planned to adopt a dog of my own someday, it just wasn't the right time.

At the shelter, we followed a woman through the rows of crates and cages to where the dog of interest was kept. As I walked past the various dogs, peering into each cage, I made eye contact with a tiny dog kept on the floor in a metal pen. He had a companion, a chubbier version of himself, who was lying on some scattered newspaper and couldn't be bothered to even look over at me. But this guy, who couldn't be more than 4 or 5 pounds, trotted over toward me with the confidence of a lifelong show dog and jumped onto his hind legs. His large, perfectly round black eyes bore into me with fervor as his front paws scratched at the fencing.

"Hey you!" he seemed to say. "Pick me up right now!"

I looked at my human companions, but they had continued on to see the other dog, not noticing I had fallen behind.

I looked back down at the dog. His mouth was wide in a toothless grin, his tongue dangling off to the side.

Me?

"Yes, you!" He started panting and continued scratching the metal to drive his point home. I dropped into a crouch in front of him, wanting to just calm him down, but he was insistent that he wanted out.

"Alright, hold on just a minute," I said to him out loud. I went to find someone who worked at the rescue and led her back to the odd little animal in the metal pen. When I returned, he didn't look at the other woman once. His eyes remained glued on me.

“That one just had an operation to remove a cancerous tumor. He also had a full dental,” she said.

“Can I see him?” I asked.

She picked him up and let his front paws rest on her shoulder. I followed her to the door, where she grabbed a slip lead from a hook on the wall.

“We’re not sure how old he is, but we think he’s around seven or eight,” she said as she placed him on the grass and handed me the lead. “You can get to know him out here. Just let me know when you’re done.” I thanked her and she walked back inside.

As soon as I knelt down, the dog scurried up the slope of my bent legs and craned his neck in an attempt to get his fuzzy, graying face as close as possible to mine. I lowered my face, and he licked me on the nose with a floppy, mostly dry tongue. His long, fine hair was a stark white, with sections of the deepest black I had ever seen. It was silky in the spots that were not matted, and cascaded from his oversized, erect ears in a way I had never seen before on a dog.

As we walked around the property, his stride was prim and proper, and he aligned himself alongside my right foot – never pulling ahead or wandering from my side to sniff. He gazed at me with unbridled adoration, like he saw something in me that I myself had never noticed in any mirror.

Some of the rescue’s larger dogs that were kept outside barked as we passed by their enclosures, but the dog

at my side was completely unbothered. I realized then that he hadn’t made any noises beyond the hurried breaths of excited panting. There had been no whining or yapping, despite the stereotypes I had associated with dogs of his small stature. And yet, I had felt like we had been communicating with each other since that moment he seemed to yell at me with his eyes to get him out of his pen. Peculiar, I thought.

After a while, I noticed that my uncle and grandmother had been watching me through the window. I picked up the little dog, keenly aware of how good he felt in my arms and hurried back inside. I apologized for taking so long with the dog and handed him back to the employee.

“Are you sure you don’t want him? It seemed like.” she began to say, but I cut her off.

“Oh, no. I’m still in school. I just came along to get the other dog for my grandma,” I said. I felt the dog’s eyes on me but wouldn’t let myself look down at him. The warmth that had lingered on me from his fur faded as I followed my family to the car.

“That dog looked like it really loved you,” my grandma said on the drive home.

“It did, didn’t it?”

“I would pay the adoption fee for him, you know, if you wanted him.”

I opened my mouth to refuse, ready to rattle off a litany of reasons why I couldn’t get that dog, but

found I had counter arguments and solutions for every potential issue I could think of. In the end, all I could think to say was, “He’s missing teeth.”

“Well, so am I,” she said matter-of-factly.

I ended up getting five beautiful years with the senior papillon I would come to know as Duck, before blood cancer took him from me. He was the first dog that was all mine, and my forever soulmate. Of all the things he taught me, the first lesson was that day: you don’t choose the dog, the dog chooses you. ■

◀  
Mr. Duck Bear  
Odin, courtesy of  
Riana Odin



REBECCA WALLICK

# Choosing Malamutes

ONE EARLY WEEKDAY morning during the fall of 1984, I was running country roads with a friend outside the tiny agricultural town in eastern Washington I'd moved to the year before, fresh out of law school.

The sun peeked above the horizon as birds noisily greeted the day. With no vehicle traffic and only an occasional farmhouse, it felt as though we had the world to ourselves. We talked amiably as we ran an eight-mile route past orchards and mint fields.

Suddenly, stealthily, a large wolf-like dog started tagging along with us. Long-legged, silver fur with black tips, he had the hint of a Zorro mask around caramel-colored eyes. Wanting to greet the beautiful interloper, I stopped and faced him, held out my hand, and called softly, "Hey boy, come here, say hello." Keeping a wary distance, the dog eyed us curiously, then sniffed something in the ditch alongside the road.

My friend and I eased back into our run. I figured the dog would go home, wherever home was. We still had three miles back to town.

I was wrong. The dog kept running with us.

Watching him trot easily just ahead of us, I marveled at his elegant gait. So carefree and bouncy. Oh, to run so easily! I was envious.

Occasionally, the dog suddenly veered off the road, jumping across the wide ditch into a farm field to investigate some movement or smell, then returned at a gallop from behind us, catching and passing us to resume the lead position.

That morning I fell in love with the dog and the idea of running with a wolf-like dog. I imagined being an ancient human exploring her world with a wolf companion.

As we approached town, to my surprise, the dog stayed close to us, following us right onto my front porch.

There, he finally let me touch him. I sank my fingers into his thick, soft coat and said a proper hello. As I cooled down and my heart rate returned

to normal, I fell deeply into his bright and curious eyes as he panted his own cool-down.

The dog had no collar, no identification. I fetched a bowl of water and put it down on the porch. I hoped he would still be there after I got ready for work, but he was gone, leaving me with a keen sense of disappointment and loss.

The dog made an indelible impression on me. I couldn't get him or our running together out of my mind. It was as if I'd converted to some new cult—the Church of Running with Wolf-like Dogs—and felt overwhelmed with the joy of being accepted. I wanted more.

Perhaps it was time to bring a dog into my life, I thought. At 28, I was done with school, had a good job, a house and yard. I was ready.

The internet had yet to become part of daily life, so I went to the town library and checked out the American Kennel Club's hardback book on dog breeds. Browsing through its pages of full-color photos, I felt like an addict taking a hit after a long period of abstinence.

Using the AKC book as my guide, I learned that the running dog was a Siberian husky: independent but friendly and people-oriented, strong with good endurance, intelligent. The only downside? Roaming. If given the chance, the book said, huskies will jump enclosures and run off, returning only when they're ready. That certainly rang true, based on my brief experience.

Curious about similar wolf-like northern breeds that would make good running companions, I read about the Alaskan Malamute, listed right after the Siberian Husky. Similar in appearance, Malamutes also had great strength and endurance, as well as intelligence. But this caught my attention: Malamutes were one-person dogs, very attached to their humans. Unlike huskies, Malamutes stayed close to home. They didn't roam, the entry said.

"That's my dog," I whispered.

Alaskan Malamutes are an uncommon breed. An ancient, or "basal" breed, it's believed they accompanied Paleo-Indigenous people from Siberia, settling the Arctic some 4,500 years ago. Bred by the Malimiut Inupiaq people of Alaska's Norton Sound region, they were utilitarian dogs, pulling heavy sledges and alerting to seals and their

See MALAMUTES pg 49



Clockwise from top left; Maia and Meadow with the author, Opus at Snow Lake, Chann enjoying the snowfall, Conall in Payette National Forest, Maia and Meadow, photo courtesy Sheree Sonfield, all other photos courtesy of Rebecca Wallick





RACHEL R. BAUM

# Marmaduke *and* Other Movie Dogs

When the movie “The Friend” came out a couple of years ago and the film “Marmaduke” in 2010, my heart sank for two reasons.

One is that, in “Marmaduke,” the “miracle” of CGI gives dogs the ability to speak English, dance, wink, and basically act like a human being.

Of course, we know that dogs can’t actually do any of those things, but I think that these movies – like “Beverly Hills Chihuahua,” “Underdog,” “The Shaggy Dog,” “Karate Dog,” “All Dogs Go to Heaven” – have subliminally raised our expectations. We’ve already endowed our dogs, a completely different species than us, with more than enough human attributes for creatures, haven’t we?

Secondly, with the release of any film with a canine main character, I hear the clamors of people saying, “What a cute dog! I want one of those!” And the world will beat down the internet doors looking for Great Danes to buy.

Before you sit in judgement, my own Dane was from a Dane rescue group. And before you

start searching the web for a Dane of your own, consider the following Dane facts:

#### These dogs are:

1. Big and will take up a lot of room in house AND your car;
2. Rowdy and exuberant when young;
3. Unhappy to be left alone and might be destructive to prove it;
4. Strong-willed (and strong!) with a mind of his own;
5. Slobberers and droolers;
6. Gassy (flatulent);
7. Short haired, yes, but major shedding machines nonetheless;
8. Capable of eating – and eliminating – in a way appropriate to their size;
9. Prone to serious (and expensive) health problems;
10. Most unfortunately, very short-lived.

My guy on all four legs is as tall as a fourth grader, and he can reach the top of the refrigerator standing on two. Forget about hiding anything edible from this dog. Because of their size, Danes must be well trained. They are too big to get away with unruly behavior.

Like Great Danes, Dalmatians, Chihuahuas, and St. Bernards, dogs that you see in the movies or on TV, are not always the best dogs for your family. I'm sure it started with heroic Lassie, the Collie. Or maybe it was German Shepherd Rin Tin Tin. Or possibly Petey, an American Staffordshire Terrier, from *The Little Rascals*, or Beethoven, the St. Bernard, or the 101 Dalmatians.

Dogs made famous by movies and by their celebrity owners have inspired some people to want that particular breed. There are so many ways budding dog owners will rationalize or justify why they chose a certain breed:

- “I didn’t intend to go into the pet store, but I did and I saw a puppy with the cutest face in there, and she was so sad, I just couldn’t leave without her, so I “rescued” her.”
- “That dog that Paris Hilton has – I want one like that, only smaller.”
- “There was a picture of a Bloodhound that I saw – the dog was sleeping on the porch – I want a dog that will just hang out with me like that.”
- “None of those wussy dogs for me – I’m getting a Rottweiler, or maybe a Cane Corso. Those dogs are really cool.”
- “Remember that dog from the *Wizard of Oz*, what was it, some kind of terrier? That was a nice dog. I want that kind of dog.”
- “I love the color of Irish Setters. I’ll bet that dog will look terrific lying next to the fireplace.”

There are probably as many reasons to get a dog as there are breeds. Before you make the decision based on the dog’s: Breed/Looks/Film Credits/Your Family History/Your Friend’s Dog/A Photograph/A Magazine Article/Your Image/To Impress People...please, determine which dog fits you: your wallet, your energy level, and your lifestyle.

Do some research before you adopt a Marmaduke, Scooby Doo, Balto, or Bruiser. A book like “Choosing a Dog for Life” by Andrew De Prisco can help you determine which doggie attributes you are seeking. The most reliable and up-to-date resource for information about all 205 recognized dog breeds is The American Kennel Club (AKC). There you can learn more about each breed, compare one breed to another, find a reputable breeder, and even choose a name for your new companion.

Please remember that your local shelter has any number of adoptable dogs who need a warm, loving home – adopt, don’t shop! ■

▼  
The author with  
George Elliot  
and Tennyson



MARYPAT MCMANUS

# NATIONAL SERVICE ANIMALS MONUMENT



**E**XCITING NEWS! Beloved National Dog Show host John O'Hurley is joining the National Service Animals Monument (NSAM) as its founding spokesperson.

The National Service Animals Monument initiative, authorized by Congress in 2022, established a project to create a permanent monument in Washington, D.C. dedicated to service animals and handlers working across the military, law enforcement, search and rescue, medical assistance and therapy fields. This monument is a tribute to the powerful connection between loyal and courageous service animals and their human companions.



Susan Bahary  
of the National  
Service Animals  
Monument (NSAM)  
initiative and  
Chris Willingham  
President of the  
United States War  
Dogs Association.  
Photo, courtesy  
of NSAM

Service animals have always been an extraordinary part of the canine community, offering comfort, love and safety into the everyday lives of those who need it most. Whether it's guiding, protecting, or simply sitting on the couch for companionship, their impact is irreplaceable. Now, their stories are taking center stage to be honored at the nation's capital.

In this exciting new project, television and Broadway star, O'Hurley will join longtime broadcast partner, David Frei. Frei is a familiar face to the National Service Animals Monument, serving as a special advisor on the project since its initial authorization. Together, the pair brings star power, longtime passion and continued support for the service animal community.

O'Hurley has been actively involved in related service animal initiatives, such as the "Bonds of Service" tribute program for many years. This new project is only an extension of his demonstrated passion for animal advocacy. O'Hurley has shared that he views the bond between humans and animals, specifically dogs, as something special that should be celebrated. The selfless acts that service dogs do for their humans and their community represent strength, healing and connection. The monument in Washington, D.C. aims to capture that spirit, honoring not just acts of service, but the important relationships behind them.

This special project will be brought to life by the incredible sculptor, Susan Bahary. Bahary is known for her sculptures portraying the powerful bond between humans and service animals.



Bahary was the sculptor behind our country's first official war dog memorial. She also crafted the beloved statue of President George H. W. Bush's service dog, Sully, which is on display at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station, Texas. Her inspiring works of art have resonated with animal lovers nationwide. Like sculptures, the National Service Animals Monument will offer visitors a chance to connect with heartfelt service animal stories of bravery and companionship.

A widely respected artist and advocate in the service animal community, she was honored with the National Dog Show's Dogs Best Friend Award for her continued contribution to advocacy efforts.

While the monument is still in its planning stages, there is a clear vision and ongoing collaboration underway among federal agencies. The fundraising goal stands at \$25 million and the team behind the monument expects efforts to grow each year. The expected completion date is around 2030.

A major milestone was reached in March, when the U.S. War Dogs Association of Towson,

▲  
David Frei (left)  
and John O'Hurley  
on the set of the  
National Dog Show.  
Photo, courtesy  
of NDS

Maryland, donated \$1 million to the National Service Animals Monument. Bahary offered, "This is a great kickoff to our capital campaign. We're deeply grateful to the U.S. War Dogs Association for their leadership, vision, and support of this project that will be a tribute to those who served, both human and animal kind. These animals are silent heroes of American service. They didn't just assist; they protected, rescued and saved lives. This monument will give them a permanent place in our nation's heart."

In the meantime, the National Service Animal Monument is already celebrating these remarkable animals through initiatives like the annual Purple Poppy Awards, recognizing individuals, animals and organizations who have made a great impact in this community. The support for this project is unwavering, growing by the day with star-studded advocacy and excited future patrons nationwide! ■

LISA BEGIN-KRUYSMAN

# A WINN-WIN SITUATION



**I**N LATE MARCH 2025, I made a quick trip to our local Winn Dixie to pick up a few items for dinner. I was in a rush as I wanted to get home to watch my beloved UCONN Lady Huskies basketball team advance during March Madness.

I may have had Huskies on my mind, but another kind of dog was about to find a place in my heart.

Outside the store's entrance, a woman sat in a motorized shopping cart cradling a tiny brown and tan puppy. My first thought was that she was waiting for a friend, or family member, who was inside the store.

Although I love dogs, and this pup was adorable, I was in a hurry to get in and out. I



Winnie, courtesy of Lisa Begin-Kruysman

wasn't inclined to stop and engage. However, for some reason, I did.

As I admired the puppy, its tiny head craned upward in my direction. I noticed her pink collar was tattered and dirty and she had several dry patches behind her ears and neck. She also looked like she was underfed.

"She's so sweet," I said to the woman.

"She's a Rottweiler," she replied.

I paused to take a longer look. Although this puppy had the markings of a Rottweiler and someone had already cropped her tail, I knew she wasn't a purebred.

"She's for sale," the woman made her pitch.

"You're selling her here, now?" I asked, surprised.

The woman named her price as others stopped to admire the pup.

My protective instincts went into play. The woman, sensing my curiosity, proceeded to tell me she was widowed and needed the money to fix a litany of repairs for her mobile home.

"Oh. I wish I could, but I have three dogs already," I said.

Another woman walked by and smiled.

"She has nice dogs," she relayed to me.

*Dogs?!* Was she a hoarder or a bad backyard breeder?

"Let me think about it," I said, heading into the store to get my items.

Inside I made a quick call to my partner, David.

"Anyone can take that dog," I said with growing alarm. "This isn't a good situation."

I was most concerned about dog fighting rings scouting for bait dogs.

"She wants two hundred dollars," I said. "At least she's not giving her away."

As I spoke to David, I found myself reaching for cans of puppy food and putting them in my cart. I also counted the money in my wallet.

"Do what you think is best," David said.

What *was* best?

But, I already knew. At the time I was on the board of the local animal shelter. I was fully aware of the plight of animal welfare in this rural community. I also knew the shelter would help me find her a home if we decided we couldn't keep her. I wasn't really sure of how my pack at home would react to this addition, or how she would handle *them*.

I paid for my groceries and headed out. In the interim, the manager had gotten wind of the dog salesperson out front.

From just inside the door, I observed his reaction.

"You can't sell dogs outside a Winn Dixie!" he told her.

"A lady said she's going to buy her," the woman said.

"Okay. But, you can't stay here," he said before stomping back inside.

"I'll go wait in my car," she said.

I was still hesitant about taking on a fourth dog because I already knew if I brought her home, she was staying. I also realized that *I* was "the lady" she had mentioned to the manager.

She made her way to a large blue pickup truck. It just happened to be parked next to my car. For me, that was the final determining factor.

I approached and leaned into the passenger side.

"I have one hundred dollars on me," I said. "Will that do?"

"Well, my husband will kill me, but alright," she said, handing the puppy over to me.

I recalled how she said she was widowed. But, as I'm a widow, too, I understood that she was now perhaps remarried and had just referenced her widowhood as an influencing factor, which was understandable in this circumstance.

It worked.

As she drove off, the puppy's head followed her car. She was alert and intelligent, I could tell already. Then she focused her full attention on me. I fabricated a makeshift nest with a sweatshirt and towel next to me, but as I drove, she crawled onto my lap and placed her chin in the crook of my arm and went to sleep.

My heart melted.

I'd already given her a name before I'd even returned home.

"I shall call you Winnie."



Arriving home, David brought our dogs outside for a meet and greet. A slow introduction was made. My blind Malti-poo was indifferent. Our Aussie was a bit aloof. She had bonded immediately with our big Rottweiler-hound mix, Jackson, we'd adopted a year earlier from the local shelter.

Winnie was confident and fearless around Jackson, and I attributed this to the probability that she'd spent her first weeks of life surrounded by large dogs. Once we treated for fleas and care for her other needs, she proceeded to quickly add weight on her five-pound frame and thrive.

A year has passed and I'm happy to say that little Winn and her "siblings" have adjusted to each other beautifully. She's smart, healthy, fun-loving and extremely affectionate. Her energetic and resilient nature inspires me as well.

I never saw her former owner again and often wonder how many dogs she's sold in the same manner since. I know some might say I aided and abetted a bad situation, but I did what I thought was right in the moment. Standing in the pet food aisle, choosing cans of puppy food and counting the money in my wallet, I quickly considered the future of that tiny life with my heart and mind and felt compelled to make sure she had a good one.

As the recently retired Winn Dixie advertising campaign affirmed, it was a "Winn"-Winn situation. ■

▲  
Jackson watches over Winnie, takes his big brother duties seriously. Photo, courtesy of the author.

LAURA VINOGRADOV

# HOW TO PICK *a* PUPPY

**E**ACH YEAR, far too many dogs get surrendered, rehomed, relinquished, or returned, not because they are bad dogs, and not because the people involved are bad, but because bad choices were made. When a dog is ill-matched to its family, it is the dog that suffers. It is the dog that is given away or, worse yet, abandoned. Deciding to get a dog is a commitment, one that should last the life of that dog. The lifespan of some dogs can be less than a decade, and it can also exceed 20 years. Your decision to commit to your future dog is best served if it's steeped in knowledge, anticipation, and planning. Of course, even with the best plans, there will be challenges. There always are. Yet, despite all the work and worry and challenges, getting a dog can be a wonderful and fulfilling adventure!

A dog can bring more joy and fun into your life than you can imagine. Those paw prints may sully your newly washed floors, but they will also leave indelible marks upon your heart. The unconditional love and acceptance you will receive from a well-loved, well-cared-for dog makes all the work, worry, and pain worth it. Guaranteed.

So, ready to move forward?

**STEP ONE:** Ask yourself why you want a dog and if this is the right time to get one.

- If you are just starting out in your career and working unforgiving hours, why get a dog just to leave them at home alone all day?
- If you love to travel, and it is unlikely a dog would be able to

travel with you, why get a dog only to leave them on endless weekends (or longer) at boarding kennels?

- If your finances are unstable, why add the expense of a dog? There are many expenses to consider. Can you afford food, equipment, dog care products, vet care, and replacement slippers?
- Are you prepared to walk your dog every single day, rain or shine? What about constantly cleaning fur and muddy paws?
- Do you have time to invest in training him or her?
- The loss of a beloved dog is as traumatic as losing a close relative or friend. Are you prepared for that?
- Do you have a backup plan for the care of a dog should you become incapacitated or die?

After answering those questions honestly, is a dog still in your immediate future? If so, let's move on.

**STEP TWO:** Choose the right breed for you.

There are hundreds of different dog breeds. Some have been bred for centuries, all have been bred for generations. Each was bred for specific reasons and specific jobs. Their breeding was to achieve distinct characteristics to suit those jobs including temperament, trainability, and physical form. Whether 100% purebred or not, ignoring these tendencies will only lead to frustra-

tion. Not understanding their nature or needs is a recipe for failure.

Not all breeds (or even mixed breeds) are suited to all situations. You can narrow down your options by assessing yourself and your lifestyle. Then look at breeds that are most likely to fit in.

By honestly answering the following questions, you can begin to narrow down the number of possible breeds from hundreds to a manageable list of a few to choose from.

- Have you ever been responsible for a dog before? Growing up with a dog as a child does not count. The question is: have you ever cared for, trained, and been 100% responsible for the welfare of a dog? Some dogs are simply not for the novice owner. There is a huge difference between caring for a Cavalier King Charles or a Malinois.
- Where do you live? Small apartment or in a house with a large, fenced backyard? City or country? Are there parks nearby or are you surrounded by concrete? While most dogs can adjust to most living arrangements, there are some breeds which simply will not do well without space to run for hours on end (Border Collie), while other breeds do very well if they live in a small space (Pug).
- How much time do you honestly intend to spend grooming your dog? Are you willing (and financially able) to pay for professional grooming for a high-maintenance

breed like the Poodle or would a wash-n-go breed better suit you? Are you willing to sweep up the tumbleweeds of fur that will collect daily from some breeds such as the German Shepherd Dog or do you want a low-shed breed like the Cairn Terrier?

- Are you physically active or a couch potato? Is your idea of walking the dog heading out for a five-mile hike or is it once around the block? Some breeds are perfect for an owner who never misses a day to be outdoors (Husky), while other breeds are more than happy to share your sofa for a movie marathon (Greyhound).

Examine your life and personality honestly and compare them to the needs of each breed that catches your eye. You will see a pattern develop and from hundreds, you'll hopefully be able to focus on two or three breeds that best suit you.

**STEP THREE:** Find the “right” individual dog.

Speak with experts such as breeders, trainers, and shelter attendants. Let them get to know you. Listen to their recommendations. With their help, you might find that the pushy alpha dog with a big personality might not be as good a match as the more reserved puppy who might grow into themselves in a few short weeks, once they're out from under that alpha dog's influence. Meet lots of dogs before you make your final decision.

Lastly, **STEP FOUR:** Remember the 3 cardinal rules about puppies:

- Rule number 1: All puppies are cute.
- Rule number 2: Never “just go to look” at a puppy because chances are, ready or not, you will return home with a puppy.
- Rule number 3: At all times, remember rules number 1 and 2!

Happy tails! ■

JON PATCH

# Saying GOODBYE

We seldom think of death until it occurs  
It seems to be in our distant futures.  
We associate it with getting old  
At least that was the belief as we've been told.  
But death sees no face, age, species or personality  
It does not matter if you live amongst rich, middle class  
or poverty.  
However time decides it is your turn  
We can only watch the ones that have gone before us  
and learn.  
It is my time to say goodbye  
To my master who shall watch me die.  
I am young and life was short for me  
But I will live forever in my master's memory.  
The hardest part of dying is to leave my master and  
friends  
But who is to say this life is the end.  
For since I must leave this life, not of choice  
I pray that someday again I will hear my master's voice.  
There is so much I wanted to do and be  
But this life is over, at least for me.  
My only wish is that my master I leave behind  
Will always remember me and a smile shine.  
Although at times life has been hard and difficult  
I know now that the reasons were not all my fault.  
You take life's punches as they come  
Many at a time or one by one.  
I lived my life as best I could  
And answered the questions I thought I should.  
But death is a challenge that no one will conquer  
Whether young, old, one or one hundred, no one shall  
live forever, I'm sure.

Original song lyrics by Jon Patch,  
National Radio Host of Talkin' Pets



KATHY MANDELL

## Choosing *a* Dog When You're Not Even Looking

**F**OR ME, almost every case, I wasn't really looking to adopt a dog. It just happened. I know that I do cheer for the underdog and want to help out dogs who are different and unwanted.

My first dog, Sam, was a Christmas present from my parents when I was seven years old. Sam was the offspring of a laboratory beagle. My dad worked at a lab. This was way back in the 1960s. I loved visiting the beagles when we picked up my father at work. I had no idea why the beagles were there, I just knew I adored them. So, my parents gave me one. They let me pick out the puppy from the litter, and I was adamant that I wanted the "runt" of the litter. She was so needy and I felt sad for her. The breeder kept saying "You don't want

that one. That's the runt." I insisted, and that's the puppy we took home. This would be the theme with every dog from then onward.

Fast forward to adulthood. My dog, Timba came to me when a roommate hadn't paid rent for several months. The roommate was looking to move out but couldn't find an apartment that would allow dogs. I suggested that they give me their dog instead of paying the cash they owed me. They agreed, and I had Timba for almost 17 years!

When Timba was very old, I adopted Hobie. I wasn't looking for a dog. A coworker had posted a bulletin in our break room at work about a dog needing a new home. I thought it may be a good idea to get a puppy before Timba passed away. Hobie was four months old. I asked the coworker

Kathy Mandell  
and Petey,  
courtesy of  
the author

if I could meet the puppy. When she and the dog's owners came to my office with this beautiful little sand-colored puppy, I fell hopelessly in love at first sight! Hobie was "the one". As loyal as Timba was, Hobie stole my heart and soul.

A year after I got Hobie, I adopted Hector from a nearby farm -- for free. That doesn't happen anymore. Hobie chose Hector from the litter! Hobie and Hector were bonded to each other and the best of friends. Hector was with us for only nine years when he died very suddenly and unexpectedly at home.

With Hector gone and Hobie getting on in years, I thought maybe I should get a puppy. I'd learned that the older dogs are great at "training" the younger ones. I saw a social media post about a little puppy called Charlie Brown who had been overlooked. Even his mother and all his siblings had been adopted, but not him. I applied to adopt Charlie Brown, and the rescue agency approved me for adoption, but someone else was approved before me. The adoption coordinator asked me to call her in two weeks -- she said she had a feeling the first adoptive family wouldn't be a good fit with Charlie. She was right. I called her two weeks later, and she said she was just about to call me! I adopted Charlie the next day, and he's still with me 14 years later.

When Charlie was seven months old, I adopted his special needs litter mate, Cooper. Most everyone knows the story of Cooper. He was a front-leg amputee and his original adoptive family for reasons unknown to me to this day, returned him to the rescue agency. Reuniting Charlie and Cooper was as good a reason as any to have a pair of large hound dogs from the same litter.

After a series of losses, not the least of which was the passing of Hobie, I was rebuilding my life. A friend of mine adopted a dog from a Craigslist ad. She named the dog, Petey. When I would go over to her house, Petey would jump up onto my lap and let me touch his adorable and unique ears. My friend said he never let anyone else do that.

Even though Petey was almost three years old my friend could not housebreak him no matter what they tried -- and they tried everything. I offered to take him for a month during the holidays and try to get him housebroken. I'd use the older dogs to teach him how to go to the door and do

potty breaks outside. A few days after Christmas, my friend told me she couldn't handle having a dog after all and asked me if I would help her surrender Petey to a shelter. I suggested instead that I keep him, to which she agreed. Petey and I have become very attached to each other. I don't know who has worse separation anxiety -- him, or me.

Now you know how and why I adopted each of my dogs. I'm a champion for unwanted and special needs dogs. There's something special about them that many people seem not to notice. I suppose I like a challenge. ■

*Kathy Mandell writes on Substack and on her blog [TravelingDogLady.com](https://TravelingDogLady.com). In 2025 she self-published "Dear Hobie" a memoir written in the form of letters to her heart dog. She lives in the Myrtle Beach area with her husband, two dogs and one cat.*

“

**For me, almost every case, I wasn't really looking to adopt a dog. It just happened.**

**KATHY MANDELL**



KATE J. KULIGOWSKI

## A Work *in* Progress

**I**N JANUARY OF 2012, my husband Wally and I answered a plea from our local animal shelter, Albuquerque Animal Care Center (AACC), to use our skills as dog behaviorists to help with a recently owner-surrendered male puppy. Repeatedly stabbed in the abdomen and eyes sprayed with Clorox, his condition upon surrender required emergency surgery. Yet, because this 18-month-old, still bleeding, pup still retained the energy to lash out at anything within his damaged line of vision, veterinarians were forced to sedate him with darts. His wounds were cleaned, tubes inserted for draining, and closed with stitches.

But once out of recovery, he remained dangerously aggressive. Kennel workers were continually attacked by this 10-pound terror. The shelter had performed their obligatory (though restrictive) methods to help, but the pup's aggressive behavior classified him as unacceptable for adoption. So,

Jake, a work in progress, courtesy of Kate Kuligowski

this adorable pug was slated for euthanasia. The AACC volunteer implored on the phone "You have been working with rescued pugs for 40 years. Can you please help?"

His veterinarian, Dr. Wilson, reviewed the pup's medical history with us. He cautioned us that his internal injuries were extensive enough that he would probably never be able to discern his need to urinate. Although most of his "lifts" would produce blanks, Dr. Wilson advised that he wear belly bands.

We named him Jake and attempted to socialize him. Sadly, regardless of the training, kindness, love and care we and other solicited professionals gave him, he was still fearful and would bite without warning or reason. None of our several other rescue dogs were exempt from this new dog's sudden bursts of anger.

Even though Wally, our son Kurt and myself were careful to wear long, padded leather gloves

▶  
Jake on a stroll

▶  
Jake on a stroll,  
both photos  
courtesy of  
the author

when handling him, Jake's penetrating, sharp little teeth still caused trips to Presbyterian Emergency for sutures. To lighten the situation, we changed his name from Jake to Jake-o, rhyming with mako (no disrespect intended for sharks), and dubbed him our "work in progress." During the following 13 years, we didn't give up on him, but his behavior showed no improvement. So, as a safety precaution for both human and furry beings, Jake-o was kept tethered inside where we could keep an eye on him.

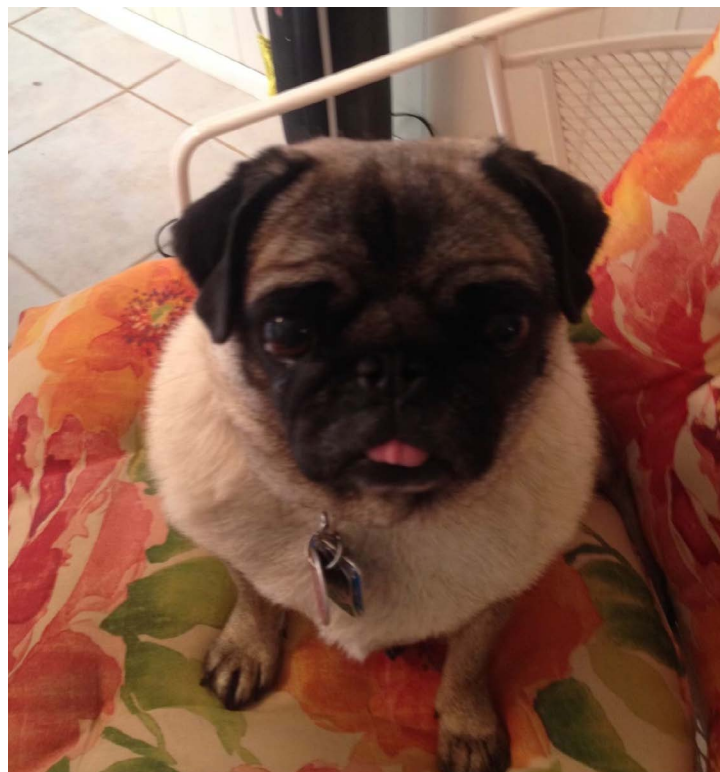
Following Wally's death in May of 2025, our responsible and caring son Kurt, along with his perceptive girlfriend Paula, discovered a fantastic new California residence for Jake-o and me with no stairs, lots of light and a large, wooded lot with multiple interesting trails. We were hoping that this new setting would not only soothe my grief but also grant Jake-o a new life with a chance to experience trust. He would, for the first time, be the only dog.

Our plans were short lived. Within weeks, I fell and spent the next 3 months in medical facilities. Although both Kurt and Paula had full-time employment (and a well-loved Boston terrier, Otis), they made time for both Jake-o and my new disablement. While Kurt was busy bringing meals to me (the hospital food was almost inedible), Paula, a true canine aficionado, stepped up to assume responsibility for the care of Jake-o. They both worked overtime trying to manage my routine obligations so I could concentrate on getting well rather than worrying.

Released in mid-December, but wheelchair bound, I remained totally incapable of caring for Jake-o, so they selflessly continued their commitment to me and my troubled pug.

In early February of 2026, Jake-o's loud, labored breathing and inability to walk resulted in an immediate visit to our local veterinarian. After studying the results of his exams, x-rays and bloodwork, Dr. Sofija's diagnosis was serious: "severe tracheal hypoplasia/collapse as well as collapse of his upper airways." Kurt and I were disheartened. Even with the care of an excellent vet and her prescribed meds to ease the inevitable increasing discomfort, Jake-o was not expected to live much longer. He was 14 and had never experienced the

▶  
See JAKE-O pg 51



KAREN HARBERT

# WHAT KIND *of a* CROSS IS THAT?

I've been involved in my breed since 1970. Dogs I have owned and/or bred have earned over 100 championships in multiple countries as well as multiple obedience titles.

I

'M A FOUNDING MEMBER of our regional Southern California club and the national club of Canada and an honorary lifetime member of both, I've served multiple terms on the board of our own national club and a few years ago I was honored with that lifetime membership as well. But when I started in this breed, no one knew what they were.

It began on our honeymoon when we visited my husband's sister and she had a litter of German Shepherds; I saw my future Rin-Tin-Tin. A year later she had a pup for me and we went to a match with her family in Golden Gate Park where I saw my first corgi.

It had to have been a Pembroke; at that time there were no Cardigans in the Bay Area. When we got back home I started researching Welsh Corgis, and the more I learned, the more I was certain I wanted the Corgi With the Tail. Meanwhile, I was training the GSD, Blitzen, in obedience and I met a neighbor who was doing the same with her Dalmatians. One day I mentioned that I was interested in a Cardigan Welsh Corgi and she said a member of her obedience club had a pair she was training in advanced obedience. So I joined the San Diego Obedience Club and met the breeder of the dog that started me on the journey, and a life-long friend and mentor. When Am/Mex Ch Pera Brigwyn Blue, UDT, and Ch Dorre Don Serchus of Winsdown, UD, had their first litter in October 1970, pick male puppy was mine. I told her I

planned to do obedience with him; she asked me to also show him if he turned out well.

Blitzen earned his CDX while Donner was growing up. Donner, Ch Dorre Don's Incorrigible, CD, finished his championship and CD on his second birthday.

Donner's was the first-ever Cardigan litter born in San Diego County. My veterinarian told me this was the first he'd ever seen in 50 years of practice. When I worked on his CD at our local park or the high school athletic field, people would ask what kind of a mix he was; telling them he was a purebred Cardigan Welsh Corgi, a show dog with champion parents got looks of disbelief and shaken heads. People told me corgis didn't have tails. They told me corgis didn't come in that color. They told me there was no such thing as a Cardigan Corgi. They told me he was a French Bulldog cross. They told me he was everything but what he really couldn't be!

I can still remember where I was when I learned that a Cardigan had just won our breed's first Best in Show. Now there are so many that I can't even name them all from memory, but the first Cardigan to win Best in Show in Canada was a great-grandson of a dog I bred.

For years a Canadian breeder and I had exchanged puppies to add to our breeding programs. When the national Canadian Cardigan club held its first supported show, half of the entries had a



parent or grandparent with my kennel name. At the US national specialty my Canadian friend invited me up to ‘look over my investment,’ and go on a Canadian show circuit. That led to more swaps, and a tradition of also swapping show circuits: one year my side of the continent – Southern California, – the next year his side – Eastern Ontario.

While the show circuits were successful for our dogs, getting there often involved a series of misadventures – my friend was the original absent-minded professor. I began keeping a travel diary of everything that could go wrong and did, *Off the Road Again*. Friends read it and passed it around and one day someone suggested I turn the stories into fiction and *Murder at the Dog Show* was born.

Donner has long since dropped out of pedigrees, but his sire is still in the background of our last, elderly Cardi, and behind the Superdog who became the canine hero of my series, *Murder at the Dog Show: Am/Can Ch Aelwyd Pirate Program*, CD. We called him Pond Scum.

Pond Scum was the dog I was campaigning while writing *Off the Road Again*. He was my companion through all of the misadventures of those show circuits, many of which found their way into the pages of my stories.

In every sport and organization, there are people who become good friends, others who don’t, and a few that arouse our worst instincts. Since the publication in 2012 of the first novel in my 23-book series, I’ve managed to kill everyone who ever pi... oops, seriously annoyed me. Now I’m taking requests! ■

▲  
Donner, photo  
courtesy of  
Karen Harbert

## Potpourri

► Continued from pg 7

to go through all the training and commitment needed for a new K9-human partnership, so I went back to my crutches and canes.

A few months later, I was doing a book signing fundraiser for Coastal German Shepherd Rescue, as I had just published a fiction book with a German Shephard police dog. A woman was there to surrender her poor dog, the female bleeding and scarred, ribs showing, weak, dirty and full of fleas. The excuse for an owner should have been arrested for animal abuse. There were no foster homes open, and she was told she could come back in two weeks. She said “nope,” just left the dog, and drove away. My husband retrieved her leash and we took her home. Sheba was another black GSD! And I had just lost Striker, my black GSD. It gave me goosebumps. Sheba trained to be my next service dog, and the loyalty and love she showed me after her rescue grew exponentially. After the vet and a bath, she spent her first night at home in my bed, and never left me until old age claimed her, too. Such a sweet beauty, and so proud of her “job” taking care of me. I still miss her terribly, and it’s been years since I told her goodbye.

Now the children were all gone. After 25 years with two GSD partners, I decided against a third service dog. I was older and not as strong as before. I couldn’t handle such a powerful breed anymore. I joined the “senior citizens club” and got a mobility scooter. Then our last dog, 17-year-old Oscar the dachshund,

crossed the rainbow bridge. I was now dogless and tearfully told my husband I would stay that way. I just couldn’t handle another death of a dear companion. I was done having my heart broken, and in addition to losing Oscar, I was still grieving over the loss of my beloved Sheba.

Against my wishes, my husband brought home another rescued dachshund. I was VERY angry for about five minutes, then spent the rest of the day with Smokey in my arms. And when he was 16 and quietly slipped away, my husband brought home another rescued dachshund, a puppy we named Niko. After the loss of all our “big” dogs, my spouse decided we didn’t have enough “dog presence” in the home, and Suzy the dachshund joined us, a breeder discard who only had two live puppies in four litters. After four years of living in a cage, she was quite feral, but slowly but surely, we are now making progress. She’s very clever, bonded with Niko and copies him, including using the dog door. She housebroke herself in three days!

So that’s where we are now. Save for Striker, my first service dog, all our others were varied rescued breeds that somehow slipped into our lives. From Massachusetts to Mexico, dogs from thousands of miles apart joined our family. When I think about that, I again wonder...serendipity... karma...fate? I suppose I’ll never know, but that’s okay. In the end, all that matters, and has ever mattered, is love. ■

## Hart

► Continued from pg 13

on the worldwide ABC library website. Through the TTBWA, Hart’s adventures will be printed as a traditional Braille book. There’s also an audio version of the book.

Sighted children who listen to *A Touch of Hart* claim Hart as a hero. They say Hart’s superpower is his blindness because it enhances his sense of smell and hearing. Knowing Hart means knowing there is more than one way to see the world.

Hart taught me to think differently about the dogs I adopted. My dogs never needed protection. They just wanted acceptance and trust. They didn’t measure life by flaws or disabilities. Only humans do that. These dogs’ imperfections taught me about character and courage. If you have heart, you can face any obstacle in life. ■

Hart has his own YouTube page at <https://www.youtube.com/@ATouchofHartPodcast>

# Fresh

► Continued from pg 15

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<sup>40 a,b</sup>

## Rescue

► Continued from pg 19

even chewed up the toilet seat. She began going to work with my husband who was a middle school teacher at the time. Sage had an innate ability to alert on children with epileptic seizures and knew when ADHD children were having a hard time. She would get up from her dog bed and quietly go sit by them and let them touch her fur for comfort while alerting my husband of the issue. A large school board meeting was held, and she quickly became the school's official Service Dog. She also had the cushy job of "Reading with Rover" before there was such a thing. She helped many children and their parents feel safe in her 12 years of service. Her last service was a nose work demonstration for the American Cancer Society a few days before she passed from a tumor. She did brilliantly as the crowd roared. What a beautiful giving heart she had.

Louie – He was a young starved, beaten, broken, hairless Puerto Rican street dog that jumped in my arms, licked me and then snarled at me. He followed me everywhere after that. From that day forward I was the only human who could touch him. Needless to say, I took him home to the mainland U.S. with me. The veterinary friends who I was visiting were glad to have him leave the island. He was a known troublemaker and puppy maker. So, Louie became my working partner. I was treating animals going from barn to barn and house to house and Louie was always by my side or in my truck, making people wave and smile and calming down anxious animals. He was a cool tail-wagging dude that everyone loved. Even with all his broken body parts he lived to 17 years old. I've never had such a crazy celebrity dog that could open up so many hearts and nurture all sorts of friendships without touch.

Wilbur – He also came to me in a dream, three dreams actually. I had just lost my rescue dog Luna, and I had been severely injured by a horse. In my early recovery I was looking for a yellow lab rescue puppy to fill the empty space in my heart. I was consulting long distance with an animal sanctuary in Texas. Before that visit, I had three prior dreams of an adult yellow lab saying, "Don't worry I'm coming." When I asked the sanctuary coordinator if they had a yellow lab puppy, she said "No, but we have Wilbur"! Wilbur was the adult yellow lab in my dreams. The sanctuary had picked him up on his final day at a kill shelter, the same day I

had called. So, Wilbur was shipped to me and he was a mess. He was starved, had every bacterial and fungal skin infection, not much hair and was in a grief state from losing his impoverished family and the children he loved. Together we spent months healing our bodies, hearts, and minds and finding our strength to step back into life. In this journey we healed each other.

Finnegan – My latest addition is a 7-month-old Lab rescue pup. He is intellectual, cautious but solid, cuddly and curious - all my favorite tenets in a pup. Who will he become? Each day brings a new awareness of who he is. The next discovery begins...

For several years, I worked testing conservation dogs at Working Dogs for Conservation, an internationally known conservation group out of Montana. They work with ivory poaching, invasive plant species, and whatever a nose can sniff to help nature survive. This organization uses "last chance" rescue dogs, the ones that have been rehomed way too many times, with the rescue system saying their time was up. I was able to place numerous high-energy talented dogs from Lab Rescue with WDC. One was blind from birth, had an incredible ability for scent work and a very high endurance level. He now works in Canada searching small fishing boats for invasive mussels that are taking over many lake ecosystems. Another rescue dog I tested turned out to be very talented at car searches and finding ivory caches. He was sent to Namibia to work at poaching roadblocks and do vehicle searches for poached ivory. These "last chance" dogs are very well cared for and doing incredible work. Some having scent repertoires of 40-50 different scents.

Last chance doesn't have to mean no chance.

Channeling the energy of a rehomed animal is all about patient, genuine discovery and finding out who they really are. Unwinding the insecurity, trauma, and uncertainty takes time, presence and patience. Yet hidden in these colorful pasts are the gifts of giving back. Rescue dogs always give back if we let them, even if it's just companionship, cuddles, and filling our lives with joy and goodness. ■



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## Tips & Tactics



► Continued from pg 25

by technology, so if you are interested in a specific genre, such as animals or romantasy, you can create a virtual community that can become a different type of “local.” A quick keyword search can help you find like-minded souls.

**Add value first:** Build relationships by commenting on and promoting other writer’s work, rather than just focusing on your work.

**Use virtual professional development opportunities:** Participate in online writing challenges like NaNoWriMo, join Reddit writing communities, or attend virtual conferences.

**Recruit others to join you:** Whether you travel in physical or virtual circles, use those contacts to spread the word. Keep your professional post-

ings, such as those on LinkedIn, updated so people can find you. If you have a website, make sure it’s current. If you’re going to networking events, make sure you have business cards handy. I recently saw a business card that provided an AirDrop process for sharing information.

Maybe you don’t want to do the heavy lifting of building something from scratch and instead want to join a group that’s already in process. Check with local booksellers, libraries and even continuing education programs at local universities and colleges. These groups are often thriving but under the radar.

Once you decide to get involved, all you have to do is to just take that first step and see what happens. You’ll be glad you did. ■

## Malamutes

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blowholes. On hunts, Malamutes watched for and distracted large predators, like bears.

During the Klondike Gold Rush of 1896, they—along with other sled-dog breeds—were valued for their freight-hauling ability. The historic 1925 Serum Run from Anchorage to Nome and Rear Admiral Richard Byrd’s expedition to the South Pole in 1929 relied heavily on the breed. During World War I, 450 Alaskan Malamutes were shipped to France, delivering supplies to army troops isolated in mountain outposts. And later, during World War II (primarily in Greenland), Malamutes sniffed for mines, carried weapons, and served as search-and-rescue dogs.

Losses from service in World War II all but eliminated the breed, which had received AKC recognition in 1935. By 1947, only about thirty registered dogs remained.

The day after I decided to get a Malamute, the Siberian husky ran with us again. As before, he appeared out of nowhere, as if conjured from

the low, early-morning mist by my desire. He ran with us for a few miles, came back to the house, accepted some water, then disappeared as effortlessly as before.

Taking this second visit as a sign validating my decision to get a dog, I started searching for a Malamute breeder. A few months later, I brought home a four-month-old female I named Opus.

I vowed to raise Opus the way my father had taught me: as a member of the family, welcome indoors, even on my bed. She lived to be 14, and now, 40-plus years later, I’m living with my fourth and fifth Malamutes, Conall (11) and Chann (3).

I consider the gray wolf my spirit animal, but Malamutes are my loyal companions on forest trails and in life. ■

## Contracts

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buyers are often extensive, while the accountability they accept in return is often minimal.

### A few patterns worth knowing:

#### Co-ownership listings.

If two people are buying the dog together, both names must appear on the contract as primary owners. If the form has only one line, add a second. Cross out, write in, and initial the change. If a relationship ends and a custody dispute follows, courts will look closely at the contract, and a single name on that line will carry weight you didn't intend to give it.

#### Congenital illness clauses.

If your puppy turns out to be sick with a condition that traces back to the breeder, the contract almost certainly limits your recourse. Most breeder agreements require you to notify the breeder within a defined window and give them the opportunity to evaluate — or take back — the dog before any reimbursement is considered. In practice, new owners rush to the emergency vet, accrue significant bills, fall in love with the puppy, and have no intention of returning the animal. I have yet to see a case where the breeder voluntarily covered those medical costs. Know the notification requirements before you give them.

#### Guardian contracts.

This arrangement is increasingly common and increasingly litigated. The breeder offers a discounted dog in exchange for your agreement to return the dog periodically for breeding purposes — sometimes for weeks at a time, sometimes more than once. It sounds manageable when you're signing, but it rarely feels manageable when the breeder calls to collect. Owners who refuse to return the dog can face significant damage claims, because they've interfered with the breeder's revenue from a planned litter. If a "guardian" or "co-ownership" arrangement is on the table, understand that what you are buying is not full ownership, and the financial exposure for breaking the agreement can be substantial.

#### The bottom line

A pet contract is not a formality. It is the document that will govern your relationship with your animal and with the organization or individual who placed that animal with you for the life of the pet. Read every clause. Ask about anything ambiguous. Negotiate the terms that don't work for your household. Get a copy of what you sign.

The best time to address a problem in a pet contract is before you bring the pet home. The second-best time is the day you read this. The worst time is when the letter arrives. ■

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## Jake-o

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comradery and happiness that most loved pets have felt. It was tragic.

Paula was of another mind and determined to try her own healthy canine care plan for Jake-o, now dubbed her “work in progress.” She replaced his collar, saying it was “causing him to choke.” Next, she put him on a diet (“He weighed 20 lbs.!”) Paula kept moving his gray velour bed so as she moved, so did Jake. She began walking him throughout our beautiful neighborhood, increasing distances daily. Weeks later, he was ready for a ride in her spiffy, newly purchased baby stroller.

Kurt captured this memorable occasion on video: Paula was navigating the stroller, where inside, a wiggly, bright-eyed, alert Jake-o danced. He was enjoying life...finally! He loved it! He loved her! Totally enamored with Paula, Jake-o

was experiencing a new attitude, “not everyone was dangerous.”

No longer anyone’s “work in progress,” Jake-o had undergone a complete transformation. He became not only much healthier, livelier and happier, but also a more restrictive biter, thanks to the determination, dedication, kindness and generosity of Kurt and Paula, who taught this old rescuer of many decades a better approach to canine health and care. I am forever grateful and wish Wally was here to enjoy it.

When I inquired about how I could express my appreciation, Paula and Kurt made the perfect suggestion: a donation to a local canine rescue. Their suggestion had far-reaching implications. The donated funds could be used to save the lives of abused, abandoned and unwanted dogs, possibly even ones like Jake-o. ■



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