

RUFFDRAFTS

the DOG WRITERS ASSOCIATION of AMERICA

FALL 2026



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*It's Show Time! Canine
conformation, agility,
scent, and field work*

TARA CHOATE

THE SPORTING LIFE



Ruff Drafts

Send all material to Merrie Meyers
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ISSUE DEADLINES

Summer 2026, May 15
Fall 2026, August 15
Winter 2026, November 13
Spring 2027, February 12

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



I AM EXCITED! The Writing Contest is about to launch! Never has it been as easy to enter, or for that matter, judge. The improvement to the competition is an ongoing project of the past few years, and though not quite finished, the difference is astounding. I liken it to the difference between driving a Mini Cooper and arriving in a Lexus. One gets you there; the other gets you there in style!

Look at this year's contest categories. We combined one or two regular categories

and added others. If you look carefully, you'll see there are also more special awards!

Please consider judging categories that you haven't entered. Every entry is reviewed by a trio of judges, so you are in good company when making the exceedingly difficult decision as to which is the best in a category. And we judges no longer need to stumble over piles of physical entries as in the past. (I remember not being able to walk through my living room because of the jumble of magazines, books, and art entries that the cats wanted to sort for me...) The judging process is now literally clicking buttons!

Now, on to another topic. I am deeply concerned by the number of dogs being bred in this country. That certainly includes the mixed breeds that uninformed and greedy folks create and then label as designer breeds. These dogs are sold at outrageous prices to uninformed people who haven't a clue as to how to care for or train them. Golden Doodles, Multi-Poos, and Cock a Doodles, among others, require daily, extensive grooming, as well as expensive professional grooming at least every eight weeks. Then there is the training... Somehow, training has become a four-letter word in this country.

We, as writers, have a responsibility to inform people about canine care and responsibility. When we don't know, we are bound to find out and share that knowledge.

In 2025, approximately 250,000 dogs were euthanized across the United States. Isn't that reason enough to persuade people to stop breeding more of them?

The main purpose of breeding a litter of puppies should be to improve the breed, not to make money. If one wants a pup to replace a beloved dog, then the original breeder should be consulted. That is the only way to duplicate your beloved dog's genetics.

One fallacy that really astounds me is this school of thought: "I want her to have puppies because I know she will love being

▲
Therese
Backowski and
her dogs, Lucy
and Hank

See PRESIDENT'S COLUMN pg 38 ►

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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 READERS,

Calling all authors, visual artists, journalists, podcasters, bloggers, and vloggers! **THE DOG WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (DWAA) ANNUAL WRITING COMPETITION OPENS SEPTEMBER 1, 2026.**

It seems like just yesterday we were at Connolly's Irish Bar & Restaurant, toasting the winners of the 2025 DWAA Writing Competition. In fact, it was seven months ago—and in about a week, we will open the platform for your entries. This year's competition covers work published from September 1, 2025, through August 31, 2026.

If you are a DWAA member, you likely know that you can enter your work in two types of categories: regular and special awards. Regular category winners receive a Maxwell medallion, named for the great Maxwell Riddle. Special award winners receive cash awards provided by the category sponsor. To enter a special award category, your work must also be entered in a regular category.

A REMINDER FOR MEMBERS: Always log in to the DWAA website before starting an entry form to be sure you receive the member entry rate.

Every year, we get questions about the entry process. It can be tricky, so DWAA member and multiple

video-category award winner Charles Weidig interviewed fellow multi-category winner Dorothy Wills Raftery about her process for submitting glitch-free entries. You can find their interview on the lower half of the Competition Rules page. It is highly informative and will hopefully answer many of the questions we receive each year.

This year, thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, we have added several new Special Award categories:

BOSTON DOG LAWYERS will sponsor an award for articles featuring the human-animal bond.

CANINE SCRIBBLES will recognize young photojournalists.

I will sponsor an award for the **BEST CHILDREN'S BOOK.**

MARSH LIFE REALTY will highlight work featuring a second chance for a good home.

Longtime member **BEV THOMPSON** will recognize an article about barn hunt and/or scent work.

Descriptions of all new and returning sponsors and categories can be found in the contest section of the DWAA website.

We also plan to feature one sponsor and Special Award category each week on social media, giving you an opportunity to learn more about the award topic, theme, and sponsor.

Supporting young communicators is a priority for DWAA. Continuing a tradition we started last year, we are offering separate regular award categories for authors and creators under age 18, allowing them to compete with their peers in written, audio, and book entries.

I hope you are planning to share some of your work with your fellow canine communicators. We look forward to recognizing the best of the best at Connolly's again next January.

And there is more! Immediately before the awards recognition ceremony, we will host a panel discussion on various aspects of publishing. Attendance is free to everyone attending the awards ceremony.

So sharpen your pens, polish your keyboards, and enter the contest!



Merrie Meyers
with Mojo and
Danny

Merrie Meyers

Merrie Meyers, Ph.D. APR, Fellow PRSA

Ruff Drafts Editor

MEMBER NEWS



TARA CHOATE

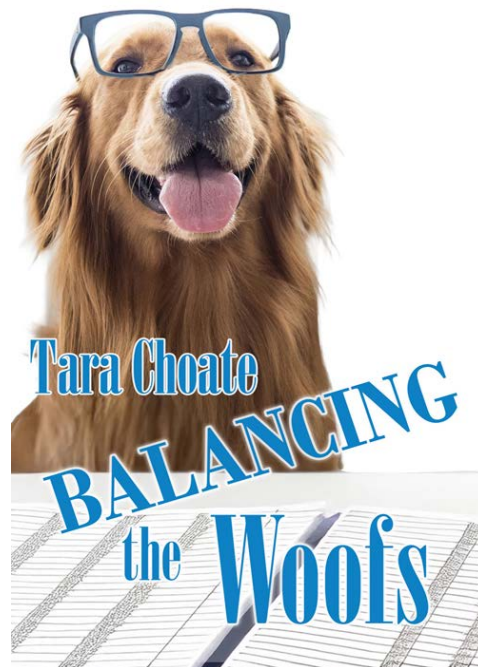
Tara Choate is an author and watercolor artist from Lincoln City, Oregon. Tara has drawn and painted her whole life.

"Art has always been a force in my life. My dad was an art teacher; he taught me to draw, then refused to allow me coloring books. After taking a lot of art classes in high school, I let art drop from my life. I missed it. Then several things changed, and I needed to find a creative outlet again."

While she works primarily in watercolor, she has recently added some acrylic, oil, pastels, and collage to her repertoire.

She published her first book, *Paw Prints in the Ledger*, in 2025. The second in the series, *Ruff Justice*, was released in January 2026, and the latest, *Balancing the Woofs*, was completed in August 2026. All are available on Amazon.

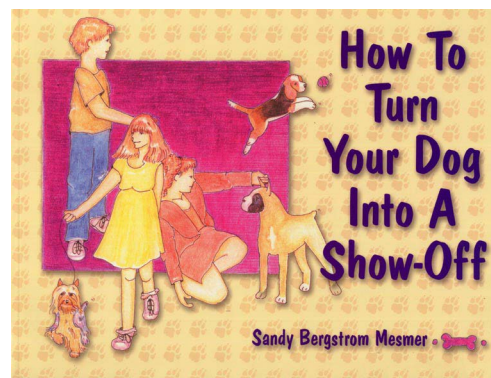
► The third in her Canine Accounting Capers, *Balancing the Woofs*. Cover courtesy of Tara Choate

NEW MEMBER
SANDY MESMER

My mother took me to my first dog show when I was eight. This fascinated me, and I immediately wanted to show our standard poodle. Mom explained the many reasons why this wasn't possible, and I understood, but there was a little voice in my head that said, "Someday I'm going to do that." Of course, being eight, the next week I was telling everyone that I wanted to be a jockey.

I bought my first Silky in 1981 from Pat Walton, then later another female from Rita Dawson, Ch. Silwynd Tessy of Tessier. I always treated the kennel as a profession, working at showing to breed rather than breeding to show. I found it extremely helpful to go to Nationals every year, as I could then see a true cross section of the best dogs in the country. I loved Ch. Marina's Houston and was impressed by his get. This led to purchasing Houston's son Ch. Marina's Marvelous Marvin. Many years later, I was blown away by three feisty and beautiful sisters at the Dallas Nationals, owned by Karen Huey. Karen and I have worked together ever since. In 1995, a friend of mine, Billie Pruitt, told me that she'd always wanted to show dogs. One of her first Silkys was Ch. Tessier

► How to Turn Your Dog Into A Show-Off, is a Junior Showmanship Guide by Sandy Mesmer. Cover courtesy of Sandy Mesmer



Thor of Tagalong, a kind dog who was happy to teach his newbie owner the ropes. Billie and I traveled together to shows until she passed away in 2015.

Tessier has produced many top winners; we have often had the #1 Silky in the country. But I have always felt that our biggest goal was not a top winning dog – that's just a way station – but a marvelous pet that epitomizes the looks of our breed as well as their sparkly and feisty personality.

Sandy is a member of the Silky Terrier Club of Central Florida, and a Board Member of the Silky Terrier Club of America. Her book, *How To Turn Your Dog Into a Show-Off* is the first Junior Showmanship pictorial guide.

THE DEATH BRIDGE

Two sisters and a homeless teen trapped in its shadow.
An abandoned dog, their only hope of escape.
But first, they must save him.

Ten-year-old Leanne Quall has a secret. She dreams of flying off the Coronado Bay Bridge, San Diego's suicide spot. Her horrified older sister Juliet finds Leanne standing in midnight traffic instead. With an indifferent father, a volatile mother, and a grandmother who thinks Leanne will outgrow her dark thoughts, Juliet is forced to seek help elsewhere.

Street-smart Landon Elliott sees Juliet rescue a starving, abandoned dog, and a new friendship is formed. Rocky the terrier starts to bring Leanne out of her shell while Juliet does the same for Landon. He hopes Juliet will return his love when Leanne finally gets help. But after Juliet bravely stands up to Rocky's cruel abuser, her safety is threatened.

Landon promises to protect both sisters. Without Juliet, he knows that Leanne is doomed, and so is his heart. Two very different people must trust each other to save one troubled little girl and the dog she loves.

A LICENSE TO LOVE

ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE

A LICENSE TO LOVE

A DOG TO WATCH OVER ME

ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE



ANNE MARIE DUQUETTE

Anne Marie Duquette, DWAA Distinguished Service Award winner, has launched a new book series, *A Dog to Watch Over Me*. The first in the series, *A License to Love*, was published on Amazon last month. Anne Marie has lived all over the nation as the daughter of a USAF pilot and USAF nurse, the wife of a career Navy Chief Petty Officer, and as a Navy Veteran herself. She has a degree in Mass Communication from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. In 1987, she made her first sale to Harlequin Romance, the primary publisher of her 25 books. She has taught adult education and religious education. She is married with two children and two grandchildren, all of whom live in Southern California.

▲
A License to Love is the first entry in Anne Marie Duquette's new book series. Cover courtesy of Anne Marie Duquette.

MEMBER NEWS



KAREN HARBERT

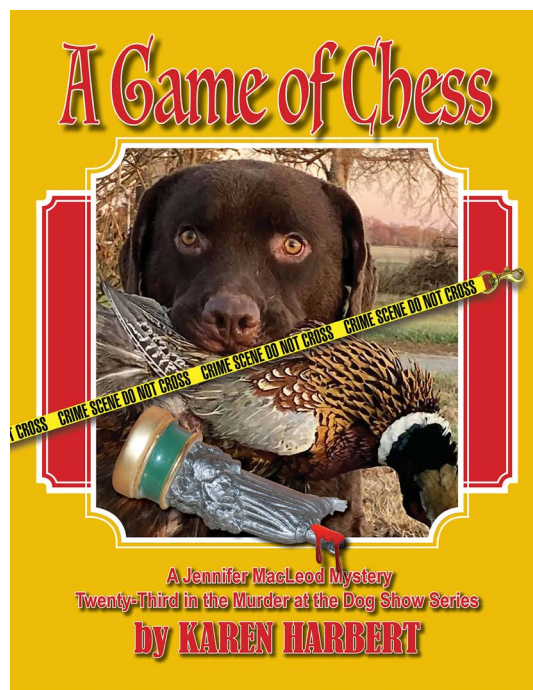
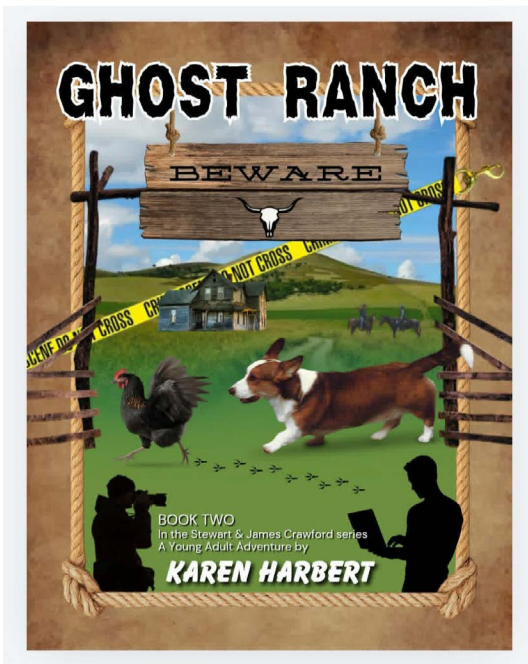
Ghost Ranch, the newest entry in DWAA Board Member Karen Harbert's young adult book series, was published this past August.

In *Ghost Ranch*, the Crawford teens are at it again, this time with a run-down, failed ranch to restore to profitability. A daunting task complicated by the mysterious and troubling things that keep happening. Is the place haunted by an evil spirit as one of their partners seems to believe, or is someone or something trying to scare them away?

Their Cardigan Welsh Corgi, Frodo, helps sniff out the answer, while also helping to train puppy Remi on how to be a ranch dog.

▶ A Game of Chess was the first entry in Karen Harbert's YA mystery book series.

▶ Ghost Ranch is Karen Harbert's second YA mystery and her 25th book. Covers courtesy of Karen Harbert.



A Game of Chess is about trying to bring a killer to justice and the young forensic investigator who puts all of her energy into it. But it's also about the world of gun dogs and the work they do retrieving birds for the table when no bird is to be downed and left in the field. There is complex and rigorous training that goes into teaching a dog to mark where a bird falls, or sometimes more than one. How the dog must be steady to shot, to wait for the command to retrieve, and to honor another dog's turn to retrieve a bird.

A friend's beloved relative is killed in a so-called 'hunting accident,' but family members are skeptical, especially when the perpetrator tries to buy his valuable property from the widow. They persuade Sabrina to examine the evidence and try to get a rural County Attorney to reopen the investigation over the objections of a small town sheriff who thinks any whiff of murder will have a chilling effect on the sportsmen who make up much of the annual budget.

The Chesapeake Bay Retriever that witnessed the killing, and the attempted kidnap of a grandchild in order to pressure the property sale, brings the story to an ending satisfactory to everyone. Well, maybe not everyone.

MEMBER NEWS



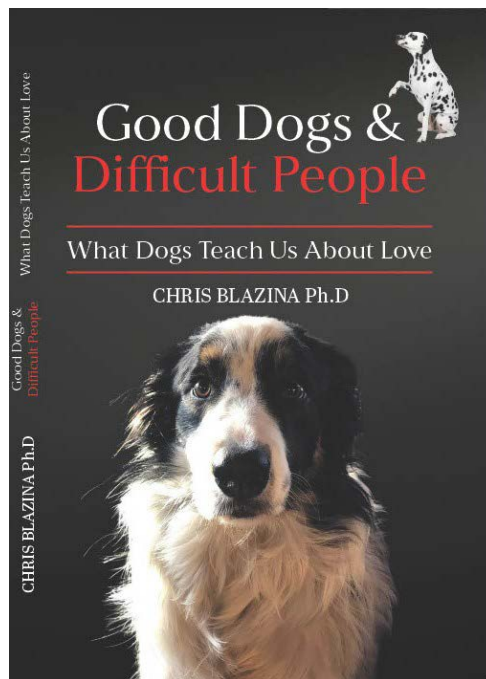
NEW MEMBER CHRIS BLAZINA

Dr. Chris Blazina draws from an extensive professional experience, including being a practicing psychologist for 30 years, an award-winning author, professor, and researcher. He is the author of nine books and more than 70 research articles. Most of his work is focused on how dogs have a healthy impact in men's lives. He has been interviewed widely across the US, UK, Canada, and Australia in radio, magazines, and newspapers.

►
Chris Blazina
and his dog
Dusty. Photo
courtesy of Chris
Blazina



►
Good Dogs &
Difficult People
is the latest book
by Dr. Chris
Blazina





Judge Joseph Vernuccio. All photos courtesy of Dede Wilson

Dede Wilson wins at Westminster KC Dog Show.



Judge Joseph Vernuccio judging an English Bull Terrier.



Dede Wilson and her son Freeman at the Dog Show.



Dede Wilson with her dog Nora, at the WKC Dog Show.

MEMBER NEWS

BARBARA E. MAGERA, MD

We Welcome *new* DWAA Member, Dédé Wilson

A note from the author: My story is not only about introducing a new member to DWAA. In addition, it explains how camaraderie was made at a dog show. By sharing a few photos with a stranger, a new friendship blossomed. I learned more about her, and she learned more about me. A bond was formed. A connection was made. I recognized that her many talents would prove beneficial to DWAA. I suggested she become a member of DWAA.



NEW MEMBER

DÉDÉ WILSON

At a recent Westminster show, I wandered over to the miniature bull terrier ring to shoot a few photos. I was lucky because the lighting in the Arthur Ash Stadium was perfect for capturing the winning starlets. The Judge, Joseph Vernuccio, was extremely photogenic and excited with the minis in his ring. He did not hold back his emotions, which resulted in some expressive photos. Even the dogs on the table were smiling.

One experienced exhibitor, Dédé Wilson, who was also very photogenic, ribboned in the conformation ring. I managed to capture the exact expression of her winning moment.

I captured several emotional shots of this striking lady showing her stunning mini in the show ring. I emailed her my photos, which she very much appreciated. I included candid shots of her having fun with her starlet in the ring.

We became good friends. Her winning bitch, Nora, had a litter of pups. Dédé dutifully kept her mini fans informed with video snippets of the pups' progress. These clips ranged from before the pups opened their eyes to subsequent scent training of maturing puppies.

Dédé Wilson has owned bull terriers for over 56 years, since she was nine years old, with minis being a more recent addition. Her dad introduced her to bull terriers, and her children have stayed with the breed, all of which inspired the kennel name of "Legacy." Dédé handled her first bull terrier at the age of 10; her son, Freeman, won breed at Westminster a few weeks after turning 16, and her win at Westminster when we met was a proud full-circle moment. She had assisted her son in his winning experience in 2006, and he came to help her when it was her turn.

Dédé's full-time job is writing about the culinary arts and educating about the low FODMAP diet for irritable bowel syndrome (fodmapeveryday.com); she also writes for Showsight magazine, and Dédé is also the Corresponding Secretary of the MBTCA (Miniature Bull Terrier Club of America). Other members of DWAA and I encouraged her to join our organization, as she has literary experience and extensive canine knowledge.

We welcome Dédé Wilson (Legacy) as a new member. She and her husband reside in Amherst, MA, with their mini bulls. ■

IN MEMORIAM

James Colasanti, Jr.

Editor's Note: James Colasanti, Jr., was a long-time member of DWAA and one of the first to sponsor a special award in the DWAA Writing Competition. We are continuing the Poetry category this year in his memory.

James "Jim the Dog Man" Colasanti, Jr. departed March 06, 2026 to be with his family, friends, and classmates in Heaven while stopping off at the Rainbow Bridge to retrieve his many four-legged and three-legged dog and cat clan to join him.

James was born on May 23, 1949 in Gloversville, NY, the only child of Mary C. and James I. Colasanti, Sr. He resided and grew up with his family, and his first dog, Butchy, who appears in many of his dog stories, at 15 South Chase Street, Johnstown, NY.

James was a 1967 graduate of Johnstown High School Sir Bills where he was the photography editor of *The Baronet*, the school yearbook. He was also a sports manager for the high school basketball team. He appeared as "Hugo" in the senior class play, *The Scent of the Roses* (by Aileen Leslie). He then attended the Syracuse University School of the Arts where he earned a BFA degree in 1971. During his college years, he worked on two feature-length motion pictures, *The Sterile Cuckoo* with Liza Minnelli, and *Hello, Dolly* with Barbra Streisand.

He also attended Woodstock, where he "ran into" Janis Joplin.

He moved to North Carolina in 1973, where he has been an advocate for rescuing homeless and stray dogs. James was a supporting member of the Dog Writers Association of America, where he was

the recipient of four Maxwell Medallions given for excellence in storytelling. He also established an annual dog writing poetry award.

In May 1975, James met Samuel Clark Whicker, who would become his Life Partner for the next 46 years. Together they rescued and housed over 53 stray dogs and 5 cats. James was predeceased by Samuel (02/20/2022). James also served as president of the board of the Animal Rescue & Foster Program of Greensboro, NC.

At the request of the family in lieu of flowers, donations may be made to: Burlington Pet Adoption Center, 221 Stone Quarry Road, Burlington, NC. 27217 (336) 578-0343. ■

Information provided by mortuary



HAILEY SHAH

WORTH LIVING

THE USUALLY GLARING fluorescent lights at animal control grew dim, signaling to Finn another lonely night. Within his barren cage, Finn resumed his go-to posture of curling tightly into a makeshift shield and declaring himself invincible, as though the strength of his belief could overpower his fear. The metal kennel bars against the plushness of a Frenchie's cheek offered no semblance of comfort. Nonetheless, he wedged the entirety of his face against them as if to eke out whatever bit of repose they might offer. The strength of his eyelids finally conceded defeat to the weariness that swept over him.

Finn's thin, misshapen body and dimmed eyes told a part of his story that was otherwise largely unknown. He was malnourished, covered in fleas, and his feet were curved and crate-worn. He was not housebroken, and the sight of a toy was met with incuriousness. At dawn, he managed to groggily focus on his soon-to-be foster mom, Mo, as she concernedly approached his cage. After a full-blown committee meeting in his mind, he approved the slightest lowering of his guard, just enough to let her take him to her rescue. As Finn was guided inside, another Frenchie rambunctiously sped towards him while another hurled its full weight onto a nearby toy, proceeding to delightedly clobber it with maximal intensity. Finn ambled around, sure that he had yet to arrive at the mellower part of the house. Growing disheartened after circling the full perimeter, he settled on a cracked-open hallway crate that would have to do. Daily, he was met with the same over-the-top exuberance he encountered that first day in the majority of fellow foster Frenchies, yet he never felt compelled to join the pack. His foster mom made repeated

visits to what became his self-imposed crate, first leaving a couple treats Finn found tantalizing, then deciding to extend a hand to test whether a pat would be welcome.

The thought of a touch went against everything Finn's body had taught itself to fear, but eventually something about her nudged him to cautiously accept her approach. She diligently persisted in her efforts with hopeful resolve, and soon Finn's hard-as-rock walls began to slightly dissipate.

The moment I saw Finn's bio video, I couldn't look away. The way his eyes fleetingly lit up upon receiving a treat, only for his whole demeanor to retreat into lassitude a moment later, ignited something fierce in me. I wanted to introduce him to every yet-discovered experience and encourage that shred of hope in him to bloom exponentially. One adoption application and successful meet-and-greet later, I found myself lifting shy, scared, tentative Finn from the car and walking him into my apartment. From that day forward, I was determined to do all I could to facilitate his slow but budding transformation. Eventually, meals turned from frantic acts of survival to leisurely affairs. The quiet resignation that once seemed to define him gradually swelled into a full repertoire of delighted snorts that accompanied the moments he felt joy.

Eventually, what started as quiet observation from a guarded distance at the meet-and-greet slowly gave way to Finn regarding me as a fellow littermate in a puppy pile, as he regularly climbed onto my lap and offered a barrage of thorough licks. With patience and strategic employment of training sprays, Finn triumphantly mastered house training. Once unfamiliar with toys, Finn soon amassed a

SUSAN BULANDA

The Sporting Life

SEARCH AND RESCUE DOGS NEED MANY OF
THE SAME SKILLS AS SPORTING DOGS

F

OR OVER TWENTY YEARS, my dogs have been Search and Rescue (SAR) canines. While this is not a sport, it involves many sport-dog skills. SAR dogs must be trained to be free-thinking and perform intelligent disobedience.

Airscent dogs are trained to find any human scent, no matter who or where it is, including objects which are often clues.

When the airscent dog finds the missing person, he returns to the handler and gives an alert signal, then leads the handler to the missing person.

The scent-specific dog follows one human scent. The requirements are more stringent than sport work, and the dog puts his nose where the scent is located. The scent-specific dog gives a passive alert, usually sitting next to the person he was following.

The human remains detective dog is taught to find victims of a disaster, homicide or bodies in water. Dogs who work disasters must have excellent agility skills since they often traverse unstable debris. They often work at a distance from the handler, following directional signals, much the same way as sheep herding dogs. They give a passive alert so that they do not risk injury on debris piles. They are trained to find either live or deceased persons. Disaster dogs can be cross-trained to find both.

Water body recovery dogs will either work on shore or from a boat. They signal where the scent rises out of the water and/or is carried on the air. This narrows the area divers must search. These dogs often bark as an alert; some even bite the water.

Dogs that look for buried bodies are required to do what is called a "find" search. They work the area slowly sniffing almost every inch of ground. When they find the scent, they give a passive alert by either sitting or lying down, so that they do not disturb any evidence.

▶ SAR dogs at work. Photo courtesy of Susan Bulanda

The dog and handler are a team that works closely together. With experience, the team gets to the point where they can read each other. The handler can tell when the dog is working a scent or if there is no scent. The dog only indicates scent, it is up to the handler to determine where to look for scent, and if the dog finds a scent, what it means. This depends on many factors, and each search is unique.

It is important to note that some dogs can be cross-trained to do more than one search discipline. At the time our unit was in operation, there were few units nationwide, so I did cross-train our dogs. For those who doubt that this can be done, all our dogs, pets or sport dogs, learn multiple commands and do not confuse them. Teaching a SAR dog a different command for each discipline is no different. They do not confuse what they are asked to do.

Actual Searches

Search 1:

It was a hot, dry August afternoon at a veteran's facility that allowed veterans to come and go freely. Caregivers discovered that a veteran had been missing for three days who had health issues.



The area was a mix of fields and woods, and no one knew where he was.

Three housing units and a recreation facility were in a semicircle around a cul-de-sac with constant vehicle and human activity. The local police K9 handler felt his dog would not be able to detect scent under these conditions, so the director of the facility called our unit.

I responded and upon arrival, obtained a scent article and gave him the scent-specific command. The dog led me around the cul-de-sac, weaving among parked, running vehicles and people. He went to the recreation building and indicated that the man's scent was on a bench and then on the door handle.

When I entered the building, the dog led me down a hall past many doors and recreation equipment to the back door. Once outside, he led me along a concrete path (the scent was trapped in the weeds along the path) to the exit gate of the property. At this point, the manager of the facility called off the search since it was out of his jurisdiction. A few days later, the man returned and verified that the dog went exactly where he walked. He had left the facility to catch a bus to visit relatives.

Search 2:

It was about 2 a.m. when we were called. A tornado had ripped through a housing development and a family was missing. My husband and I responded with my SAR dog. The houses were in various stages of ruin, from totally gone to some with half of the house missing. Along with structurally trained firefighters, we crawled over every destroyed house looking for the missing family. My dog and I crawled through the debris to the basement of each house to be sure that people were not trapped. We did not find anyone. As it turned out, the family was away on vacation.

Search 3:

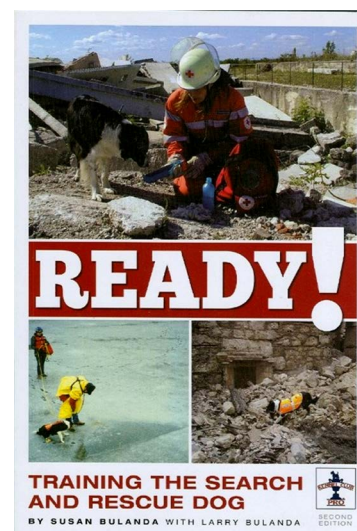
About midnight, we were called to look for a missing ten-year-old who ran away from home. He had become angry with his parents and ran into the neighboring woods. The police and firefighters had been looking for him all night before they called us. My husband told his airscent dog to search for the boy, and within fifteen minutes he had him. It turns out that the boy was watching the searchers, and every time they came near where he was hiding, he moved to a new location, but he could not hide from the dog. ■

Susan Bulanda has written three worldwide popular

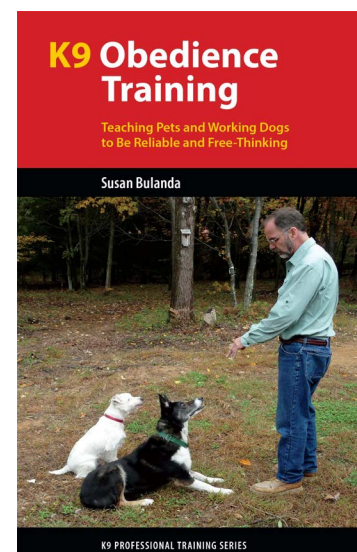
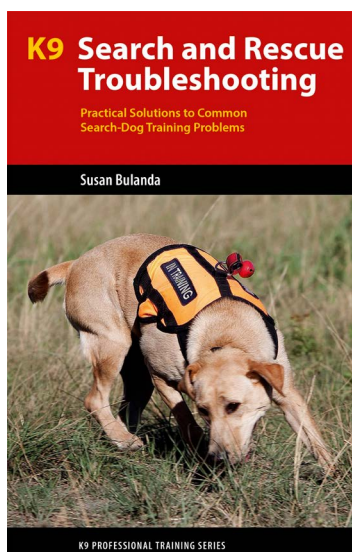
books for K9 SAR. *K9 Obedience Training: Teaching Pets and Working Dogs to Be Reliable and Free-Thinking*. How to train the SAR dog is explained in *READY! Training the Search and Rescue Dog* and how to fix training problems is covered in *K9 Search and Rescue Troubleshooting: Practical Solutions to Common Search Dog Training Problems*.



sbulanda.com



Covers courtesy
of Susan Bulanda





TARA CHOATE

The Sporting Life

THE PHRASE conjures up images of attractive, athletic people participating in extraordinary feats of vigor and timing.

- Greg Louganis on a diving platform.
- David Beckham on the pitch.
- Michael Jordan dunking a ball.

For an athletic dog's human, glamour is rarely visible. Why do I spend my spare time training and competing with my dogs? I ask myself this question every time I get up at zero-dark-thirty to haul equipment to the day's show. I ask it when I get home and scrape dog hair, liver treats, and that thing-I-scraped-out-of-my-dog's-mouth from the dryer's lint trap.

Because my dog represents the best part of myself.

The human-canine bond began because humans got to thinking that maybe one of those swift and powerful canines could help them bring

home some extra food. Maybe early dogs thought the same thing about the slow but clever humans.

Today, teamwork—in any form—is desperately lacking in our society. As much as we try to instill the importance of teamwork in our children, society has moved toward venerating the individual more than the group.

Dog sports mimic this dynamic. It's the handler who enters the show, plots the course, and makes the decisions, with the dog in the role of loyal follower. But, as those on the dumb end of the leash know, it's the dog who steals the show. Who hasn't laughed when an incorrigible terrier decides to roll the rat in the box rather than simply indicate? Groaned when a frisky herder accidentally knocks a bar? Clapped when the puppy group descends into chaos?

When my dog and I compete, what I long for is a golden moment that demonstrates the team I

▲
Agility
Competitor.
Photos
courtesy of
Tara Choate

►
Scent Work

►
Weave Poles

know we can be. A perfect front cross that pulls the dog onto the correct course. Waiting that extra second for a pronounced alert. Watching breathlessly as my dog runs full tilt to swing into her spot at my left side.

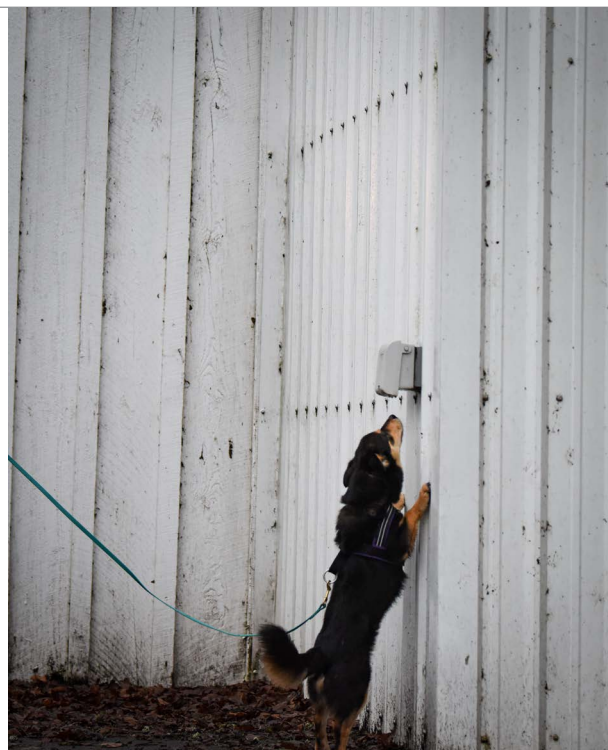
There is an additional attraction to dog sports. Dog events are wildly inclusive. They are about our dogs, but it gives humans a chance to be around other humans who get that life can be... hard. Dogs spread the cure to chronic illness, mobility problems, neurodiversity, and loneliness—just to name a few—to all humans in their orbit. When dogs get together, their powers are positively miraculous.

Dogs have kept me going through “adulthood.” My first dog, Sean, kept me out of the pit of despair in college when I suffered my first really big bout of depression. He did it by needing to be walked, fed, and trained. My second dog, Ginger, was with me during young adulthood, as I learned about depression medication and attempted to navigate professional life. Finn was my trusted confidant as I left the corporate world to open my own business. Key was by my side as I learned how to cope with a brain that wasn’t in step with the world at large.

And during all this, my dogs and I were part of the dog sport community. At practices, at trials, at fun runs, there we were along with a few others who shared a similar discomfort with the non-dog world.

So, if you’ll excuse me, I need to call the chiropractor... for the dog, of course. I’ve heard tell of chiropractors for humans, but such luxury is beyond me. I’ve got the sporting life to pay for. ■

Tara Choate lives in Lincoln City, Oregon, with her two dogs and two cats. She has written three cozy mystery novels about fraud and dogs. While these fictional dogs don’t solve the crime, they help the main character navigate life through their enjoyment of agility and (coming soon) scent work.



TED SLUPIK

ROSEBUD'S BRIEF CAREER



E

VERYONE DREAMS of their dog becoming a celebrity and being recognized as one of the best in its sport.

But which sport should you choose?

Of course, you must consider your dog's natural abilities and exercise needs. Once you figure that out, the search begins for an activity that is a good fit for both dog and owner.

I wanted to do something different with my rough-coated collie, Rosebud. So, the search was on for the perfect activity, something that would provide her with both exercise and a mental challenge.

When a local Collie rescue group offered an opportunity to try sheep herding, I jumped at the chance. I figured it would be a fun way to see whether Rosebud—and I—might have an interest in this unusual sport.

We arrived at the farm where the event was being held. As soon as we stepped out of the van, we noticed several fenced pens in the nearby fields, along with the overwhelming smell of



Rosebud herding sheep. Photos courtesy of Ted Slupik

sheep dung. Not to be discouraged, we signed up for our turn to be evaluated by the farm's expert trainer.

While we waited, I went online to learn more about this unusual sport. Here's a quiz to see whether you know more about sheep herding than I did. (Answers are at the end of the article.)

Sheep Herding Quiz

1. How much does an average mature male sheep weigh?

- a. 100 pounds
- b. 150 pounds
- c. 200 pounds
- d. 250 pounds

2. How much does an average mature female sheep weigh?

- a. 50 pounds
- b. 100 pounds
- c. 150 pounds
- d. 200 pounds

3. How many sheep can one herding dog handle?

- a. 100
- b. 200
- c. 300

4. How long does an average sheep live?

- a. 5 years
- b. 7 years
- c. 10–12 years

5. What command do herding dogs respond to best from their handler?

- a. Voice
- b. Clapping
- c. A whistle



I was amazed by the complexity of the sport. I learned that for an experienced herder, managing 300 sheep can actually be easier than managing three. I guess there really is something to be said for “following like sheep.” It turns out that sheep feel much less secure when there are only a few of them together. When they are part of a large herd, they tend to follow one another. We also learned that once a herding dog gets the first sheep through a gate and into a pen, the rest of the herd will likely follow.

Another interesting fact I discovered was that the white spot on a Collie’s tail—something I had always considered a beauty mark—is called a “Shepherd’s Lantern.” It makes the dog easier to see in the dark, allowing the handler to better track the dog’s position and direction of movement.

While Rosebud and I waited for our turn, I graded my quiz. I quickly realized that my knowledge of sheep herding made me woefully unprepared for the sport. Rosebud, however, was innately prepared—probably because of her breed’s genetic predisposition toward herding.

An experienced handler took each dog into the pen with several very large and formidable-looking sheep. I must admit that I had absolutely no experience with sheep. I had always thought of them as cute, fluffy, and gentle creatures.

Boy, was I wrong.

The handler took each anxious Collie into the ring to see how it would react and to



Rosebud moves the sheep counterclockwise.

determine whether it had the natural ability to continue with sheep herding. Armed with her lunge whip and shepherd’s whistle, the trainer encouraged each dog to participate.

The tension mounted as one Collie after another entered the ring. What did I learn by watching?

Nothing that I expected, that’s for sure!

- Of the 12 Collies that participated, three refused to even enter the ring.
- Of the remaining 9 that entered, 4 immediately rolled in the sheep doo-doo and left before the sheep even entered the training ring from the adjacent pen.
- Five Collies, Rosebud included, entered the ring. They stayed while the sheep came in and attempted to stare down the sheep.
- The other 4 dogs did moderately well, but they appeared nervous and anxious. They started and stopped repeatedly, despite the trainer’s encouragement using the lunge whip, voice commands, and whistle. Eventually, one by one, with cheers from the crowd, the tired dogs left the ring.

And then Rosebud entered the ring.

Although hesitant at first, she was intensely focused. She seemed to know instinctively what to do. She followed the trainer’s commands without fear, starting and stopping as needed

SUSAN HARTZLER

THE SPORTING LIFE

Paige Turner, Squirrel-Chasing Champion

PAIGE TURNER is what you might call a canine overachiever. My Australian Shepherd, with one blue eye and one brown, does agility and dock diving. She's also a certified therapy dog and a professional actress and model. Whatever she's doing, Paige approaches it with the focus and enthusiasm of a gold-medal athlete.

But there is one activity that truly owns her heart. Squirrel chasing. There are no ribbons. No judges. No entry fees. No governing body that I know of. But don't tell Paige it isn't a sport. She takes squirrel chasing quite seriously.

A Dog of Many Talents

Agility requires Paige to listen to me as she navigates jumps, tunnels, and other obstacles. Dock diving requires her to launch herself fearlessly into the water. Therapy work asks something entirely different of her: patience, self-control, and an ability to read the people around her. Acting and modeling? Well, those come naturally. Paige has never met a camera she didn't like.

But squirrel chasing? That seems to require forgetting everything her human has ever taught her.

The competition can begin anywhere. We'll be walking along when suddenly Paige's entire body changes. She practically pulls me off my feet, her eyes locked onto something I haven't even seen yet. Squirrel.

At that moment, our leisurely walk is over. Paige is competing. I am apparently the equipment, hanging on to the other end of the leash and doing my best to keep us both upright.

The Home-Team Rivalry

Paige doesn't even have to leave home to compete. There's a squirrel that regularly hangs out in a huge tree in our neighbor's yard, overlooking ours.

I don't know whether he has chosen this particular tree because it's prime squirrel real estate or



because he enjoys tormenting Paige. I'm beginning to suspect the latter.

Paige knows when he's there. She watches the tree. And the moment she hears him, whatever she was doing before becomes completely irrelevant. The chase is on.

The squirrel scrambles up the tree, sounding his alarm: "kuk-kuk-kuk," followed by a long "quaa." Paige races to jump on the backyard furniture, spinning, barking, and carrying on like the Tasmanian Devil, apparently convinced that if she makes enough commotion, he'll eventually come down. He doesn't.

▶ Party girl, Paige Turner. Photo courtesy of Susan Hartzler

Sometimes he just sits there looking at her. I can't prove he's gloating, but... I've seen his face. And if a squirrel could laugh, I'd say he does. The next day, they do it all over again, much to the delight of Paige and the dismay of my neighbors.

At this point, I'm not sure whether they're adversaries or simply two athletes who have agreed upon a standing appointment.

Seven Holds the Family Record

There is, however, an uncomfortable fact Paige would probably prefer I leave out of this story. Her brother Seven has actually caught something. Once. It was a chipmunk.

But Seven apparently misunderstood the objective of the sport. Instead of treating the chipmunk like prey, he held the little creature gently in his front paws and looked up at me as though he were pleading: *"Can I keep him?"*

The chipmunk did not share Seven's vision of their future together. While Seven lovingly held his new friend, the chipmunk bit him in the face... several times. Seven still didn't want to let him go.

Eventually, I convinced my boy that this particular friendship wasn't going to work out, and Seven's brief career as a wildlife foster parent ended with a trip to the veterinarian. So technically, Seven has the only confirmed catch in the family. Paige has the obsession.

Training the Human

I've spent years training my dogs, and I've learned that every canine sport or activity requires teamwork. Squirrel chasing is no exception.

It's just that I'm not entirely sure Paige and I agree about our respective roles. I consider myself responsible for safety, leash management, and preventing her from disappearing into shrubbery. Paige considers me unnecessarily slow.

My job is apparently to spot squirrels sooner, keep the leash from interfering with her performance and, most importantly, keep up. I am not particularly good at any of these things. Fortunately, Paige doesn't seem interested in replacing me. Yet.

The Joy Is in the Chase

Watching Paige has made me think about why dogs enjoy the activities we call sports in the first place. They don't know there's a title at stake.

They don't care about ribbons. They certainly don't go home and check the standings.

Whether Paige is running an agility course, flying off a dock, making a child smile during a hospital visit, posing for the camera, or staring hopefully up at her favorite squirrel's tree, what I see is a dog completely engaged with whatever is in front of her. Maybe Paige Turner understands something that we humans occasionally forget. Sometimes the joy is simply in doing what you love.

Continued on next page ►

on the

THANK YOU TO SUSAN HARTZLER FOR THIS ISSUE'S COVER PHOTO. DID SOMEONE SAY DOCK DIVING?





► Continued from previous page

Paige doesn't care that she's never caught a squirrel. Yesterday's missed opportunities don't matter. Neither does the squirrel that escaped up the tree five minutes ago. Because suddenly... THERE'S ANOTHER ONE! And everything begins again.

The Official Standings

If we're keeping score, Paige's record isn't particularly impressive. Squirrels spotted: thousands. Squirrels pursued: as many as I've allowed. Squirrels caught: zero.

Seven: Chipmunks caught: one. Chipmunks successfully befriended: zero. Veterinary bills resulting from competition: one.

But Paige would undoubtedly dispute this scoring system. From her perspective, every squirrel she encounters eventually runs away. Therefore, the official family standings are Paige Turner: thousands. Squirrels: zero. Seven: one very confused, but grateful, chipmunk.

Tomorrow morning, Paige will be back at it, checking the neighbor's backyard tree for her favorite opponent and preparing for another round. And I'll be right behind her.

Because even a gold-medal athlete needs a support team. Although, if you asked Paige what my role is, I suspect she'd have only one piece of advice: Keep up. ■



◀

Senkoro Squirrel
Supervisor,
Paige Turner.
Photos courtesy
of Susan Hartzler

◀

Seven and Paige
Turner



TIPS & TACTICS

MERRIE MEYERS
Editor Ruff Drafts

The Past, Present and Future walked into a bar. It was Tense.

IF IT DRIVES YOU CRAZY when someone uses punctuation incorrectly, this post is for you. While expressing yourself correctly is important, sharing your thoughts clearly is equally important.

Correct punctuation plays a crucial role in **enhancing the clarity, intonation, meaning, and precision of our writing**. Punctuation is a helpful guide, ensuring that readers can understand what we're trying to convey in our sentences. But punctuation rules are not set in stone. They reflect how we share our thoughts in society.

Over the centuries, punctuation has changed from creating rhythms for reading aloud, to rules of grammar, to tools for setting the tone in texts. These changes reflect shifts in how information is shared.

Early Greek and Latin had no spacing or punctuation. Orators used dots, placed strategically in the text to guide them where and when to stop for breath. As printed materials became more accessible, commas and periods were used to create a structure for the eye instead of the ear.

As writing moved from typewriters to keyboards, other changes have occurred. While punctuation is still critical for clarity in all forms of writing, from formal legal documents to casual texting, contemporary communication is driving how we convey our thoughts. Some notable changes are how we use spacing after periods, hyphens, exclamation points, the Em dash, and periods in texts.

Spacing after a period. If you learned to type using a typewriter, you may recall the rule of placing two spaces after a period. The two-space rule was created because of monospacing, the way a typewriter used the same space for each letter and number, regardless of its width. Two spaces made it clear that a new sentence began. As typewriters disappeared from business communication in the 1980s and personal computers replaced them, digital fonts with variable-width letters and punctuation were created, eliminating the need for added distance between sentences.

Today, all major style guides recommend one space after a period. The last major style guide to update the standard, the American Psychological Association (APA), did so in 2019. By 2020, many word processors and grammar checking tools began flagging double spaces after periods as a grammatical error.

Hyphens. Many compound words and modifiers have gradually lost their hyphens over the last century. Teen-ager is now commonly written as teenager. Today, major dictionaries favor the closed form. In 2007, the sixth edition of the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (OED), a more condensed form of the standard OED, was published. It included the removal of hyphens from about 16,000 compound words such as email, bumblebee and potbelly. In 2019, the Associated Press (AP) Stylebook updated its

See TIPS & TACTICS pg 35 ►

KATHY TOPHAM

Finding a Sport *for* Rougarou

I did not purposely go searching for a training challenge for my next sport dog, but I certainly found one with Rougarou.

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ET ME INTRODUCE you to my dog, a five-year-old Pyrenean Shepherd, named for the French foundation myth of the werewolf (he looks the part, eh?) or the swamp monster from Cajun culture—take your pick. He is 24 lbs. of muscle with a level of athleticism I have rarely met. Rougarou is a grey and black scruffy dog with a split-faced mask that tugged at my heart from the moment we met. I had no idea on that fateful autumn day how much this little dog would influence my life and shake up my preconceived notions about how to train dogs for sports and, honestly, how dogs learn.

I love training dogs and competing with them in all kinds of sports, but I do not consider myself a “dog trainer.” Rather, I am someone who trains my dogs with the help of instructors, fellow competitors, online classes, books—you name it. You could say it takes a village to train my dogs.

We started our training journey the week Rougarou came home. I introduced him to clickers (he hated them), shaping of foundation behaviors (Rougarou said nope), and refused to offer any behaviors, and tried to develop my hierarchical list of rewards (food, praise, and toys).

▶
Rougarou and
the author.
Photos
courtesy of
Kathy Topham



Pyrenean Shepherds are independent in their native environment. I think they need to know WHY more than other breeds. If Rougarou didn't understand how the behavior was to be used, take SIT for example, he wouldn't offer it, wouldn't lure into it, and certainly could not be gently placed into the position. Hands off! Also, I am convinced Pyr Sheps live in a different time dimension than us. A 30-second sit must feel like 30 minutes to them. I was exhausted just trying to get a sit stay!

By one, I was pretty sure Rougarou wasn't going to be my next agility partner. Nor was he shaping up to be an obedience or rally partner. He would disengage from our training and put himself in an empty crate. He began to avoid a handful of cookies, seeing that as an indication I must be up to no good. In agility class, he would refuse to move—either towards or away from the equipment. We were frustrated, and I feared he would lose his interest in everything.

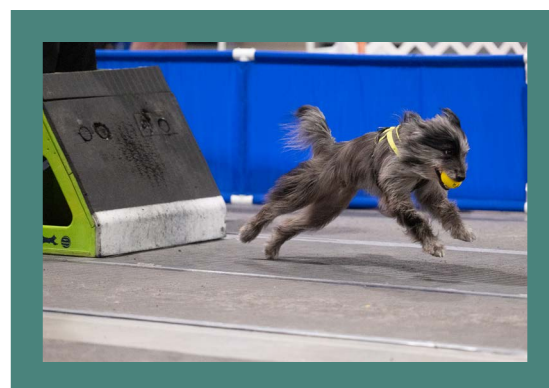
On a whim, I took him to a Fast CAT event. That's a 100-yard dash for the dog. They chase plastic bags (fake bunnies) tied onto a string and



Rougarou and a disk



Rougarou in flyball



attached to a motor. So, yep, our first success was in a sport that required no training.

Chasing frisbees was fun too. Bringing them back was not so much fun. We continued to struggle. He would bring the frisbee back to my general location, but would veer off and hide with it under my truck. Not the stellar performance I was hoping for. Dock diving was similarly a lukewarm success. I just wanted my boy to find something we could enjoy together.

Next up—flyball. My local club was offering a beginner class, so we signed up. For those who haven't seen or experienced flyball, the premise is simple. It is a four-dog relay race, where each dog jumps over a series of four jumps, grabs a ball from a spring-loaded box, then returns over the four jumps to their handler. Two teams race at a time. I thought with Rougarou's short attention span, high level of endurance and athleticism, paired with his lack of interest in other dogs, this might be the thing!

Our first class was an introduction to the box. The instructor placed a board against the wall. We were to reward them for any interaction.

As you can guess, Rougarou decided I had nefarious intentions, refused the cookies and the toys, and found an empty crate to put himself in. So, we watched while the other dogs in the class were rewarded for successfully putting all four feet on the board. One dog even executed a beautiful four paw "swimmer's turn." Yes!! Then it was our turn again. Rougarou went over to the board, executed the swimmer's turn, then disdainfully ignored my proffered treats and put himself in the crate.

The following week, we introduced a tennis ball velcroed to the board. Again, I let him watch other dogs successfully figure out how to jump, hit the board with all four paws, grab the ball, and get a jackpot of cookies. Our turn came up. The instructor said, "before we add the ball, since you were having trouble last week, let's see what he will do with just the board first." She placed the ball on a ledge behind the board, hidden from sight. Rougarou ran up, hit the board, climbed to the top, retrieved the hidden ball, gave it to me, refused the treats, and then put himself in the

See ROUGAROU pg 39



TONI EAMES

CDX



WHEN OUR GOLDEN RETRIEVER guide dogs, Ivy and Kirby, earned their CDs in November 1990, after qualifying in three straight shows with scores averaging in the mid-1990's, my late husband Ed and I jumped into open work.

When Ivy became the first guide dog in history to earn a CDX in March of 1992, we wrote to the Guinness World Records. Thinking this feat would not be of interest to the general public, they rejected our entry. It certainly was of interest to the obedience community. Although blind handlers can participate in the sport of obedience competition with minimal adaptations, few have taken advantage of this opportunity. Those few we know have competed with pet dogs. We were the only blind handlers who took our guide dogs into the ring.

In contrast to novice training, where we could practice independently, some of the open exercises required sighted assistance and specially adapted devices. Behind our townhouse was a small lawn area where we did the bulk of our training. Once a week, we practiced in a park or schoolyard with a class with sighted dog trainers.

In order to prevent confusion between the roles of working guide and obedience competitor, the dogs wore different collars and leads for each activity. Although open heeling is done off lead, when we practiced by ourselves, we used short leads to make sure the dogs remained in position. Initially, when training for the drop on recall, the dogs wore bells on their collars so we could determine whether they dropped. This method proved inadequate when we needed to reward and release them from the down position. Unless they were panting hard, the bells stopped ringing once they dropped. We turned to a friend for assistance.

Howard Hurtt, founder of Adaptive Devices Group, listened to our problem and came up with a clever solution. He created small beeping boxes attached to Velcro straps that could be placed

around the dogs' necks. Not only could we tell the instant the dogs dropped, but we could locate them and give them food rewards. The beeping boxes were also useful while practicing the long sits and downs. Bells on their collars alerted us to the dogs moving out of position, while the beeping boxes enabled us to return to the dogs at the end of the exercise. When not in use, a plug stopped the beeping sound, and the devices could be recharged when necessary.

Howard also designed a beeping dumbbell that Ed used when training Kirby to retrieve. Ivy was already a reliable retriever and took great joy in working with her dumbbell. Although Kirby, a true golden retriever, enjoyed carrying toys in his mouth, he had no formal training to fetch. He was happy to take the dumbbell from Ed's hand, but when it was thrown, he would not chase and retrieve it. By substituting the beeping dumbbell, Ed knew where it was and could more readily enforce his fetch command. Before getting this device, Ed had no way of knowing Kirby had disobeyed the fetch command until he returned empty-mouthed. Using the beeping device, Ed could immediately determine Kirby had retrieved and was returning with the dumbbell.

An unanticipated advantage of Howard's creation was improving my ability to throw the dumbbell. Although several classmates tried to teach me how to throw underhand, it just didn't work. By throwing it overhand, I had greater consistency in throwing straight.

Despite purchasing a set of jumps to practice on our own, we discovered the impossibility of practicing these exercises without sighted assistance. At first, I stood next to the high jump hoping to hear the thud of Kirby's landing when he took the jump. Although this method worked sometimes, it was not dependable. When Ed listened for Ivy's thud, the method was even less reliable due to her lighter weight. The broad jump

presented an even greater problem. We abandoned attempting to practice these exercises on our own because we didn't want to praise the dogs if they didn't take the jumps.

Deb Harper, a trainer, came to our rescue. Two or three times a week, she would come to our house and provide the sighted assistance we needed to practice the open exercises. In her role as training coach, she helped us prepare the dogs for competition.

As blind handlers in the novice ring, we also needed certain accommodations in the open ring. For the figure eight, posts had to provide an auditory signal by repeating the word post, until the exercise was completed. In addition, we had to be guided into position at the beginning of each exercise. In open, three additional accommodations were needed. Because we had difficulty walking a straight line, we requested removal of the jumps during the heeling pattern. In our training, we were encouraged to move swiftly in the ring to keep the dogs' attention focused on us. However, experience taught us that some judges failed to stop us before we collided with the ring ropes. The jumps in the ring during the heeling pattern could be a potential threat to our safety. During the drop on recall exercise, when many judges use hand signals, we needed voice signals. Since correct positioning of dog and handler was essential during the high and broad jump exercises, we needed someone familiar with the positions to position us during practice.

We wrote to the AKC, and they found our requests for accommodation reasonable. They didn't think these modifications would give us or the dogs an unfair advantage in the ring. Most judges were quite comfortable working with us, but some were noticeably nervous working with blind handlers.

Deb Harper was the pivotal element in our open efforts. In addition to the individualized training sessions, she chauffeured us to out-of-town shows. She was showing her golden, Sage, for OTCH points, and Deb assisted us in the ring. Her most important role was placing us correctly for the high and broad jumps. When judges preferred giving hand signals on the drop on recall, Deb provided verbal signals.

When we decided to compete with the dogs in Bermuda, we wondered how we could manage in the ring without Deb. She offered to stow herself in our luggage, but we found a more practical solution. By measuring the exact distance between the dogs and the jumps, we could let the judges in Bermuda know precisely where to position us and

the dogs for the jumping exercises. This technique proved successful. After earning their CDs in three straight shows, they each earned one open leg in the remaining two shows.

Whether we were working in the ring or guiding in harness, Ivy and Kirby's performance style was very different. Ivy was very serious and showed concern when she made a mistake. Kirby, on the other hand, was happy-go-lucky and wasn't concerned when his performance in the ring was not up to par. Therefore, Ivy was easier to train and earned her CDX title in eight shows. Kirby had fun in the ring and invariably drew a comment from the judge about how energetic and animated he was. When he declined to participate in heeling, he ignored Ed's request to drop on recall, regarded the high jump as a one-way trip, pretended never to have been taught the broad jump, or feigned exhaustion on the sit stay, he never stopped smiling and wagging his tail. Of course, Ed contributed to some of these ring fiascos. Poor Kirby was terribly confused when Ed told him to jump instead of fetch in the retrieve on the flat exercise. On another occasion, Ed was sure Kirby had "nqed" when he had to give a second heel command so he sing-songed his come command on the next exercise. When Ed repeated the command (a definite nq) in his normal voice, Kirby did a flawless recall, an immediate drop, a straight front (a rare occurrence), and a perfect return to heel. The result of all this goofing off was that Ed and Kirby raised the national average for the number of trials needed to earn the CDX title!

Although Ivy's scores were not outstanding (187, 191 and 193), she earned a first and third placement while getting her title. Kirby got his first leg and a fourth place (187) at the same show where Ivy finished her CDX and took first place. Ed was getting discouraged and losing hope, but when Kirby got a second leg with a 187-1/2, Ed's spirits revived. Many entry fees, restaurant meals, hotel rooms, and miles later, Ed was overjoyed when Kirby earned his third leg, despite the less than outstanding score of 180! ■

JEREMY COHEN
Boston Dog Lawyers

Follow *your* Nose

THE DOG SPORT WHERE EVERYBODY CAN COMPETE

WHEN KATHY'S one-year-old Labradoodle, Ryder, was diagnosed with a broken hip that left him with a false joint and a lifelong mandate to participate in only low-activity exercise, she was left wondering how this exceptionally smart, active dog would get enough stimulation.

Then she heard about recreational scent work and its positive mental stimulation and decided to give it a try. From the first session, she knew she'd found the perfect activity.

"It was great because it did exhaust him, both mentally and physically," she said. "After a competition, he'll sleep so late the next morning that he'll forget all about waking me up to be fed."

Recreational scent work grew out of professional detection-dog training used for police and military dogs, and has increasingly gained popularity over the past 15 years. It began in 2006 when professional dog trainers Ron Gaunt, Amy Herot, and Jill Marie O'Brien developed K9 Nose Work, which allows dogs of all breeds, ages and abilities to use their natural scent skills to search for hidden odors as a fun enrichment activity. It quickly grew into a competitive sport, with the National Association of Canine Scent Work (NACSW) established in 2009 and now exists in numerous organizations and competition formats.

"Dogs' noses are thousands of times stronger than human noses," said Kim Lewis, owner of Lucky Dog Events in New Salem, Mass., where Ryder attends classes. "Investigating with their noses, finding the prize and getting rewarded gives all dogs, and especially anxious or reactive dogs, an outlet and a confidence boost."

In scent work, dogs are trained to sniff essential oils, usually birch, anise, clove and cypress, in the same way a detection dog would be trained to find gunpowder or drugs, said Lewis, who has been instructing dogs in multiple sports including

agility, nose work, obedience, confidence, puppy classes and more for 25 years.

There are multiple types of scent work: container searches, which Ryder does, where dogs sniff out a scent in a box or other closed container; interior searches, to find a scent in a room or building; exterior, where dogs sniff grassy areas or fields for a specific scent, often a pair of antlers; barn hunts, where dogs sniff out rats; and vehicle searches.

Any breed can participate in scent work, and dogs can begin training as puppies. They can typically begin competing between six months and one year old.

Ryder's mom, Kathy, said it's also been a wonderful bonding experience for the two. They've been doing scent work together for more than two years, and Ryder has competed and titled in the sport multiple times, which is another positive aspect, she said, as it's not just about winning first place.



JON PATCH

FORGOTTEN

Every day I'd drive this old country road,
see nothing but trees and hills that time will erode

I'd whistle a tune in my old country way,
with thoughts and concerns of our country's decay

I looked to the left and then to the right,
that's when I saw him; he was oh such a sight

He seemed to be staring down the old country road,
in hopes that his master would return, as he was told

I couldn't go by and let his life end that way,
so I stopped and decided to make a difference that day

I approached him so slowly with a voice of content,
but he ran to the woods for I was not his master, God
sent

Each day would go by, I'd continue the same
then one day it was different, he remembered my name

His body was weak, a breath hardly felt,
but I gave him my love of which gave him his health

Off this old country road, he now has a home,
water and food with a bed and a name of his own

Now I am his master and he is my friend
how could anyone consider this dog's life, the end. ■

Titling in the sport means finding all the sniff targets. Any dog in the competition can title, although usually only a small percentage of each group do. And the ones who find them the fastest "win" by placing in the competition.

Kathy and Ryder go for accuracy over speed, but she said he's also come in first place at some of his competitions, which is a fun bonus.

But by far, the best part about scent work is its inclusivity. "It's great for both able-bodied dogs and those who can't be as active, like Ryder," Kim said. "If you can't run in an agility ring, it's a great alternative."

Even reactive dogs, who are often excluded from dog sports because of their group nature, can safely participate. The NACSW is strict about where trials and competitions can be held. For instance, they can't have competitions where there might be dog walkers or loose dogs that could distract or frighten dogs in search areas.

Dog parents can choose to keep their dogs on leash, even during indoor competition searches, if they feel more comfortable doing so. Outdoor sniff searches are automatically done on leash, as it's all about the safety of the dogs.

"That way, dogs are confident they can search and not worry about other dogs. It's a great option for dogs that don't like other dogs," Lewis said. ■

For more information or to find a certified instructor near you, visit <https://www.nacsw.net/>.



nacsw.net

IONNIE HODGE

Devil's Kettle

WE STARTED TOO LATE. It was nearly sunset by the time we reached the waterfall. The guidebook told me how far but not how difficult the climb would be. My two-year-old Labradoodle raced ahead, teasing me, returning often, puzzled but delighted I couldn't keep up with her. It was a steep, taxing hike, so I knew I was in for a cold, but thigh-burning descent back as darkness fell. I should've been worried because there were no other hikers.

Thankfully, despite having an intimate knowledge of panic and trauma, I've never been afraid of the dark. It is falling asleep and waking drenched in a cold sweat, or some days even just waking up at all, that terrifies me. But, as emotional padding, I was gifted the longest, most spectacular sunset I can ever remember.

Devil's Kettle was beautiful in the fading light. Devil's Kettle, but there is nothing demonic about its muscular beauty.

The river, strange that I cannot remember its name, divides a few feet before the falls. Half of the tannin-rich, bronze water roared over the edge, sounding like what my Buddhist friends might say were 10,000 lions agonizing over a good man's death. The other half poured into a slowly rotating whirlpool that locals claim to be a magical kettle.

I carried little with me on this trip. But I was weighed down by memories. Some of us carry sorrow deep in our pockets, a heavy coin we can use to pay the boatman who will carry us from one side of life's river to the other, where we hope peace waits for us.

Memories are like relatives: the good ones rarely come when invited, and the bad ones never leave when they should. On this trip, of dozens we have taken together, we were near Grand Marais,

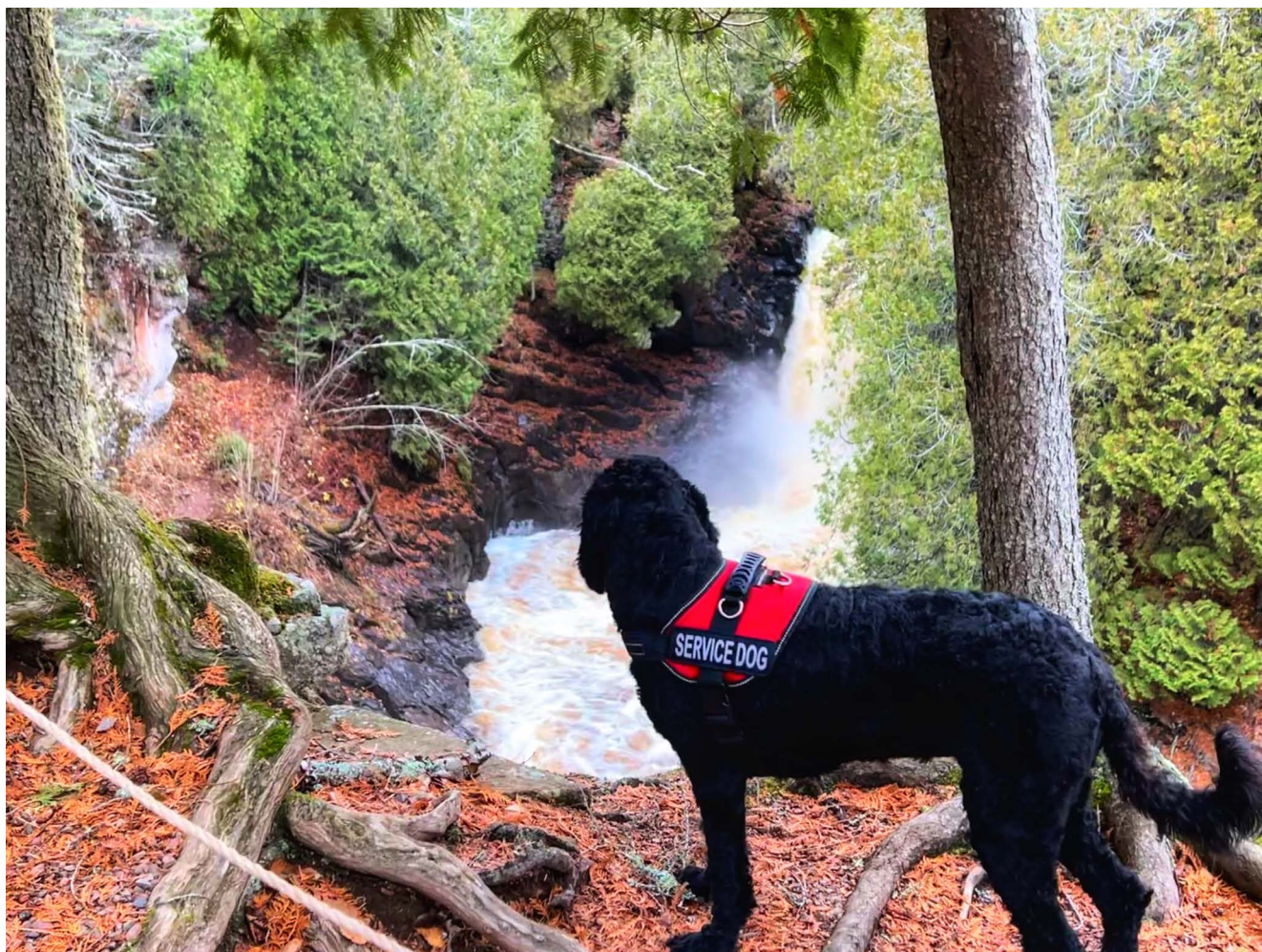
Minnesota. I was hoping for a miracle: I asked the falls to teach me how to quietly empty a full and aching heart. But it was late and time to return, with or without an answer.

Experts, I am told, still look to spoil centuries of awe here. Scientists who have come here often lack imagination. Those wannabe mystery poachers have poured dye, ping-pong balls, and water-resistant trackers into the bowl and then rushed downriver in an attempt to gut legend, break a generation of sacred magician's vows, and spill the secrets of the falls. But nature's sleight of hand still puzzles them. They come asking the wrong questions.

My wise service dog watched me as I was mesmerized by the water. I am sure she could hear the past crashing against my time-worn heart and slowly leaned her head on my thigh. She's never left my side as I have journeyed through a long pandemic of thundering loss on my quest toward healing from PTSD. Is there any better medicine than hiking with a furry friend?

As we carefully made our way down the mountain, the colors of dusk changed again and again, from one gentle pastel to another. So, I did not quicken my descent despite the barely visible roots stretching across a steep and narrow trail. Wood, barely above the ground, that an imaginative friend of mine fantasized as a child were witches' knees and elbows, posed no living or ghostly threat.

Halfway back, I paused to rest and caught a hint of pure, natural vanilla. I'd noticed a whiff of sweetness at the same spot while trekking up. I had wondered if it was a hunter disguising his scent, or a squatter's camp cooking something delicious.



I stopped, caught my breath, and filled my lungs and spirit with a smell as rich and beautiful as the dusk still ahead of me.

Once back to my lodge, I searched out the answer to the puzzling aroma that now resides forever in me. I learned that what I smelled was ponderosa pines, celebrating caducity. Caducity is how, after some three hundred years on earth, they announce on the wind they are ready to leave a life well-lived. How I wish my passing to be so pleasant.

I made two decisions that day: I want friends to pour some of my ashes into the kettle and at the base of those pines when I die, near where I left my pocketed coin of sorrow on the banks of the river. I left it there after my “class” at the falls, because I am no longer worried about needing to buy my way into an early eternal solace. I promised the best friend I’ve ever had, Mae, the bodhisattva, the furry guardian angel who quietly polices my soul, that I would always be there to thank her and care for her. And we would hike in this life and the next.

I now know for certain there’s nothing devilish about nature’s parlour tricks. There are mysteries that belong only to the divine: where rushing currents of doubt and hope begin and end. I am now ready to pour out my sorrows and leave judgment to winds that will one day carry me as a fragrant memory back to the river’s edge. ■

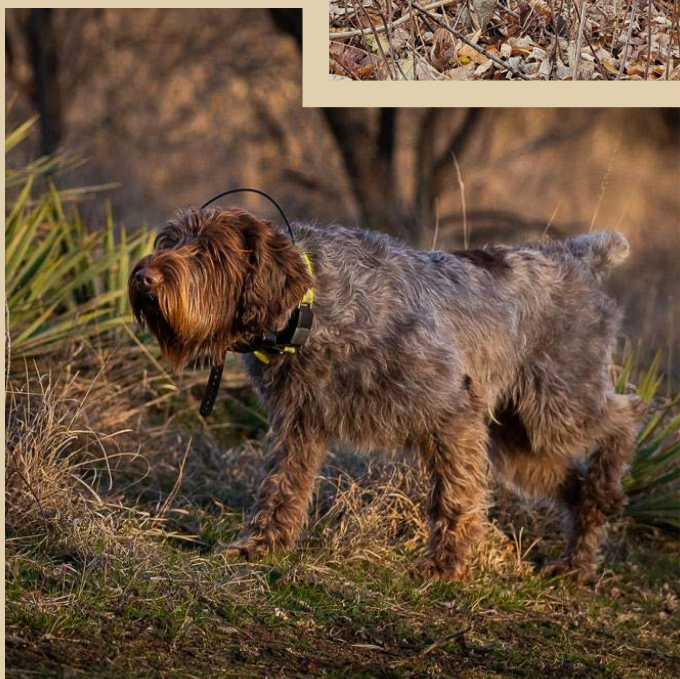
▲
The Overlook
at the Waterfall.
Photo courtesy of
lonnie Hodge

CAROL ERDIE, AWPGA

Wirehaired Pointing Griffon

PROTECTING *the* DUAL-PURPOSE HERITAGE

Every fall, somewhere in a field, a Griffon freezes on point—eyes fixed ahead, body still, every instinct focused on the bird hidden somewhere beyond us.



▲
Rosie demonstrates her fieldwork.
Photos courtesy of Carol Erdie

◀
Buck.

I

N THAT INSTANT, generations of thoughtful breeding come alive. Whether we hunt wild birds, compete in AKC Hunt Tests or the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA), show

in the conformation ring, or simply train our dogs to do the work they were bred for, we become part of preserving that heritage. For the Wirehaired Pointing Griffon, the sporting life isn't simply an activity. It is the breed's identity.

The Wirehaired Pointing Griffon was never intended to excel in just one arena. The breed's greatness lies in doing both—working all day in the field and embodying the breed standard in the show ring.

The Wirehaired Pointing Griffon continues to earn its reputation as a truly dual-purpose gun-dog—one that performs with honesty and intelligence in the field while possessing the conformation, temperament, and structure described in our breed standard. As the breed grows in popularity and national visibility, including Griffons such as Rosie, a 2026 Westminster invitee, we are reminded that recognition in the ring must always remain grounded in the breed's original purpose.

When a Griffon can hunt wild birds all fall, and then step onto the nation's most visible stages with correct structure and moderation, we see our standard expressed exactly as intended. The balance between field ability and breed type is the foundation we are responsible for preserving.

Form, Function, and the Griffon's Working Identity

The Griffon's hallmark harsh coat, moderate frame, and cooperative, close-working hunting style were developed for practical, functional reasons. These traits are not decorative—they are tools that allow a Griffon to operate effectively in thick cover, withstand harsh weather, and remain in partnership



◀ A 2026 Westminster invitee, Rosie brings national visibility to the breed while remaining, first and foremost, a capable working dog.

▶ Buck with owner Amy Caswell O Claire.



with its handler during long days in the field.

Correct structure—balanced angles, a strong topline, efficient movement—translates directly to endurance. When we evaluate Griffons in the conformation ring, we are not simply judging appearance, we are assessing whether the dog before us could do the job the breed was created for.

The Griffon in the Field

Those who hunt behind a Griffon know its hallmarks: a remarkable nose, natural tracking ability, intensity on point, and an unwavering desire to cooperate. A well-bred Griffon works within a natural range, adjusts to terrain and scent conditions, and maintains a steady, earnest work ethic.

Participation in NAVHDA tests, AKC Hunt Tests, and real hunting situations remains essential to preserving these qualities. Even modest involvement—one hunting season, a Natural Ability test, or basic field training—helps breeders and owners appreciate how deeply structure, temperament, and performance are connected.

Honoring Dual-Purpose Excellence: The Brandy Memorial Trophy

The AWPGA's commitment to the dual-purpose Griffon is reflected in the Brandy Memorial Trophy, established in 2015 in memory of GCH Whiskeytown Brandewyn ("Brandy").

The 2014 #1 Griffon in Breed and All-Breed points, Brandy, also earned her Senior Hunter title before her untimely passing at four-and-a-half years old. The award honors dogs that embody the true Griffon ideal.

Recent recipients include Brandy (2014), Brie (2015–2016), Kitt (2017–2018), and Buck (2021–2023).

This award reinforces the principle that excellence in our breed has always included **both** field and conformation.

Spotlight on Dual-Purpose Griffons

To illustrate the dual-purpose balance at the heart of the breed, here are two modern Griffons—Rosie and Buck—whose accomplishments reflect both functional ability and correct breed type.

Rosie — A Functional Hunter with Correct Breed Type

GCHS SoaNipi Point Rosefinch MH TKI, UT2 NA2 exemplifies the breeding philosophy that links true field ability with correct structure. A 2026 Westminster invitee, Rosie brings national visibility to the breed while remaining, first and foremost, a capable working dog. In 2025, she earned her NAVHDA Utility Prize II and AKC Master Hunter title, demonstrating competence in both upland and waterfowl work. Her moderate movement, correct coat,

and balanced outline reflect the breed standard, while her accomplishments illustrate that success in the ring is built on the same qualities that allow a Griffon to work honestly and effectively in the field.

Buck — A Versatile Hunting Dog with Proven Structure and Temperament

GCHG CH Double Barrel's Turkey Creek Jack Johnson CGCA MH NAI ("Buck") exemplifies the dependable hunting ability and sound structure that define the Wirehaired Pointing Griffon. With an AKC Master Hunter title and NAVHDA NAI, he demonstrates the cooperation, steadiness, and eagerness to please expected of the breed.

In the field, Buck hunts with confidence and purpose. In conformation, he is an AKC Grand Champion Gold, Best in Show winner, two-time Westminster Best of Breed winner, and the #1 Griffon in 2022 and 2023. His outline, movement, and coat reflect the standard's vision of a moderate, capable sporting dog.

Buck embodies everything the breed was intended to be—a capable hunting dog, a structurally correct show dog, and an affectionate companion. His stable, gentle temperament completes the picture of a truly versatile Griffon.

BETH DIXON

What is Excellence in Agility?

HAVE YOU EVER aspired to be successful in any sport? This kind of pursuit can be heartbreaking if you are, like me, barely competent or even less than competent! In dog sports, especially, there is a real tragedy lurking here. This is because our disappointments about performance may negatively affect our dogs who are working so hard to make us happy.

I confess to a long, frustrating quest to succeed in agility with my dog, Maggie. These painful anecdotes are described and analyzed in my book, *Canine Agility and the Meaning of Excellence: Formulating an Ethical Approach*. My experiences of competing with Maggie led me to ask, “What am I trying so hard to do?” Once I asked this very basic question, I positioned myself to inquire about and challenge what excellence means in the sport of agility. I argued that excellence is not necessarily measured in traditional ways, by qualifying runs, titles, and championships. These points, ribbons, and certificates are external to the real ethical value of the relationship between handler and dog. What is central to the sport of agility is the *team* that works together in training and in competition. The value of this relationship lies in mutual trust, mutual respect, and mutual communication between handler and dog. What this means in practice, of course, is infinitely variable depending on the dog, the handler, and the circumstances. In my writing, I have tried to describe what these values look like in real-world situations by interviewing fellow competitors, trainers, judges, and classmates about what excellence means. For example, Diane Fyfe is an AKC judge who graciously shared her time for an interview at the end of a

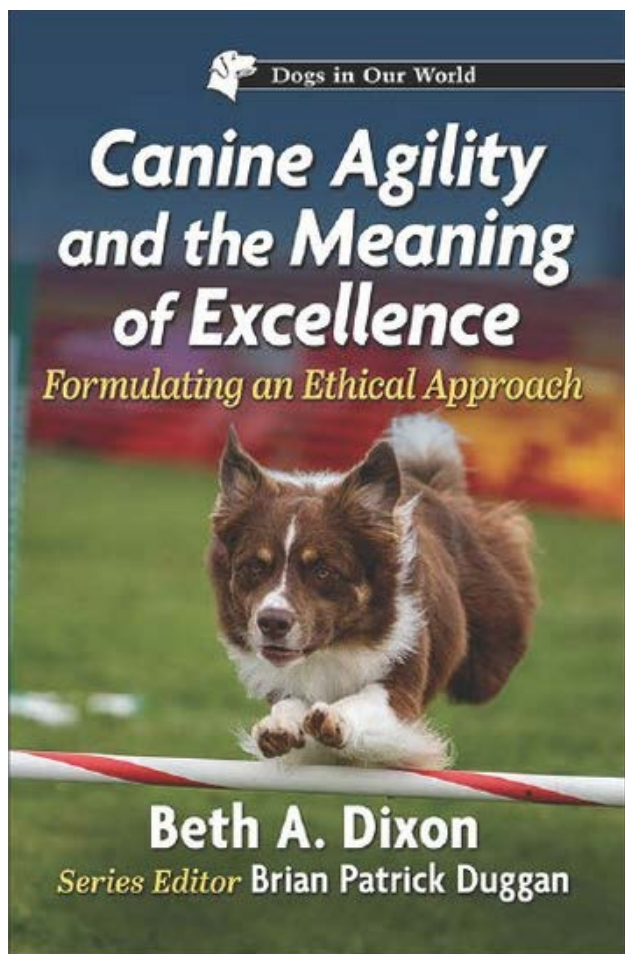


long three-day trial. I asked her whether a team can display excellence but fail to earn a qualifying run. She had this to say,

“Yes. The other thing I think is that people need to ask themselves how much passion do they have for this? If you really want to be excellent you have to have a passion for what you are doing. Otherwise, are you going to put 100 percent effort into that thing? Because you’re not going to make a lot of money, as a matter of fact. You’re going to spend a lot of money. So what are you there for? Are you there for the recognition? If so, that is not the right motivational state to have in the pursuit of excellence” (*Canine Agility and the Meaning of Excellence*, 119-20).

And now what do I think? After writing the book and speaking publicly about the topic, I see more clearly that the traditional ways of measuring success in this sport are hard to ignore. If a team is succeeding in this traditional way, the handler does not need or maybe doesn’t want a different way of measuring success. The one they have is good enough because it supplies positive reinforcement from the agility community and from the organizations that set goals for qualifying runs, titles, and championships. I know this from my own experience as well. I now have a two-year-

▲
Kip goes
through the
tire. Photo
courtesy of
Beth Dixon



old “teenager” who is making her first real forays in the ring. Kip is not as hard to run as Maggie. In fact, she is a joy, a happy, confident little dog who doesn’t try to bite me at the bottom of the A-frame. Now I, too, have something to brag about if I wanted to post her accomplishments online. But I have learned something from my failures. I have learned that the real measure of excellence is what we are slowly and painstakingly building together in the training field and in the ring. This story is harder to document and to describe since it is more complex than one training moment or one run at a competition. It began when Kip came to my house as a puppy, and it includes all our many interactions since then, in a variety of settings. We have learned quite a lot about one another in two years. Yet, there are no points awarded for what we have achieved together so far.

Do you have a story about excellence in agility that you would like to tell me about? Email: dixonphilanddogsport@gmail.com. ■

Tips & Tactics

► Continued from pg 23

guidance on dual nationalities, changing Asian-American to Asian American. The phasing out of hyphens reflects the speed of communication in the digital era.

Exclamation points. With all the enhancements created in the digital era, there are still some challenges, such as conveying the intended tone of a message. Shorter sentences sacrifice pauses and vocal cues that helped us understand the intent of a conversation. The exclamation point is one common solution. No longer just for moments of strong emotion or loudness, the exclamation point can also indicate friendliness in a text or email, such as “Thanks!” to convey warmth or enthusiasm. Because short digital messages without punctuation can seem irritated or distant, the exclamation point has become the equivalent of adding a smile.

The em dash. As our writing has become shorter, faster, and more conversational, one punctuation mark that is increasing in use is the em dash (—). It is used to create emphasis within a sentence, often replacing commas, parentheses or colons. It is more informal than other forms of punctuation, reflecting spoken conversation more than printed text. The origin of the em dash—so named because it is the width of the letter M—goes back centuries and in multiple languages. During the typewriter era, the lack of a dedicated em dash key led to the use of two hyphens, but in the digital era, the em dash has rebounded in use.

Eliminating periods in texts. The period has been used for more than 500 years to indicate the stop of one thought and the start of another. The role of the period changed with the increased use of cell phones and texting for communication. Beginning in the 2010s, a period could suggest annoyance or anger. “OK.” indicates anger or frustration, while “OK” seems more relaxed. People may omit periods altogether in texts to avoid sounding angry. However, in longer forms of writing, the period remains an essential tool for communicating clearly. ■

Merrie Meyers, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, is Editor of Ruff Drafts. She compiles the information in Tips and Tactics to help members with their writing.



BARBARA MAGERA, MD

Nathaniel Russell

R

ECENTLY, I WAS ON THE HUNT to add a ruby Cavalier puppy to our family.

I have been very lucky and blessed to have several Cavalier conformation show champions. I was searching for a show quality puppy; however, experience taught me the importance of health testing in the bloodlines. Because of my clinical experience as a physician, I am very attuned to the role of mitral valve disease (mvd) in toy breeds with the highest incidence in Cavaliers. I was searching for a breeder who utilizes echocardiography to heart clear their bloodlines. Many Cavalier breeders in North America rely on auscultation for cardiac clearances which is at best only 40 percent accurate to diagnose mvd.

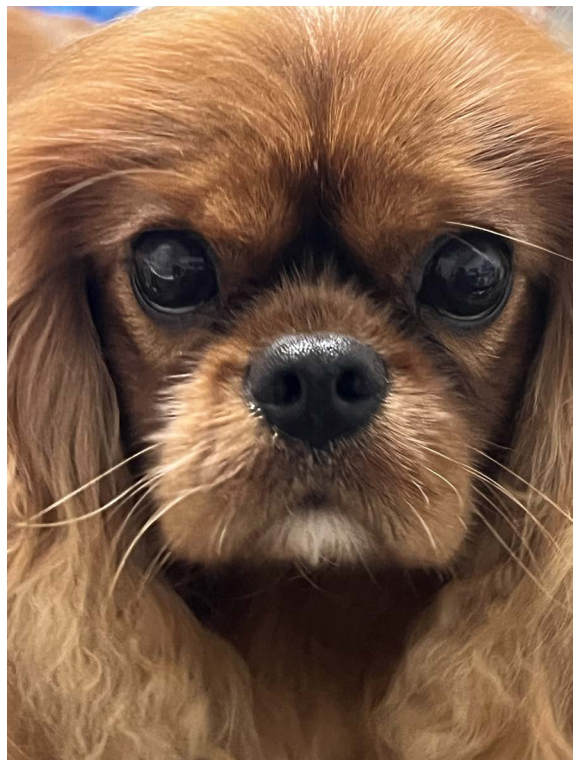
After much diligent searching, I connected with a breeder I knew from the conformation world who had a whole color litter. She owned both the dam and sire and agreed to perform a cardiac echo on both. Luckily, they were echo heart clear for mvd.

The breeder provided videos and photos of a ruby brother and sister. After agonizing about which pup to pick, I decided to bring both pups into our family.

For the first few weeks, the pups demanded my attention every three to four hours to potty, play or eat. I was severely sleep deprived while performing the mundane but necessary tasks of puppyhood. Strong bonds were forming between me and the pups.

As the pups matured, Noel was the obvious alpha canine. She dominated her brother in every physical activity. Nathaniel's personality was much more relaxed. During playtime, Noel prevailed in rough and tough play which Nathaniel thoroughly enjoyed.

At six months old, I registered Nathaniel in a Charleston conformation show. On the first show day, we awoke in the wee hours of the morning for washing and grooming. When we went outside



for a prewash potty relief, Nathaniel was obviously limping. I immediately placed him on the grooming table and examined his extremities by gently gliding his shoulders, forearms, hind legs and paws through range of motion. None of these maneuvers caused pain, tenderness or restricted movement. I carefully palpated his spine, which did not elicit any pain or restricted movements. At daybreak, my husband awoke and came into the kitchen. He observed Nathaniel's gait and confirmed our pup was indeed limping. We immediately canceled our show plans and headed for an emergency visit with our veterinarian. Several hours later and after normal x-rays, our vet concluded Nathaniel's abnormal gait was the result of a soft tissue injury. I mentally reviewed the pre-

▲
Nathaniel Russell.
Photos courtesy of
Barbara Magera

vious day's playtime with Noel. I concluded that the roughhouse play with Noel were too strenuous for Nathaniel. Interestingly, this little boy didn't complain, cry, or scream when Noel was obviously aggressively dominating him. Our vet prescribed a mild anti-inflammatory agent and restricted activity for Nathaniel. I was disappointed that despite our weeks of practice, a playtime injury forced the cancellation of his debut in the show ring. I was looking forward to showing off my stunning ruby starlet at my home club show. From then on, we monitored activities with his sister. We didn't want to encourage Noel's escalation of further injuries to her baby brother.

As time passed, the personalities of both pups emerged. Noel still remains the alpha Cavalier with a drive to be the first to attempt any new activities. She clearly expresses with forthright doggie barks exactly what she wants, namely food, treats, toys or our attention.

Nathaniel has blossomed into a very obedient and loving little boy. He thoroughly enjoys bath time and grooming. His favorite sport is retrieving soft small Dr Noy's toys. He is clearly irritated, but tolerates Noel's attempts to steal his favorite toy.

Trying to curtail Nathaniel's interest in wooing the canine ladies has proven futile. Despite my many attempts to utilize diapers or belly bands, he manages to escape these restrictions. Presently, Nathaniel has the "hots" for my Danish-bred black and tan girl. Bella is athletic but kinder when playing with Nathaniel.

My chaotic schedule precludes me from routinely attending dog shows. I finally decided to place Nathaniel with two all-breed handlers who are experienced with Cavaliers. More importantly, they exude enthusiasm in the ring. They ensure the dogs enjoy their show experiences. Our goal is for Nathaniel to learn the routine of the conformation show world while having fun in the ring.



The results of these two young handlers is impressive. At his second show, a very seasoned and well respected judge awarded Nathaniel winners dog and best of winners. On show day two, Nathaniel won winners dog and a three-point major. I am very proud of my ruby boy but I realize he still faces a steep learning curve. I have no doubt that under the careful training of his handlers, his future looks bright and hopeful. Most of all, Nathaniel is happy and having oodles of fun at the dog shows. I am very grateful to his breeder for this gorgeous and loving ruby Cavalier. ■

Barbara E. Magera MD, PharmD, MMM (Caracaleeb) is a Cavalier fancier, photographer and writer who lives and practices medicine in Charleston, SC. She blogs at caninescribbles.com

▲
Nathaniel wins winners dog and a 3 point major awarded by Judge Patti Widick Neal at the Greater Hickory Kennel Club, Greensboro NC.



caninescribbles.com

President's Column

► Continued from pg 3

a mother.” I don’t believe that having children does anything to improve anyone’s disposition, let alone a poor bitch.

Please, everyone, let’s focus on educating the public about the issue of canine overpopulation, so that we don’t have to euthanize hundreds of thousands of dogs anymore!

Therese Backowski

Therese Backowski

DWAA President

Rosebud

► Continued from pg 19

while pursuing creatures much larger than she was. When one of the sheep got out of line, Rosebud barked and stared at it intently.

Then something happened that amazed the trainer.

The sheep suddenly did an about-face and ran in the opposite direction. Without missing a beat, Rosebud turned and began running counterclockwise, following the sheep as they changed course. The trainer was very impressed. Afterward, she told me she had never seen a “newbie” perform that maneuver without the training to do it.

Then came the unfortunate part.

Apparently, one of the larger sheep had finally had enough of this little interloper who was running them ragged. The sheep stopped, waited until Rosebud got close enough, raised a hoof indignantly, and then stomped on Rosebud’s paw.

I can only imagine how much that hurt. Needless to say, Rosebud’s performance came to an abrupt end.

All in all, Rosebud was a star. She had displayed natural skill and talent in a sport I had never even considered before that day.

I took a very tired dog home, praising her for her impressive performance. But after spending three hours bathing her when we arrived home, I decided to retire her from any future sheep-herding exhibitions.

Rosebud concurred. ■

Answers to the Quiz

Every answer was C.

Worth Living

► Continued from pg 13

sprawling, cherished array of his own, courtesy of his doting grandparents. His once-guarded demeanor eventually gave way to an inimitable charm upon greeting fellow dogs on walks. In a nutshell, bit by bit, Finn was a dog reclaiming his missed puppyhood.

Today, Finn’s marveling over tiny wonders reflects a life he treasures: being utterly enchanted by a blowing leaf, stretching out on a sun-drenched patch of grass, and feeling compelled to track down every intriguing aroma. Finn now throws his whole heart into these moments. A leisurely stroll becomes a sensory-packed adventure, a game of chase becomes a contest of vying to outdo one another in ridiculousness, and cuddling together becomes a mutually agreed-upon disregard for any semblance of personal space. Finn’s fleshed-out sense of self now appears in his preferences, comforts, and idiosyncrasies: his insistence that an overly ragged toy among many more desirable options is premium entertainment, his delicate corn cobbing, and his rapid series of jubilant play-bows delivered with absolute urgency whenever we are reunited. Although we still face some challenges, I see them as a chance to be a united team against anything that comes our way.

Finn was never simply a dog in need of care, but an individual whose richness transcends words, whose unmistakable captivation with living and limitless theatrics deserves to be deeply celebrated and ardently protected. No shelter dog is merely a life to be saved. Every shelter dog deserves to be granted an opportunity to flourish in their entirety with the freedom to be fully, unmistakably themselves. Through the tireless, persistent efforts along the chain of rescues, sanctuaries, fosters, and adopters, shelter dogs like Finn can quietly and bravely tiptoe their way toward softness, patience, and love, and discover there is still a vibrant, abundant, high-vitality life worth living. ■

While Hailey completes her master’s degree in professional communication/digital media and a certificate in nonprofit management, she aims to further immerse herself in animal welfare and advocacy roles. Ultimately, she seeks to combine the knowledge and perspective gained through these experiences with the depth and breadth of her animal science and preclinical veterinary background to be a force for advancement, impact, education, and lasting change in the world of animal welfare and advocacy.

Rougarou

► Continued from pg 25

crate again. He figured out quickly that the ball was the important part of the trick.

Next, the instructor asked me to send Rougarou to a tennis ball she placed in the middle of the floor to see how well he retrieved. Well, instead of just running up and back to me, Rougarou ran up to her, grabbed the ball, then diverted over to the wall where the board was still placed, hit the board with all four feet, and then brought the ball back to me. He made a triangle to include the board! He put the pieces together all on his own. He understood the task was to do both—hit the board AND give the ball back to me. I was dumbstruck.

I found a local flyball club and convinced them to let us come and watch the entire behavior chain from the sidelines. Dogs training to compete ran over the jumps, hit the box, grabbed the ball, then returned to their owners right in front of us.

Now it was our turn. The instructor asked where we were in our training journey and what we wanted to work on. “I just want to take him back to the start and let him run the whole thing,” I said.

“Well, okay,” the team leader said somewhat dubiously. Sure enough, the little dog that watched flyball performed the sequence flawlessly. Four

jumps, ball, turn, four jumps back. He handed me the ball but refused the reward.

Rougarou is competing successfully in flyball these days. Our breakthrough in flyball has translated to frisbee and dock diving. I let him watch the behavior I am looking for, and he can successfully translate what he sees into performing the task himself.

My takeaway lessons from my experience with Rougarou are these: the traditional methods commonly used for training dogs for sports are not a one-size-fits-all. Not every dog learns the same way. Some dogs are more visual learners, just like some people. Sometimes it takes a village of instructors to find someone who can help your special dog. Some dogs find that being correct is more rewarding than cookies, toys, and praise. For Rougarou, “location” is also a very important cue, an abstract concept he uses for many things. Patience and willingness to think outside the box has helped us become a team that can enjoy the game.

Most importantly, I learned never to give up on difficult dogs. They have a lesson to teach us, if we are willing to listen. ■

Griffon

► Continued from pg 33

A Call for Stewardship

Rosie and Buck demonstrate why the Wire-haired Pointing Griffon must remain a functional sporting breed first. Their achievements show that excellence in the ring is most meaningful when supported by the structure, coat, instinct, and temperament needed for real field work.

As we look ahead, our priority must remain on preserving the traits that allow the Griffon to thrive in both field and ring:

- Moderate, functional structure
- Harsh, weather-resistant coat
- Natural pointing, tracking, and retrieving instincts

- A cooperative, stable temperament
- The ability to work honestly in the field while presenting correctly in the ring

These interconnected qualities are what make the Wirehaired Pointing Griffon the supreme gundog. Every time a Griffon stands motionless on point, retrieves a bird, earns a hunting title, or enters the conformation ring, we see that form and function were never meant to stand apart. Preserving both is our responsibility—and the greatest way we can honor the sporting heritage entrusted to us. ■

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