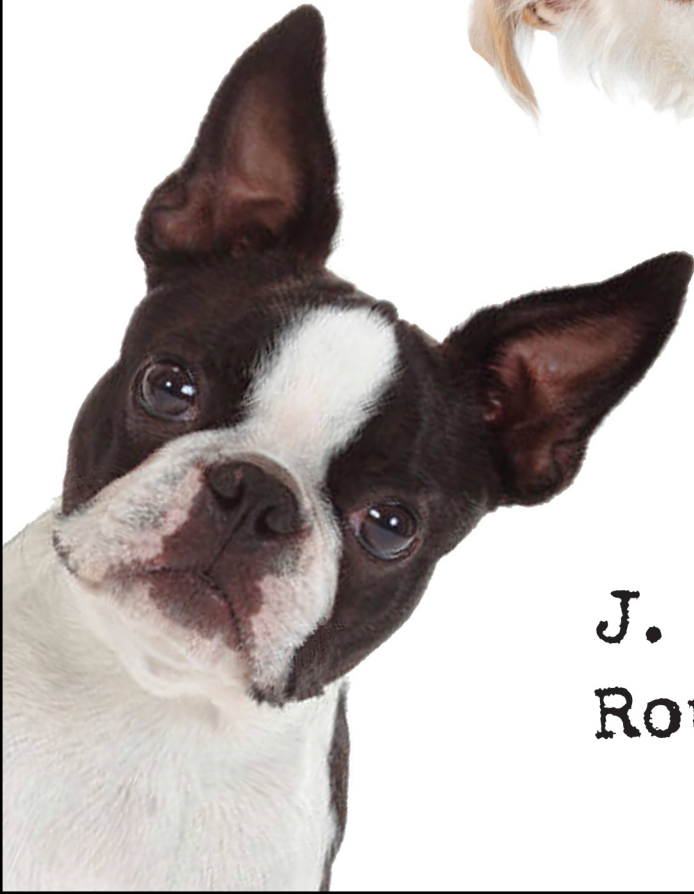


PLEASE WRITE



A NOVEL
in LETTERS



J. Wynn
Rousuck

PLEASE WRITE

A NOVEL IN LETTERS

J. Wynn Rousuck



BANCROFT PRESS

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TO MY PARENTS
AND ALL THE DOGS THEY BROUGHT INTO MY LIFE.

CHAPTER 1

Dear Grandma Vivienne,

You know I only write if something is amiss.

With considerable dismay, I must inform you there is another dog in the house. Frank brought home a puppy. Why??? This is a perfectly contented one-dog household.

The puppy arrived here dirty and shivering in the small hours. Pamela and I were asleep when Frank came into the bedroom, turned on the light, and deposited the muddy pup on the bed.

Pamela sat up, none too happy, and told Frank to get the puppy off the bed and out of the bedroom. And what was he doing staying out until this hour? And where was he? And we cannot keep that puppy! And some other things I didn't catch because I followed Frank and the puppy out of the room.

Frank gave the pup a bath in the basement washtub. It wouldn't stop whining and whimpering. At one point,

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it jumped out of the tub and shook dirty bathwater all over me. The indignity!

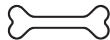
Pamela and Frank need to locate its owners. Soon.

I have enough to deal with trying to keep things on a steady keel around here. We do not need a superfluous, auxiliary animal. It's not even a Boston Terrier.

Yours,

Winslow

P.S. The selfish, scruffy pup has already eaten my dinner, stolen two dog biscuits, and decimated my favorite tennis ball.



DID YOU LOSE THIS DOG?



**WHITE FEMALE TERRIER PUPPY
FOUND SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28
IN FRONT OF HAMPDEN 7-ELEVEN**

CALL PAMELA: 410-627-0608

Cleveland Heights, Ohio
Thursday, November 1, 1990

Dear Zippy,

My first letter to you! Winslow and I have corresponded for some time, and he wrote to me about your arrival.

What a tough time you have had – cowering wet and cold under a parked pretzel truck in a rain-storm! And what a relief to be bundled into a warm car and taken to a warm home!

I am so glad to have the picture of you that Pamela sent – even if it is on a flyer that says: “DID YOU LOSE THIS DOG?”

I realize the flyer probably upset you. Rest assured, you have nothing to worry about. I promise.

Although Pamela printed lots of these flyers, I would bet that the rest of them are at the bottom of a trash can. Pamela gave them to Frank to post around the neighborhood. But remember, it was Frank who found you and brought you home. He has your best interests at heart.

It is also a positive sign that Pamela has given you a name – especially after insisting she did not want a second dog. I know that she considered naming you “Pretzels.” But that might have reminded you of your recent hard times. From what I hear about the way you dash around the house, “Zippy” suits you better.

I also urge you to calm down on another matter. Although Pamela called the Maryland SPCA and

placed ads in The Baltimore Sun, she has not had any results. Whoever left you out in the cold – just blocks from the SPCA! – is not coming back. Forget all about him, or her, or them. You now have a brand new, safe, permanent, loving home.

So, no need for worries.

Let's get back to the photo. You are quite an adorable little ragamuffin! You appear to have all of the best characteristics of a West Highland Terrier (positively precious!) and a Jack Russell Terrier (very intelligent!).

I know that Pamela will come to appreciate these fine qualities. Before long.

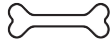
Winslow informs me that you have a fondness for tennis balls, so I have enclosed a package of miniature tennis balls. They are just your size and may surprise you with some "squeaks." I've also enclosed a rope pull-toy for Winslow because I know he is reading this to you. Be nice to Winslow. Keep in mind that he is a very formal dog (after all, as a Boston Terrier, he always wears a tuxedo). He is also a wise, steadying influence, but he is not accustomed to the high jinx of a young pup. And he was there first.

I am certain Winslow will also come to like you. Before long.

I already like you. A lot.

Love,
Grandma Vivienne

P.S. A bit of advice: Forgive me for bringing up the flyer again. I could not help noticing, however, that in the photo, you are sitting on the leather wing chair in the living room. This is not a good idea. It is apt to make Pamela cross. Winslow never jumps on the furniture.



“Vivienne!

Vivienne!

Vivienne!

Vivienne!

Rope toy!

Rope toy!

Rope toy!”

(Transcribed by Winslow, who requests a new rope toy. Zippy destroyed the miniature tennis balls, then stole my rope toy and promptly wrecked it, too. This is not the way “Winslow will also come to like you” is supposed to work. Far be it from me to cast aspersions, but I am beginning to understand why this pup may have been abandoned...)



Cleveland Heights, Ohio
Wednesday, November 7, 1990

Dear Zippy,

I am told that you have a real knack for getting the most out of toys. It is always fun to have a dog that enjoys toys!

Even so, you should respect Winslow's belongings. I realize that the concept of personal property may be difficult to understand at your tender age, but you must leave his things alone. You need Winslow to be your friend. He knows the ropes - oops, unfortunate word choice - and he is reading you my letters.

Speaking of age, Pamela said you had your first visit to the veterinarian and that he figures you are about seven months old. That is a very nice age to be. In people years, it makes you a toddler.

A word or two about the vet designating you as a "terrier mix." This is something you can be proud of. Owning a mixed-breed dog is new to Pamela, however. Her dad was a dog judge. That means he judged purebred dogs in competitions called "dog shows."

Judging dogs was his lifelong hobby. He began this hobby as a young man, before he got married, and well before Pamela was born. Pamela started going to dog shows when she was just a little girl.

What Pamela may not know is that her father

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once owned a mixed-breed dog. He often said it was the smartest dog he ever had.

Pamela's mother also may be partly to blame. After attending dog shows for a while, she began painting portraits of show dogs, which may have influenced Pamela. Her mother put her art aside when Pamela's dad got sick, but Pamela grew up with some of these pictures in the house.

So if Pamela is acting a bit snobby around you, please ignore her. She has been under a lot of stress lately and working way too hard, which is one reason she needs you - to get her out of the office. Did you know that petting a dog can lower a person's blood pressure? That means it improves a person's health. I am sure that just having you around will make Pamela's life calmer. Eventually.

Also, though you may not have loved your visit to the vet, the fact that Pamela took you there is yet another excellent sign that you're here to stay.

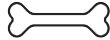
To reinforce your place in the household, I have just ordered your first piece of monogrammed jewelry. In a few days, you should receive a package containing a bright pink collar with a tag engraved with your new name, address, and phone number. I know this will look quite chic on you (and I wasn't sure how quickly Pamela would have a tag made).

The tag is shaped like a dog biscuit, but do not eat it! To clear up any confusion, I have

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enclosed some Milk-Bone puppy treats, with a coupon for Pamela to buy you more.

Love,
Grandma Vivienne



“TREAT!

TREAT!

TREAT!

TREAT!

TREAT!

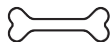
TREAT!

TREAT!

TREAT!

TREAT!”

(Transcribed by Winslow, who — reluctantly — acknowledges that, yes, Zippy, does appear to be here to stay, as you put it.)



Dear Grandma Vivienne,

Pamela and Frank keep saying how lucky I am to have a

canine companion. I, however, feel compelled to give you a more detailed account of what my life with Zippy is really like. In your first letter to Zippy, you advised her to stay off the furniture.

As you so accurately noted, I (almost) never, ever jump up on furniture. Indeed, I consider furniture-jumping to be behavior unbecoming a Boston Terrier. Zippy recognizes no such boundaries.

She's also the fastest thing on four legs. For several days now, I have had to put up with the ignominy of being chased around the house by this white fluff ball.

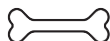
Mostly, she chases me around and around and around the first floor — living room, dining room, kitchen, living room, dining room, kitchen, living room, dining room... That would be bad enough, but yesterday she added a new trick.

At some point during this ridiculous race — usually before I have time to notice — she jumps up on a chair or sofa, waits until I come charging by, then leaps on me. The nerve! The humiliation!

Pamela and Frank have reprimanded Zippy about this, but I am pretty sure I detected a chuckle in their voices. Honestly, this is more than a well-bred Boston Terrier should have to put up with.

Yours, the deeply frustrated,

Winslow



Cleveland Heights, Ohio
Wednesday, November 14, 1990

Dear Zippy,

Oh, my goodness. It seems you did not understand my point about personal property. Pamela told me that you chewed up a book, and not just any book – her leatherbound collection of Shakespeare's plays.

I am not going to reproach you. I am sure Pamela has already done so, and I have no intention of adding any "bad dog's" to those you have already received. Fortunately, it is a grandmother's duty to spoil her grandpuppies, not to criticize them.

To be honest, I think all of this fuss about a book is "much ado about nothing," and I commend your choice! No doubt about it, Shakespeare gives you a lot to chew on. Nonetheless, Pamela went on and on and on about her "rare edition." I simply cannot imagine how she expected you to be aware of such things.

Still, Pamela is a theater critic and she uses these books for her job. That job puts treats in the treat jar and kibble in your bowl.

Your job, as I believe I have mentioned before, is to lower the stress in Pamela's life – not to increase it. The lesson here is: In the future, confine your chewing to your toys and stay away from books.

In an effort to channel your chewing in the

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right direction, I have enclosed another toy. This toy is in the shape of a rolled-up newspaper: "Doggy News: All the news that's fit to chew." I thought it was appropriate for two reasons: 1) Pamela works at a newspaper, and 2) you are being newspaper-trained.

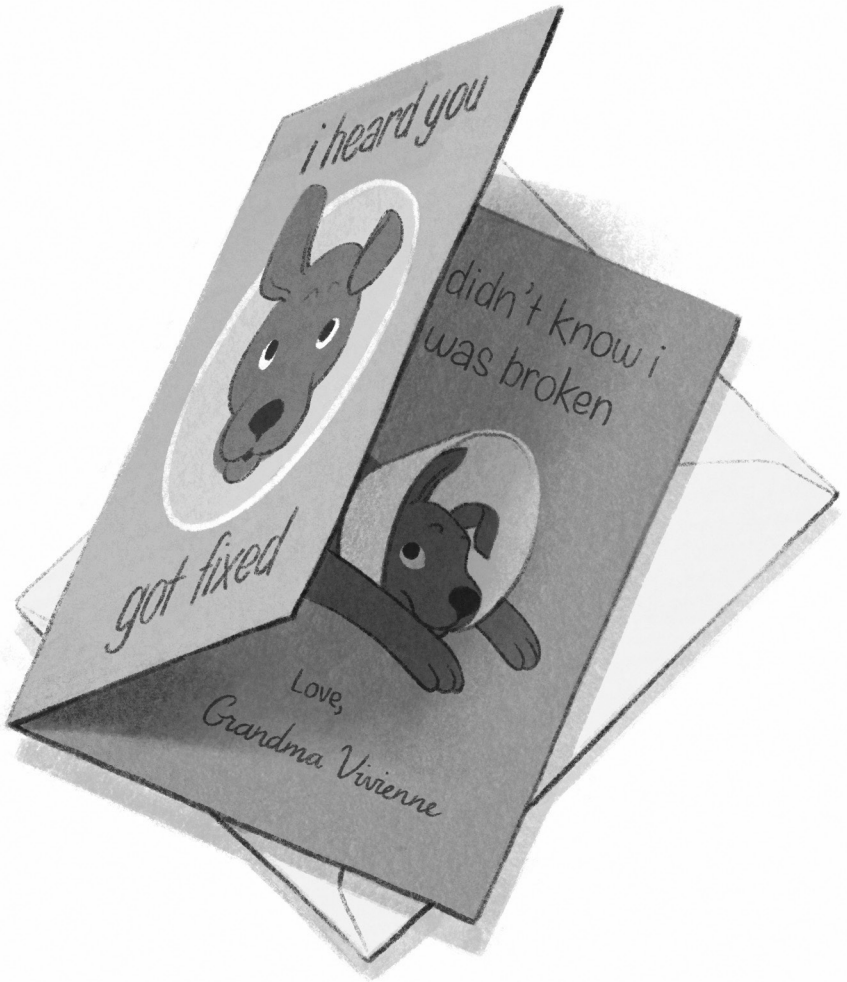
By the way, you seem to be a smart puppy, so with all of those newspapers on the floor, you might try to pick up a word or two before putting the papers to the use Pamela and Frank intend. This would not only broaden our correspondence, but would take some of the burden off Winslow.

Love,
Grandma Vivienne

P.S. Out of curiosity, which play in the Shakespeare book was the tastiest - "As You Like It"? "The Taming of the Shrew"? "Titus Andronicus"? (Yuck!) Judging from titles alone, I would guess it was "Hamlet."

A note to Winslow: I have put some thought into your predicament concerning Zippy's relay race, and I think I have come up with an idea. After she has made a few circumnavigations, chasing you around the first floor, why don't you just stop? Step aside. If Zippy has built up enough speed, maybe she will just keep going and not notice that you have dropped out of the race. She may even tire herself out!

CHAPTER 2



J. WYNN ROUSUCK

Dear Zippy,

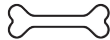
All my best wishes for a speedy recovery.

The treats in this package are dog biscuits made by Pamela's mother. They are the best medicine I know. I hope you enjoy them. And do remember to share a few with Winslow.

Feel better soon!

Love,

Grandma Vivienne



Cleveland Heights, Ohio

Wednesday, November 21, 1990

Dear Zippy,

I trust that by the time you get this, you will be back to your peppy self and free of that annoying plastic collar. (Hmmm... Just remembered that these are called "Elizabethan collars." I wonder if your reaction to that pesky collar could be related to your dislike of Shakespeare?)

I know you don't understand what happened to you or why, but I can assure you, it was for the best. Young ladies go through biological cycles that are not much fun - period. Thanks to your visit to the vet, such things need not be your concern. You can focus on what really matters - enjoying yourself and providing non-stop joy to

Pamela, Frank and, I hope, Winslow.

Tomorrow is a Big National Holiday, Thanksgiving - your first holiday in your new home. I am a firm believer in celebrating every holiday that comes along. I have a feeling you will be, too.

Here is a brief account of the first Thanksgiving, in a form I think you will understand:

Just as Zippy arrived out of the blue earlier this month, pilgrims arrived from across the blue sea a long, long time ago.

The pilgrims celebrated the harvest with the people already living here, the Native Americans. Together, they shared a meal of poultry and corn and pumpkins and all kinds of yummy things.

Every year, we gather around the table to remind ourselves of the good will and fellowship on which this country was founded. (Actually, the good will and fellowship are questionable, but I will save that for a future date.)

Although I have never heard about any dogs at the first Thanksgiving, I am sure they were there, enjoying the bounty.

Pamela and Frank are having guests over

tomorrow. The guests are certain to make a fuss over you, as well they should. I am sorry that I won't be among them, but I will be there in spirit.

I am thankful that you joined Pamela and Frank's household, and I know they are, too. (I told you Pamela would come around!) Who knows? If you give Winslow some peace, maybe he will be thankful for your company, too.

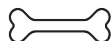
Happy Thanksgiving!

Love,
Grandma Vivienne

A note to Winslow: I spoke with Pamela earlier today and convinced her that, in gratitude for your patience and guidance with Zippy, you deserve the turkey liver all to yourself.

As you are aware, this is our first Thanksgiving without Pamela's father. Holidays are very difficult when you have recently lost someone. I know I can count on you and Zippy to provide some warm, welcome distraction. I will be spending the day with relatives, and I am glad Pamela and Frank are having guests over.

Thanksgiving celebrates peace, and that is what I wish you and Zippy.



“TURKEY LIVER!

TURKEY LIVER!

TURKEY LIVER!

TURKEY LIVER!”

(Transcribed by an angry, turkey liver-deprived Winslow. That fool puppy is even faster than I thought. “Zippy” doesn’t begin to describe it.)

Dear Grandma Vivienne,

I wanted to let you know that your suggestion on how to stop Zippy from dive-bombing me worked. Now, however, she’s channeling her speed in other areas, such as stealing the turkey liver out of my bowl — just as I was about to enjoy it. The effrontery! The impudence!

And that’s only the latest indignity I have suffered. Zippy insists on sleeping in my bed — with me! Not that she doesn’t have a bed of her own. But no, she leaps in, shoves me as far to the edge as possible, then sprawls out. When she was wearing that big plastic Elizabethan collar, there was no room for me in the bed at all. I would have crawled into her bed, but I have more pride than that.

Enough complaints about the hooligan hound. Respecting your Thanksgiving wishes, I have vowed to be a peace-maker, and I have made — or rather, am trying to make — peace living with Zippy.

I am writing you now because I need to bring up a more

serious subject, which Pamela may not have mentioned. After the Thanksgiving guests left, Frank also went out. At first, I wasn't too concerned. In my experience, people come and go, often for a few days at a time, without a word of explanation to me. This is particularly true of Frank lately.

This time, though, Pamela seemed unusually upset, which got me worried. She stayed up all night, so I did, too, keeping close watch. I waited by the door for a long time. Then I decided I should keep an eye on Pamela, so I followed her around. Zippy trotted right behind me.

Pamela washed all of the Thanksgiving dishes and pots and pans. Then she scoured the kitchen counters and the kitchen floor. At one point, she turned around and saw the two of us, seated side by side, in the kitchen doorway.

I thought I noticed a little smile before she said, "Are you two keeping tabs on me?"

Then she brought out the vacuum and vacuumed the entire house. This vacuuming spree nearly scared Zippy out of her wits — as if there are wits there to scare. The silly nitwit crawled under the sofa, shaking.

Pamela eventually sat down, and I took my station, lying at her feet. I pretended to sleep, but every now and then I glanced up at her, to make sure she was okay. One of these times, she caught my gaze, leaned down, and patted me on the head.

She sighed and said, "Where is he, Winslow?"

Next she opened the Yellow Pages and started making phone calls. She would give Frank's name, then wait. After a pause,

she'd say, "Thank you," hang up, and make another call.

Frank finally walked in the door early the next morning. I was, of course, happy to see him, but he didn't seem happy, and he smelled like the rum cake that Uncle Ed baked for us last New Year's. (I remember that cake because I nibbled some crumbs off the floor. Unpalatable.)

Zippy, noticing nothing out of the ordinary, started leaping for joy. Frank always plays with Zippy as soon as he gets home, but this time he said, "Not now, Zippy."

Ever since then, everyone seems on edge. Except, of course, Zippy, who is oblivious. But sometimes even her comic relief doesn't seem to work. I am sorry to trouble you with all this, but I thought you would want to know.

Yours, a concerned,

Winslow



Cleveland Heights, Ohio
Wednesday, November 28, 1990

Dear Zippy,

I am glad you had a good time at your first Thanksgiving. Pamela said that your jumping abilities are truly spectacular. She and Frank had no idea that you could land on the dining room table in a single leap - from a sitting

position! Apparently, their guests were astonished as well.

I am sorry that you were then stuck in the backyard, but I must say, you only made your situation worse by digging up the bulbs Frank planted this fall. It is no wonder that this upset him. That is why, sweet Zippy, after all of your hard work, you ended up spending the rest of the evening in your crate.

That yard is Frank's pride and joy. He built the fancy wood fence himself when Winslow joined the family. The yard has been pictured in Baltimore Magazine. It has been featured on garden tours. It has won prizes. And it is a showpiece for his work as a landscape architect. But you couldn't possibly have known that.

So again, I am not scolding you. That is Pamela and Frank's job. I think you are a highly amusing, creative, smart, and agile puppy.

Here is an idea: I bet you didn't know that Pamela has a friend named Janet who teaches Puppy Kindergarten classes at the SPCA. These would be lots of fun, and they would give you a chance to play with other puppies. I will mention this to Pamela the next time we talk.

In the meantime, I hope you are following my suggestion and paying some attention to the newspapers covering the floor. I think you will be surprised by what you can learn. (And, after the turkey liver incident, I don't know how long you can expect Winslow to continue being your

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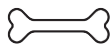
secretary. Boston Terriers may be known as "The American Gentlemen," but even gentlemen have their limits.)

All for now.

Love,
Grandma Vivienne

A note to Winslow: Thank you for taking me into your confidence about Thanksgiving night. You were right. Pamela has not mentioned this on the phone, and it is, indeed, troubling.

In response to your bedtime issue, I am going to suggest to Pamela that until Zippy is completely house-broken, she be crated at night. Not only is crate training an excellent house-breaking method, but it will solve the problem with your sleeping quarters, at least temporarily.



DDDE#\$R GHR%ANDFa VIV*IIINEEE,,,,,,,,I* L)
OPVE# Y&)OU&*&,,,,, ZZZI*****P_PY&

Dear Grandma Vivienne,

You will be pleased to know that I have been encouraging Zippy to follow your advice regarding the written word. But because she barely seems to notice what's printed on the newspapers, I have taken matters into my own hands —

make that, paws — and begun reading to her.

Teaching her to write is more challenging. The enclosed scrap of paper is proof — albeit rather pathetic proof — of my first effort.

This is the method I am using: When Pamela is at the newspaper office, I try to get the pup to sit in front of the electric typewriter. Then I show her that the letters on the keyboard are the same as the letters in the newspaper. You will remember that this worked for me.

The jumble of letters and symbols on the enclosure is the result of my repeated efforts to guide Zippy's paw on the keyboard. This was no easy task. For one thing, she got so excited putting her paws on the keys, she kept hitting them over and over and over again — that is, hitting any letters or symbols that happened to be near the ones I was trying to get her to hit.

Then when the bell would ring at the end of the carriage, she just about went out of her mind with puppy euphoria. She leapt straight up out of the chair and started running around the room until she was too exhausted to continue.

Still, I persevered. But every time she seemed rested up enough to continue, this pattern would repeat. Her few words — and I use the word “words” loosely — took more than forever to complete. All the while, I was afraid Pamela would come home and see me on the desk chair with Zippy at the typewriter.

By the way, her first epistolary effort consists of a mere scrap because she grabbed the paper out of the typewriter with her teeth. This is all that I managed to rip away from her.

Anyway, I have given the matter much thought, and I have a new idea. I'm going to try to get Zippy to sit still long enough to copy a headline from the newspaper. Maybe this will be an easier way for her to make the connection between the newspaper and the keyboard.

You will also be pleased to know that things have settled down around here, although there was a rather strained period during which all of Pamela and Frank's conversation was directed to me and Zippy.

"Winslow, where did Frank put my overdue library book?"

"Zippy, I hope Pamela knows I can't accompany her to the theater tonight."

"Winslow, do you think Frank remembers that he has a doctor's appointment tomorrow?"

Zippy loved this. Any sentence beginning with her name is cause for unbridled elation, or — if her name is mentioned more than once — chasing her tail.

Now, thankfully, Pamela and Frank are back to speaking directly to each other — and to us, only under appropriate circumstances, i.e.,

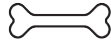
"Winslow, you are such a good dog."

"Zippy, get down off the sofa!"

With order restored, I can devote more time to educating that all-too-easily distracted pup. An uphill battle, to say the least.

Yours, the pedagogically exasperated,

Winslow



Cleveland Heights, Ohio
Monday, December 3, 1990

Dear Zippy,

I am SO impressed by your first writing attempt! I realize there are a lot of distractions - the clicking noise of the keys and the sound of the bell. It is all very stimulating for a small, sensitive canine.

The only answer is practice, practice, practice. And possibly Puppy Kindergarten. Janet doesn't teach typing, but she may be able to help with your attention span.

In the meantime, my repeated thanks to Winslow. I think the idea of copying newspaper headlines is a good one, and I look forward to seeing the results.

Love,
Grandma Vivienne

