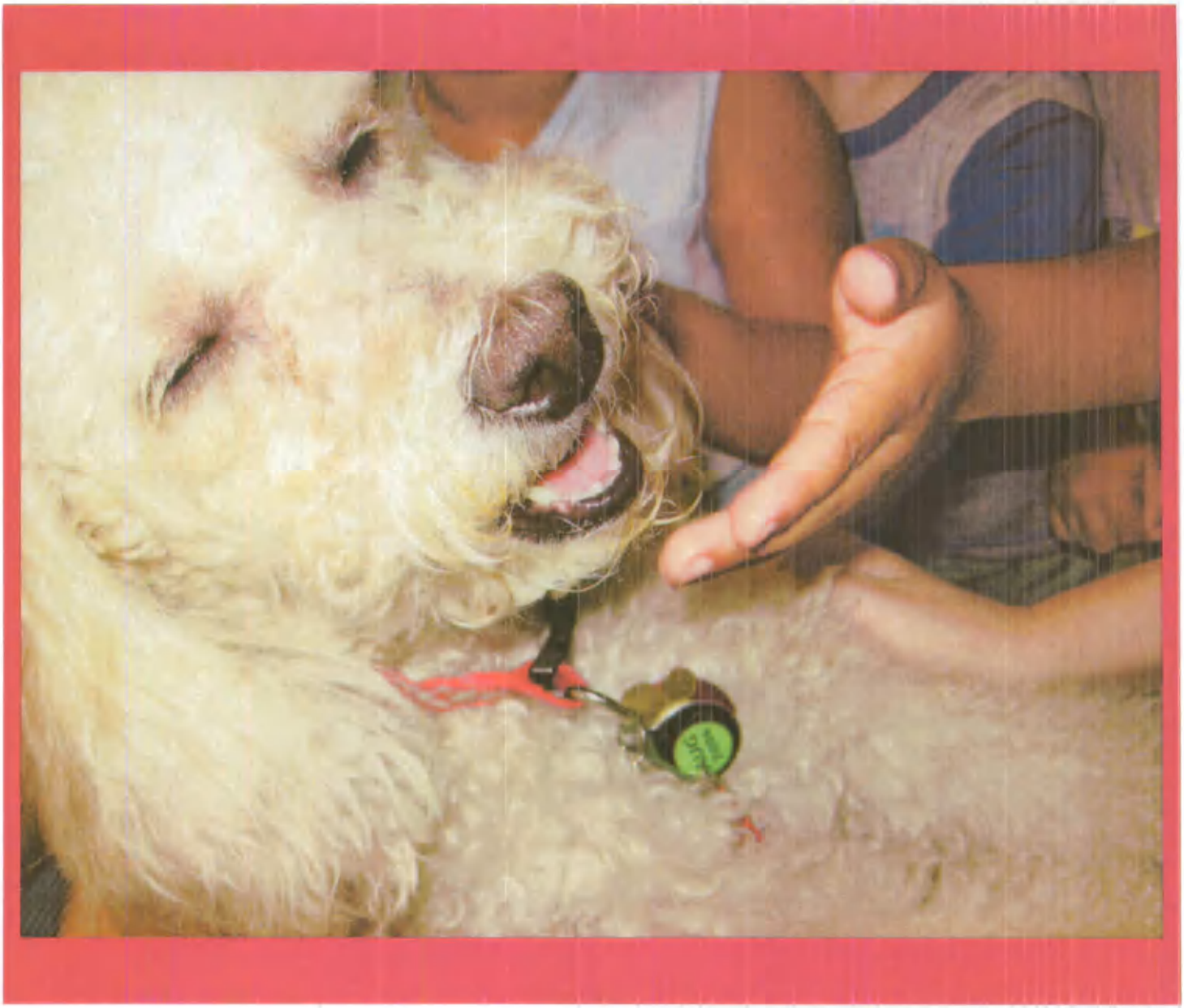
REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING



Animal - Human Relationships: Comforting, Healing, Transforming

Volume 14, Number 4 Fall 2008

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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Special Issue
Animal-Human Relationships: Comforting, Healing, and Transforming
Guest Editor: Marilyn K. Potts

Cover Photograph by Sue Grundfest. Original artwork: Dan Jimenez

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Letter from the Editor

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.

In this issue of *Reflections* our relationship with our animal kin and the bonds we develop with them is explored with intelligence, wit, and touching honesty. Reframing the concept of "pet"— a social fiction that animals exist for our use and pleasure—these authors emphasize the reciprocity of the human animal and non human animal bond. Animals shape our thoughts, dreams, and culture from childhood onward. As children we learn most things about the world around us by filtering them through our understanding of our animal kin. Animals are deeply implicated in human development. As Paul Shepard, renowned naturalist noted, "There is a profound, inescapable need for animals that is in all people everywhere, an urgent requirement for which no substitute exists. It is as hard and unavoidable as the compounds of our inner chemistry."[1] Animals are the earliest inhabitants of the mind's eye; they are essential to the development of both speech and thought.

As human animals, we have evolved in the midst of our animal kin and our intelligence has been nurtured by theirs, as prey, adversaries, guides, sentinels, and finally as companions. Our similarities to all other animals overwhelm our differences from them, which exist primarily in our own unrealistic and narcissistic claims about superiority over the natural world. Animals remain emblematic of our relationship with the wildness of the natural world throughout our lives. As mediators between the thinking animals and the wildness of nature, companion animals may seem to comply with their assigned roles, but they represent an untamed natural world and may be the only vestiges of that world for many of us. The undeniable physicality of animals evokes an awareness of our oneness with our bodies, just as their shorter life spans teach us about grief and prepares us for other inevitable goodbyes. These narratives remind us, in many different ways, of our interdependence with animals and their transcendence in our lives, over and above the social construct of "pet." They allow us to maintain a deep connection to the wildness from which we all emerged.

Reflections thanks Marilyn Potts for developing this issue and working with the authors who crafted narratives of commitment, passion, and courage as they told stories of their deep relationships with their animal kin. Marilyn Potts is a nationally known scholar and expert on distance education, as well as a dedicated friend to animals. This issue was a labor of love for her, and I want to thank her for her integrity and commitment to the well being of all animals.

[1] *Thinking Animals.* New York: Viking Press, 1978, p. 2

Introduction to Special Issue Animal-Human Relationships: Comforting, Healing, and Transforming

Marilyn K. Potts, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach

Our call for narratives on animal-human relationships clearly touched the hearts of many helping professionals. The response was so overwhelming that we will be devoting two special issues to this topic.

Although I did not need to be convinced of the power of nonhuman animals in my own life, I have learned much while serving as guest editor for these two special issues. I have become acquainted with the devoted cadre of social workers in veterinary schools helping students deal with human clients and both students and human clients deal with bereavement. I have learned the difference between animal-assisted visitation, animal-assisted activity, and animal-assisted therapy. I have gained appreciation for the heroic canine crisis response workers whose healing presence comforts both human responders and disaster survivors. The importance of including companion animals as family members in psychosocial assessments has been reinforced. The parallels between wild horses in training and the prisoners who train them have become apparent. I have learned how horseback riding can empower those with mobility limitations and how dogs can help clinicians establish rapport and trust.

Some issues of political correctness should be addressed at this point. Calling our animal companions "pets" is viewed by most in the field as inappropriate. One author pointed out that the word "animal" is misleading as well. Since humans are animals also, the correct term would be "nonhuman animal." I struggled with the use of "it" as the correct pronoun when referring to nonhuman animals, preferring to use "he or she" myself, although the former is said to be grammatically correct. For the most part, our authors were allowed to use their own preferred style regarding these issues.

The first article in this issue illustrates Catherine Faver's spiritual development through her relationship with animals, particularly her rabbit companions. This sets the tone for the remainder of the issue by "fostering an awareness of the kinship of all life."

Next, Karen Dalke describes the Wild Horse Inmate Program of Colorado Correctional Industries. Through a partnership with the Bureau of Land Management, inmates train mustangs for adoption. These are some of the parallels she draws. Neither horse nor inmate wants to be there. "There is a separation from a prior life, but they are not yet reincorporated into another society." Both parties serve as teachers and students as they develop an awareness of others and a sense of empathy. Both earn an opportunity for a second chance.

Sue Grunfest and Coco (our cover girl) are featured next. Coco came into Sue's life when Sue was recovering from a serious illness. "Little did I know then that by saving *her* life, she would in turn save *mine*." Although limited by her own health issues now, Coco continues to teach children about empathy, among other important lessons: "...when Coco could no longer see with her eyes, one gentle child told me not to be sad because Coco now sees with her heart."

Nancy Gee then describes her work with her two therapy dogs. Like Coco, Louie and Nikki have enhanced the lives of many special

needs children. Nancy describes the case of Adam, in particular, a child with significant mobility limitations, who was empowered to crawl through a tunnel for the first time due to Louie's intervention. "When he saw Louie do it, he began squirming to get away from his aide. The next thing we knew, Adam had crawled into the tunnel."

F. Ellen Netting's article is about "lessons learning from aging dogs." Through nearly 40 years of married life, she and her husband Karl learned much about relationships, aging, and dealing with death from their animal companions. Beginning with Pooker and ending with Sandy and Schnapsy, "their stories have become part of our narrative as a couple."

We then present a narrative about an animal visitation program, written by Christina Bach. As Christina goes to work, she assembles her things. Blackberry, pager, and Beagle. Beagle? Yes, Gus the Beagle works with her in the VETPETS program at the Philadelphia Ronald McDonald House. Christina describes how Gus and his co-workers bring joy to children undergoing treatment for life-threatening illnesses and comfort to families experiencing bereavement.

A light-hearted yet insightful narrative is presented next. Peter Nguyen describes his unrealistic expectations for Colt, his new puppy. Far from fulfilling Peter's dream of a Norman Rockwell painting of a "boy and his dog," Colt "ran amuck doing what puppies do" while Peter played the "role of a worried and frustrated parent" whenever Colt did not conform to Peter's expectations or fit neatly into his world. Through self-reflection and cognitive restructuring, Peter remembered his social work practice skills – we must "start where the client is" rather than imposing our own values and needs.

Sandra Younger and Terra are a crisis response team. Sandra is a human and Terra is a Newfoundland dog, certified through HOPE. While their own home is in danger (after having burned down in 2003), Sandra and Terra head to the Esperanza Fire base camp. Upon meeting Terra, "exhausted, depressed firefighters...would start to smile, perhaps for the first time in days...A few would even well up in a sudden release of emotion."

Next, we return to horses, this time as they empower physically handicapped children and adults. Patricia Westerman, Dolores Westerman, Holly Hargreaves, and Melissa Verge describe the work of "Great and Small," focusing on two special riders and their horses. An adult with multiple sclerosis describes this as "a disease of loss" but regains one of her lost activities through riding Goldie, a draft horse who is also a "goddess." "I am empowered," she says. "I have better posture. I have more core stability. These may seem like little things, but they're huge." A child with developmental delays describes her interactions with Bear. "I trust Bear so much. I talk to him about my feelings." The child was empowered not only by her own riding, but also through her work as a mentor for newcomers to the program. She says, "I feel proud that I teach the kids who don't know how to ride how to sit in the saddle straight."

Aubrey H. Fine (the author of one of the few books in existence on animal-assisted therapy) and Cynthia Eisen then describe the work of Magic, P.J., and Huck. The narrative about Magic's magical work with Sally, a child with severe behavioral issues, is a compelling case study. The authors note how Sally progressed from "open hostility and physical aggression" to a state of steady increase in her language abilities, attention span, and self-awareness (in the words of her group home caseworker). In Sally's own words, "Thank you, Magic. You make me feel like a good girl. I love you."

Christina Risley-Curtiss writes of her "very personal journey" with her cats, dog, goat, horse, and rooster. She reminds us that other animals can help human animals survive and thrive. She reminds helping professionals that if we are to "look at our clients in a truly ecological and holistic perspective, we must ask about the presence of, and relationships with, other animals in their lives." We need to "consider ways to support those healthy relationships and draw on them for client support." Anyone who has experienced the illness and death of a beloved animal companion will appreciate her call for helping professionals to address such traumatic experiences with their clients.

After reading the foregoing articles, our readers will surely be convinced, if they were not already, of the significance of nonhuman animals in our lives. Thus, our final article may come as a shock as it deals with euthanasia. Tracy Zaparanick discusses the personal experiences inspiring her research on compassion fatigue among those who work in nonhuman animal care provider (NACP) environments (i.e., veterinary medicine, animal rescue, animal shelters, etc.). She points out that most helping professionals work with populations about whom they care. She asks helping professionals to "imagine now for a moment that the job required you, directly or indirectly, to stop the beating heart of individuals of that population you value."

Our last piece is a compilation of two short articles written by dogs themselves (with some help from their human typists). Although at risk of being accused of anthropomorphism, I have included these pieces because they illustrate how the humans involved were comforted and inspired by their animal companions during some of the darkest times of their lives.

We end this special issue with Gilda Martinez's review of a new contribution to the field of animal-assisted intervention, authored by Merope Pavlides.

It's my personal hope that these powerful articles, along with Tracy Zaparanick's statistics on euthanasia, will inspire some of our readers to adopt a "pet" and otherwise advocate for the humane treatment of all sentient beings.

Acknowledgement: These special issues are dedicated to all of the animals described by the authors and to Bobby, Goldie, Diana, Susan, Jerry, Tippy, Skipper, Buttons, Penelope, Clara, Marley, Amelia, Ezekiel, Johnny Cougar, Janice Joplin, Buster, Sparkle, Sushi, Kiko, Snookie, Pookie, Rosie, Sweet Pea, Missy, ChiChi, Ishi, Jack, Crackers, Bull, Bulldozer, Maurice, Oliver, Fluffy, Bear, Cosmo, and Inyo.

I also thank our Editor-in Chief, Jillian Jimenez, for talking me into serving as guest editor for these special issues. It has been a truly rewarding experience. Wendi McLendon-Covey provided excellent support throughout the process. I appreciate the insightful comments of our anonymous reviewers, particularly the one who wrote, "This makes me want to go out and get a dog."

Marilyn K. Potts is a professor in the Department of Social Work, California State University, Long Beach. Comments about this

A Rabbit Tale: Animals as Spiritual Guides

Catherine A. Faver, Ph.D., University of Texas-Pan American

Relationships with animals can facilitate spiritual development by fostering an awareness of the kinship of all life. After recognizing her own experiences reflected in images and attributes of rabbits, the narrator discovered the true meaning of connectedness through a miracle that hopped into her life.

I was born on the vernal equinox (March 21) four days before Easter (March 25) in the Chinese year of the rabbit (1951). Springtime has long been associated with the hare as a sign of new life. In fact, the term "Easter" is derived from "Eostre," an Anglo-Saxon moon goddess symbolized as a hare and associated with a pagan feast celebrating the vernal equinox. This springtime holiday was appropriated by the early Christians to celebrate their belief in Jesus' resurrection and in 325 the date of Easter was set as the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring (Davis & DeMello, 2003).

Given the timing of my birth and the historical religious significance of rabbits, perhaps it is only natural that rabbits and rabbit symbols would be important in my spiritual development. Yet in my earliest memories, spring is associated not only with my birthday and the Easter bunny, but also with a tragic event.

Less than a week after my fifth birthday, my maternal grandfather died unexpectedly and violently. The waves of shock and grief that rolled over my extended family were intense. Although I was not close to my grandfather, I was deeply affected by my family's reactions. Like many young children who lose a close relative, I began to fear that one of my own parents would die. Instinctively, I hid my feelings, seeking comfort in solitary play at the margins of my family's grief. Throughout this crisis my parents maintained our daily household routine and on the surface life went on as usual. Many years later, however, an encounter with an animated rabbit drew me back to this event and propelled me forward in a world of "widening and deepening connections" (Lasher, 1996, p. 2).

I entered kindergarten in the fall following my grandfather's death. Our family had recently purchased our first television and my favorite program was Captain Kangaroo. In nearly every episode, the silent puppet Bunny Rabbit managed to trick the Captain out of a bunch of carrots. Revealing the quick-wittedness often attributed to rabbits in myth and legend (Davis & DeMello, 2003), Bunny Rabbit's antics demonstrated that we can use our minds to gain a sense of efficacy. Apparently, I took my cue from Bunny Rabbit, because from the beginning of my school days, I relished learning and flourished academically.

Three years after my grandfather's death, my parents gave me a large pink and white stuffed rabbit on my birthday, just eight days before Easter. The rabbit quickly became my favorite toy; I diapered it and played with it like a doll. In a characteristic photograph, I am sitting on my bed holding the rabbit while reading a book. In retrospect, my attachment to this rabbit seems to have buffered the passage through middle childhood. By the time I had hugged the fur off its body and the starch from its ears, I was ready to "put away childish things" and face the challenges of adolescence.

Some years passed before my next rabbit encounter. During late adolescence I was given a copy of Margery Williams' (1922) *The Velveteen Rabbit*, a children's classic I had somehow overlooked. The book's essential message is that we become "real" (i.e., authentic) selves through loving relationships. Love entails vulnerability and the risk of loss,

but the joy of being real is worth any pain endured. Despite my limited life experience, I recognized the wisdom of this message and stored it in my heart for my journey into adulthood.

At this point the reader may have noticed that no living rabbits have yet hopped into the picture. They are coming – but not quite yet.

When I am asked how I became interested in animal welfare, either personally or professionally, I usually say, "It all started with Thumper." It would also be true to say, "It all started by paying attention." Either way, it started on a hot summer afternoon almost 20 years ago. I went to the local theater to see Walt Disney's 1942 animated film *Bambi*, which I did not remember having seen during its previous releases. As I watched I was captivated by Thumper, the child-like rabbit who befriended the young deer Bambi. Disney's Thumper was spontaneous and honest. When the newborn Bambi attempted to stand on his little deer legs, Thumper blurted out (to the obvious chagrin of Mother Rabbit): "Kind of wobbly, isn't he?" Later, Thumper ventured into the forest, introducing his friend Bambi to plants and animals and teaching him to skate on the frozen pond. During another adventure, the threat of a spring storm sent Thumper rushing home to the safety and security of his family.

While watching the film, I found myself feeling protective toward Thumper. "I'm worrying about an animated rabbit," I thought. "What is this?" Upon reflection, I realized that Thumper evoked my own sense of vulnerability as a small child, especially during the period after my grandfather's death. Unlike Thumper, however, I had sought safety in solitude rather than connection and I had hidden my feelings instead of expressing my fears openly. Somewhat inexplicably, my connection with Thumper was cathartic; viewing and processing Thumper's story gave me a new sense of compassion for my five-year-old self.

Having identified so strongly with Thumper, I became curious about the attributes of real rabbits. Because they are prey, rabbits are often associated with vulnerability, fear, and timidity (Davis & DeMello, 2003). At the same time, rabbits are gifted with the protective gear they need. With their sensitive noses and long, flexible ears, rabbits smell and hear danger, and with their powerful hind legs and big back feet they run with great speed, making zigzag patterns to evade their pursuers. Their burrows and warrens provide places of safety and retreat; above ground, ill or injured rabbits hide their symptoms in order not to attract the attention of predators (Davis & DeMello, 2003; Harriman, 2005).

Like rabbits, I was given protective gear that offset my childhood vulnerability. The time spent quietly observing my family in the aftermath of my grandfather's death helped to shape my way of being in the world. I made friends with solitude and learned to cherish time alone for reading and reflection. I learned to be attuned to my surroundings, intuitively taking in people and situations as a whole. These gifts have served me well in teaching and scholarly work. Coupled with the religious training of my youth, my sense of vulnerability surely affected my choice of social work as a profession as I entered early adulthood. On a cognitive level the religious mandate to "do justice and love mercy" (Micah 6:8) provided an impetus for my vocational choice. On an emotional level, however, both the religious mandate for justice and social work's commitment to vulnerable people resonated with the vulnerable child still hovering within me, the child who had withdrawn in fear in the aftermath of tragic loss.

My reflections on the connections between Thumper and my own life experiences heightened my awareness of real rabbits. Soon I began to notice wild rabbits feeding in a field near my apartment. Leaping in the tall, dew-covered grass, they surprised and delighted me. I wanted to be closer. I wanted to know rabbits personally.

Assuming responsibility for rabbits as companion animals is, however, quite a different matter from simply observing wild rabbits in their natural habitat. Thus, several years passed before I welcomed my first two domestic rabbit companions, sisters Daffodil and Dandelion, into my home. In preparing for my rabbit companions, I had read an early edition of Harriman's *House Rabbit*

Handbook (2005) and I knew that we would need a veterinarian with specialized knowledge about rabbits. After Daffi and Dandi joined me, I found additional guidance and support through the House Rabbit Society (HRS), whose website (www.rabbit.org) and journal (*House Rabbit Journal*) provide extensive information about the needs and care of domestic rabbits. Over the years these and other resources have not only supported me as a caregiver, but have also connected me to a network of people committed to the well-being of rabbits.

Living with rabbits changed my perspective and my life. My rabbits did not try to convert me, but their needs and behavior constantly challenged me to see the world from their point of view. They invited me into relationship, and relationships are transformative. Gradually, my human-centered perspective, which gave little thought to the welfare of nonhuman animals, evolved into a view of human spirituality as "a process of taking our rightful place in the web of life" (Faver, 2008), a place that is characterized by respect, compassion, and kindness directed to *all* animals (human and nonhuman) and the earth which is our home.

Living with rabbits also demonstrated to me what research on many species has documented: animals have intelligence and experience emotion, and each individual is unique, not simply a representative of a species (Bekoff, 2000; Goodall & Bekoff, 2002; Davis & DeMello, 2003). Yet, while humans and animals have much in common, it is a mistake to assume that intelligence and emotion can be defined by the human experience of these qualities. Each species has unique sensory capacities and skills, and humans can never fully enter into other species' experience. As Davis and DeMello (2003, p. 346) noted: "Animals...may actually be more emotionally complex than humans, not less." Recognizing the "otherness" of animals as well as our connectedness fosters humility and respect, thus opening a path to spiritual growth:

> *Animals...offer us a unique opportunity to transcend the boundaries of our human perspectives; they allow us to stretch our consciousness toward understanding what it is like to be different. This stretching enables us to grow beyond our narrow viewpoint...When we relate to them as "other," yet also as our kin, our fellow creatures of God and the universe, we enter an expanded level of consciousness.* (Randour, 2000, pp. 6, 13-14)

For many years I had believed and taught that "we are all connected to everything" (Ochs, 1986, p. 121), but I had mostly ignored our connections to the earth and nonhuman animals. I had emphasized the value of diversity but had failed to explore the gifts of "otherness" received through relationships with non-human animals. At last it became clear to me that the barriers we maintain between human and nonhuman animals are just as arbitrary and harmful as the barriers between human groups that we have challenged. Our commitment to those who are vulnerable and oppressed must also include compassion and care for nonhuman animals. As Randour (2000) explained:

> *Love demands that we stretch ourselves beyond our usual way of thinking, often characterized by defining ourselves by our differences. Sometimes the difference we find is gender or race. Other times it is religion or nationality...[W]e have begun to realize that organizing ourselves by these differences not only disenfranchises others but also diminishes us. But even as we find unity within the human race, we still go to great lengths to distinguish ourselves from other species. We need to extend our care and understanding to all species.* (Randour, 2000, p. 30)

My growing awareness of the kinship of all life compelled me to add my voice to the chorus of those who acknowledge the many connections between human well-being and the welfare of the earth and nonhuman animals. In retrospect, I was following what Lasher (1996, p. 2) calls "the path of animal connections." Through my relationships with rabbits, I finally perceived "the essential connectedness of all things" (Lasher, 1996, p. 2), which is the foundation for compassionate action.

The three rabbits who now share my home – Flopsy, Tuli, and Clementine – were all lost, abandoned, or "runaways" as young rabbits. Despite their similarity to their wild counterparts, domestic rabbits are unprepared to fend for themselves and rarely survive on their own outdoors. Thus, although the circumstances that brought my three rabbits into my life were very different, I regard each rabbit as a special gift. Tuli's arrival, in particular, taught me an important lesson. Here is Tuli's story.

Nine days before Easter in April, 2004, I left my apartment just before dawn to take a walk. Crossing the parking area, I caught sight of a small animal darting across my path. "Cat," I thought, knowing that numerous homeless cats roamed the area. Instinctively, I turned aside to look and discovered, to my amazement, a small domestic rabbit returning my gaze. All the stories of "rabbit rescues" I had read raced through my mind. Capturing a lost domestic rabbit outdoors can require days of patiently waiting and cultivating trust, but this little rabbit was unlikely to survive for long in the midst of urban predators. I felt totally unprepared to rescue her but I had to try.

I stood still, afraid that she would run away if I approached. As I waited, she hopped close and sniffed my shoes, then retreated to explore the foliage at the edge of the pavement. Seeing her closely, I realized that she was not simply a juvenile rabbit; she was a "dwarf," one of the smallest species of domestic rabbits. Yet here she was in the parking lot, extremely vulnerable in a world of potentially dangerous cats, dogs, and people.

Hoping she would not disappear in my absence, I backed away slowly and darted into my apartment to grab a towel, the only equipment for "bunny-catching" at hand. Returning to the parking area, I was relieved to see she was still there, still exploring. I followed at a distance, biding my time, waiting for the "right" moment. Finally, I followed her to the edge of a shrub. She was close to my feet, just below me. I had one chance. If I missed, she would run away in fear. With my heart pounding, saying a silent prayer, I dropped the towel over her, reached down, and scooped her up.

At that moment joy and gratitude flooded my heart. I could hardly believe that I was actually holding her. It was a miracle. This little rabbit had hopped across my path and into my life. Speaking softly, reassuring her, I took her into my apartment, and introduced her to her new home.

Almost four years later, Tuli and I were in our Houston veterinarian's office where she was receiving treatment for a minor eye infection. While examining Tuli, Dr. Antinoff asked, "How did you find her? I forgot." I recounted the story, ending as usual by saying, "It was a miracle. Finding this bunny was a miracle in my life!" To which Dr. Antinoff replied, "It was a miracle in *her* life."

Dr. Antinoff's words stunned me. Suddenly, I saw Tuli's rescue in a new light. In allowing me to capture her, Tuli had taken a big risk. In return, she received a second chance. She found protection, love, and a "forever home." Tuli's experience showed me the real meaning of connectedness: what we do for others, we do for ourselves. Tuli was my miracle and I was hers.

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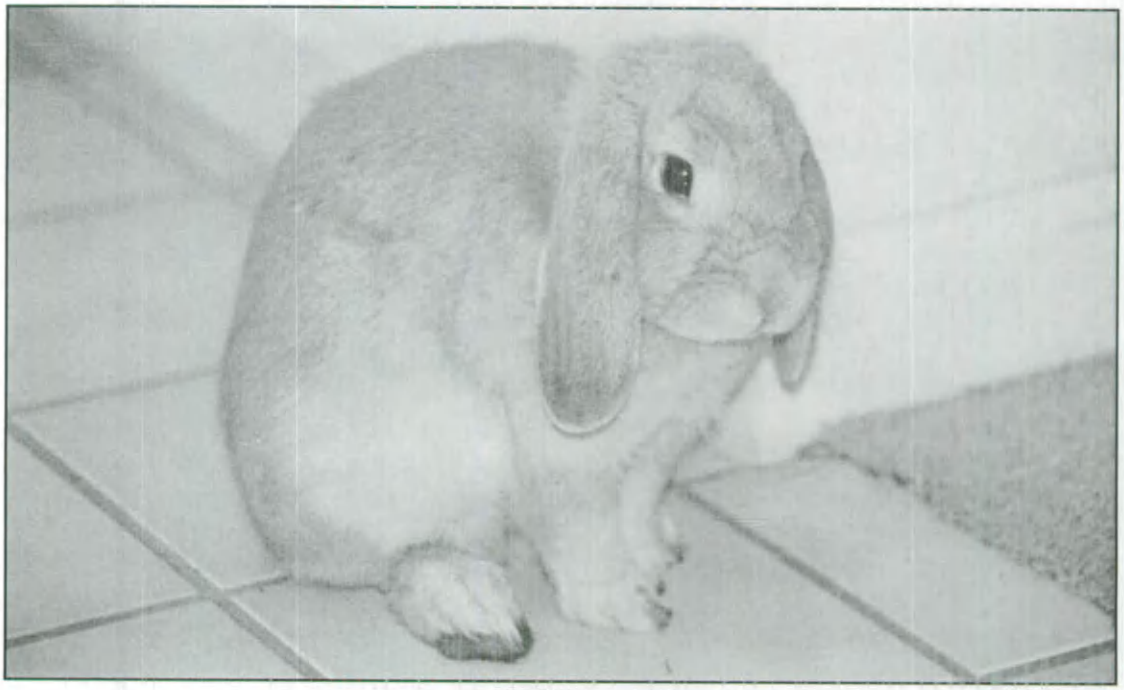
Catherine A. Faver, Ph.D., L.M.S.W., is a professor in the Department of Social Work at the University of Texas-Pan American. Her research focuses on the connections between animal and human welfare, including the link between animal abuse and family violence. After this narrative was completed, her family expanded to include Pym, a previously neglected bunny who is greatly enjoying his new home. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: cfaver@utpa.edu



Flopsy. Photograph by Catherine A. Faver.

At the Threshold of Change: The Inmates and Wild Horses of Cañon City, Colorado

Karen Dalke, Ph.D.,University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

To an outsider, the Wild Horse Inmate Program (WHIP) may seem like an equestrian training facility that utilizes inmate labor. Upon closer examination, the human-animal relationship that develops transforms both inmates and mustangs, preparing them for life beyond the Cañon City, Colorado correctional facility. This narrative examines the WHIP program and identifies learned skills necessary for reincorporation into society. Note: Inmates' names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

In a moment, life can change. We are constantly confronted with choices that can have long-term ramifications. Making the right choice is often associated with the amount of privilege bestowed upon us by society. Those not afforded such privileges may not be as lucky.

The incarceration rate has increased significantly in the United States over the past few years (Haeyoun, Park, Nguyen, & Carter, 2008). As a nation, we often do not want to think about those who perpetrate crimes. However, rehabilitating inmates must be part of the equation if we are to reduce prison populations and incorporate them into society. Polls have shown that the American public endorses the idea that inmates should learn a skill or trade while incarcerated. Learning a trade will do little good if there are no employment opportunities in the community upon release (Mann, 1999). The questions that plague rehabilitation programs are "Do they work?" and "How do you measure success?"

In 2000, while doing research for my dissertation, I made my first visit to Cañon City, Colorado. I had an opportunity to observe the Wild Horse Inmate Program (WHIP). It was not until recently that I realized the transformative power of that program for both humans and horses. I watched an inmate work with a mustang. Now, nearly eight years later, he is making national headlines for all the right reasons (Amann, 2005; McKeown, 2004).

Larry's journey from troubled youth, to prison inmate, and finally to his position as an assistant manager of an equestrian center supervising six employees is well documented (McKeown, 2004). Larry provides hope to those who come after him. The inmates and the horses may change, but the transformative process remains the same. For the mustangs, this program offers them a way out of holding facilities and into new homes across the United States. The power of the human-animal relationship is at the core of this transformation. To understand how this process occurs, a closer look at the Colorado Correctional Industries' WHIP is warranted.

Colorado Correctional Industries Wild Horse Inmate Program

The West conjures up images of outlaws, saloons, and shoot-outs in the middle of some dusty little town. Cañon City has a long history of wild horses and inmates. Located about 40 miles southwest of Colorado Springs, it is home to nine state and four federal prisons.

In 1871, John Shepler became the first inmate before Colorado was even recognized as a state. Since that time, there have been notorious inmates, significant riots, and memorable escapes. There have also been dedicated employees who have carried out the mission of the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC) that emphasizes the importance of ensuring public safety while at the same time providing self-improvement opportunities for inmates. Perhaps the focus on rehabilitation stems from the unique cultural context; 16% of Fremont County is incarcerated and the majority of residents work for the CDOC. The innovative wild horse program is a blend of history, culture, and the mission of the CDOC (Schwartz, 2001).

Because of a highly creative partnership with United States Bureau of Land

Management (BLM), wild horses or mustangs are rounded up on public lands and transported to the holding facility at the East Cañon complex. The BLM provides the feed and the adopters. The CDOC provides minimum security inmates who are prepared in all aspects of horse care, ranging from veterinarian and farrier skills to training and handling. Once the mustangs are trained, they are offered to the public for adoption (Wheeler, 1998).

The Transformative Process

From an etic perspective, WHIP looks like any equine training facility. Brian Hardin, manager of the program, acknowledges:

> *Some people may think that working with horses under the bright blue Colorado sky might seem more like a vacation than punishment. The program teaches inmates communication skills and responsibility and gives them goals and skills they will need when they are released. (Gazette, 2000)*

It is not until you witness the relationship that develops between inmates and horses that the process can be truly understood. Both horse and inmate exist in a liminal state or "betwixt and between." Neither have a socially accepted role. There is a separation from a prior life, but they are not yet reincorporated into another society (Turner, 1964). The roles of teacher and student vacillate between the horse and the inmate. Both move through the process together. Both have entered this liminal state against their will, skills that were previously used are no longer viable, and new skills must be learned if they hope to leave the facility. Each step requires coping strategies and the opportunity to learn new skills. There are primarily four general steps to the process: 1) intake, 2) selection, 3) reciprocal training, and 4) reintegration into society.

I once quipped to someone next to me while I was watching the inmates work with the horses, "This is my dream job!" However, that person pointed out to me that I would have to commit a crime in Colorado, be convicted, be sent to this facility, and then compete with thousands of inmates to secure one of the 40 or so wild horse program positions. In addition, which I think was the greatest deterrent, I could not leave my work site.

Every inmate is processed the same way. "During day 1, the prisoner's identity is verified, he is fingerprinted, pictures are taken and a prisoner identification tag is generated, and medical and mental health screens are conducted" (Hardyman, Austin, & Peyton, 2004, p. 16). Mustangs are treated in much the same manner.

Capturing or rounding-up mustangs is a part of actively managing the herds on public lands, which is dictated by the Free-Roaming Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971 (18 U.S. Code 47). Horses under the age of five tend to make the best candidates for adoption. Once captured, they are transported to a holding facility like the one at Cañon City for processing. They receive vaccinations and are freeze-branded for identification. These horses that once roamed free on thousands of acres are now placed in paddocks.

After this initial processing, an acute sense of confinement confronts both inmates and horses. At this time, those that are able to adapt to their new surroundings will have additional opportunities presented to them. There are currently 40 positions available in the wild horse program. Inmates are chosen from Four-Mile Correctional Center, a minimum restrictive facility, based on their interest in the program. Most of the inmates have no prior experience with horses. Inmates know that if they do not work hard, they can be easily replaced. This is another opportunity for inmates to show that they are serious about change.

Not every inmate or every mustang is chosen for training. The horses and inmates must have a willingness to learn. They must want to change. Horses that have vices or are difficult to handle will be passed over for a more compliant counterpart. In essence, the selection process is equally competitive. If one is chosen for this program, there is an implied sense of hope. This is a pivotal stage since someone has recognized that a particular

inmate or horse has the ability to be reincorporated into society. In retrospect, this may have been the most important step in Larry's transformation and for others who will follow him. Wanting to change is important, but someone else providing an opportunity for it to be realized creates a link between the inmate and society.

Once the horses and inmates have been chosen for participation, the training begins. The program utilizes humane techniques employed by trainers like Bryan Neubert and Clinton Anderson that focus on teaching safe horse-human interactions. For the first few weeks, inmates simply feed, water, and clean the paddocks, habituating the horses to human proximity. Once the horse no longer fears the caretakers, it graduates to halter training. There the horse is taught to lead and is desensitized to care by farriers, groomers, and veterinarians. If the horses progress through this, the inmates will train them under saddle.

Although the outsider may see this simply as horse training, it is important to emphasize that most of these inmates have no prior equine knowledge. Most of these horses are about 1,000 pounds. The inmate cannot rely on intimidation or physical control. New skills must be learned: the ability to read body language, to identify challenging contexts, and to react safely to explosive situations. These skills cannot happen without an awareness of others and a certain level of empathy (Strimple, 2003).

At the same time, the horses learn to trust the trainers through consistent training methods. If the horse is difficult to control, it is likely that the trainer has missed a step in the gentling process. The horse is doing what it is taught. This is a reflection on the inmate. Recognizing how the inmate's behavior impacts another living being is vital to his reincorporation into society. In addition, taking responsibility for the horse's progress, the inmates learn to take pride in their work, enhance their self-esteem, and develop a deep affection for their students.

On a recent trip, I spoke to another inmate. Jay reminded me of Larry as he talked about how the program gave him an opportunity to learn about himself and gain skills he never imagined possible. Jay told me, "I have only had a saddle on this horse about twice, but I can show you all the different stages of training. This is Ruby. I named her for her color. She learns really quickly. I guess I will be sorry to see her go." Jay haltered the three year-old mare from Wyoming and proceeded to the round pen. I could tell that he was excited to show me what he'd taught Ruby.

In the wild, most of these horses have learned to move away from the pressure exerted by a lead stallion or mare. The process for training these horses builds on those skills. The distraction-free environment of the round pen allows for the horse to focus on its trainer. The approach is one of teaching rather than punishment. As Jay moves about the round pen, Ruby easily changes her direction or gate. It is like watching a dance. As Ruby changes gates, Jay verbally asks for what he wants, "Walk…., Trot…., Lope." Whenever Jay utters, "Whoa!" Ruby turns and she faces him.

Once the horses are easily directed around the round pen and know how to stop on command, the blanket and saddle are introduced. Whenever Ruby shows resistance, Jay slows the process down and backs up to a previous level of success. It is obvious that this process requires both patience and the ability to read body language. "Every horse is different. But, all of these horses get a lot of love," Jay says as he grabs the blanket and saddle. After just 20 minutes, Jay is able to saddle Ruby for the third time without incident. "She's a quick learner. I don't have to go through every step with her. Some horses needed more." It was time to end this training session.

For inmates like Larry and Jay who reach this level of the program, much has been learned. There is compassion for another living being. There is awareness that sometimes there is more than one answer to a problem and patience may be the best choice. The lessons learned through these human-animal relationships are not easily quantified (Turner, 2007). However, meeting the players prior to and after involvement with the program, I saw a clear transformation.

On my last trip to Cañon City, I asked Jay if it was hard to see the horses adopted. "I

know they are going to a good home. I feel good about that." With a bit more prodding, Jay admitted that he remembers some horses more than others. There is sadness about seeing relationships end. However, we all experience this throughout life. Letting go is probably the hardest lesson many of us will ever learn.

Personal Reflections

The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition, is one of only a few that has an entry for the word "liminal." It is derived from the Latin term *limen* and means threshold. My visits to WHIP remind me that both inmates and equines are at a threshold of change. This change requires individual hard work, but it also requires that society provide opportunities once the participants graduate. For Larry, both individual drive and societal support collaborated to create a new beginning (Harrison & Schehr, 2004). I can only hope that this will be true for Jay and others who participate in the program.

As for Ruby and her equine counterparts, there are always more screened adopters than trained horses. It is amazing how much a horse can learn in only 90 days of training. Equally remarkable is how much an inmate can change with just one short-term positive relationship. As we age, cynicism seems to come with relative ease. This program proves that lives, whether human or equine, can be changed. This program gives everyone hope.

For further information about wild horses and burros, please visit: www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov.

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Photograph by Karen Dalke.

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Photograph by Karen Dalke.

CALL FOR NARRATIVES

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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Special Issue on Work and the Workplace

The Spring 2010 issue of Reflections will explore how social work and other helping professions have taken seriously the role of work and the workplace in the lives of our clients and communities. We are interested in narratives which address work, the workplace, unemployment, job training and supportive services, workplace rehabilitation, corporate philanthropy, and the role of social workers within trade unions and in organizing human service workers into unions. We seek submissions based upon the author's experience related to work and the workplace as broadly conceived, including narratives about the author's role in building the fields of occupational social work and employee assistance programming.

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You will be contacted within 30 days of receipt of your manuscript. If you have questions or would like to discuss ideas, you may contact Michael A. Dover at (734)645-6261 or via email at mdover@umich.edu.

Coco: The Love Dog

Sue Grundfest

This narrative describes the human-animal bond in its purest form as both human and dog discover their best lives. The lessons taught and learned by the author and one fluffy poodle not only saved their lives, but also had a profound impact on countless others who learned the meaning of love and joy and strength from the Love Dog. Note: Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Thirteen years ago, as I counted the ceiling tiles from my hospital bed, I knew my life was going to change dramatically. Like most Baby Boomers of my generation, I thought I could have it all. Work hard, enjoy the rewards business success brings, and make a difference in the world. I had the perfect career as Vice President of Community Outreach for a global cosmetics company and over 20 years in business built a strong career, professional respect, enduring friendships, and the need to do more. So I spent the week working to pay my bills and the weekends working to pay my soul.

One day in 1995 that all changed when I was cut down with an incredibly sudden, life-threatening illness. Peritonitis and sepsis challenged every aspect of my life. After many months in the hospital and many surgeries to tear open and rewire my body, followed by many months of an extremely difficult open-wound healing, the currency I valued was no longer money or outward success. The only currency that mattered now was *time*. Time to stare at the ceiling and count the tiles endlessly as I lay in one position with nothing but time on my hands. Time to challenge my sense of "self" and time to think, think, think about who I was now and what I may have lost along the way. What if I really did not have "all the time in the world" to do what I planned to do "later on" — would I have the courage to change my life *now* and live the life I was meant to live? Was this detour the opportunity I needed to recreate my life?

I remember thinking that it would be so easy to roll over and just give up. Maybe it was just too hard to exercise, eat differently, be patient, and deal with pain and discomfort. But I was used to working hard – so I rolled over and started over and did whatever it took to bring joy back into my life. And as I healed, I looked well. My eyes were bright, my step was lively, my mind was sharp. But I had "invisible" challenges. A steady fatigue, a dark mourning for the functions I had lost, a palpable sadness when I thought about the year of my life I had somehow missed. So while everyone told me to take it easy, be patient, take a vacation, lessen my workload, rest...*I got a dog!*

And that's how I met my best friend and pet partner, Coco. And my life changed forever. Our lives changed forever.

Coco was not the dog I thought I wanted – she was the wrong size, the wrong color, the wrong gender, and she had many health issues...but she was the perfect dog for me.

She was full of patchy spots where she had chewed her hair off due to allergies; she had a hernia and what I later learned was colitis. And that was just the start of her "issues." But the moment I saw her and she looked into my eyes, I knew I had to have her. This intense puppy with the funny hair crawled into my heart – and never left. Everyone told me I was making a mistake to take in such a "needy" puppy. Would I be able to make such an investment financially, emotionally, and physically to care for her? But a small voice kept telling me that I didn't need *less* responsibility to move forward – I needed *more*.

Little did I know then that by saving *her* life, she would in turn save *mine*. Coco always knew when I needed a push to be active and

nudged me to take her for a walk. Or when I needed to rest, she would lie down on the street and just wait patiently for us to start moving again. I truly believe that if it weren't for her I would still be sitting on my couch feeling sorry for myself. Through her unconditional love, ability to listen and learn, and desire to please, I had no choice but to get up and back into the world. And this was the start of her career as a therapy dog – for me!

A lifetime overachiever, it was extremely difficult for me to accept recovery time and Coco taught me that it was okay to walk a bit more slowly, to have to rest a bit more, to depend on others, and to have fun again. Coco had so changed *my* life that I wanted to share her boundless love with others, so for the past 11 years we have been a pet-assisted therapy pair registered with the Delta Society, working with special children affiliated with New Alternatives for Children, Lighthouse International, Ronald McDonald House, a long-term care facility for adults living with HIV and AIDS, and several New York City public schools. As I continued to heal, I realized that even the most able-bodied among us have invisible scars and challenges. None of us are perfect; yet, we are all perfect. At the end of Coco's leash, I have been privileged with meeting so many people whose path we would never have crossed otherwise. This little dog whose kisses tickle so profoundly reached the depths of those we met – she was just what the doctored ordered!

I remember so clearly the first facility we visited all those years ago. I had become involved with a social service agency in New York in my role as Vice President of Community Outreach and thought a dog could complement the many therapies they offered the special children and families they served. The Director of New Alternatives for Children loved the idea and asked us to partner with a young girl, seven years old, who had cerebral palsy. We knew that the physical aspects of playing with Coco, brushing her, and holding her leash would be beneficial to enhancing Nina's movement. We had no idea how far beyond physical therapy our involvement would reach.

Nina would meet us after school and at first she was so shy and quiet. But Coco knew exactly how to bring her out of her shell and encourage her to try new things – as she'd done for me. Through patience, trust, and deep friendship, Nina learned to throw a ball to Coco, clip her leash on and off, dress her in little sweaters, brush her hair, and play hide 'n' seek. Because Coco "couldn't hear very well," Nina had to raise her little voice to be heard. Because Coco had so many "itchies," Nina had to scratch a little harder so that Coco would feel relieved. Nina would do her homework alongside Coco or read a book with her friend on her lap. Each new therapy or game made both child and dog stronger and happier.

As Nina got older, she would take Coco for walks alongside her wheelchair. And as Coco got older, Nina would take her for rides on her wheelchair.

When you choose to be a pet-assisted therapy pair for a specific child such as Nina, you can't help but become a part of each other's lives over the years. And I came to understand that while anyone could see Nina's physical limitations, only those who loved her could see her invisible scars. Nina had spent most of her life living with the most wonderful foster family, as her biological mother could not care for her. Her foster mom even went to school to become her assistance aide so that she could attend school with Nina. They loved her so much and wished to make Nina a permanent member of their family. But of course, Nina only wished that her biological mother would come back for her. Nina would talk to Coco about her family and, as Coco's vehicle, I learned how to relate to this amazingly wise child. With the guidance of the social workers, I learned how to utilize Nina's love for Coco to give her a forum in which to talk and express her emotions. So over the years, her special time with Coco became a time to talk and share and be happy or sad in a safe environment, as well as time for physical therapy. And I came to respect the case workers and support team and was very proud to be a part of Nina's care plan.

So when one day I was called at work and asked if I could bring Coco to the agency the next day for a special meeting with Nina,

of course we went. Nina's biological mother had relinquished her parental rights and they were going to tell Nina, now 13, that her foster family could finally adopt her. While everyone thought this was the dream come true for Nina, they also knew that this meant the end of *her* dream of the fairytale ending with her real mom. They wanted Coco there so that Nina could relax and absorb this life-changing news in the most positive setting. As soon as Nina rolled off the elevator, she knew something was up – she saw Coco! The look that had become so familiar to us upon first meeting – insecurity, shyness, sweetness – broke into a big smile because no matter what else was happening, she was going to have a special visit with her best friend.

We were led into one of the playrooms and with a tired ball of fur on her lap, Nina learned how bittersweet life can be. Warm tears followed big sighs and as Nina stroked Coco, Coco slowly wagged her tail and kissed Nina's hand…her way of saying, "this is a good thing but I understand why you are sad." And when Nina celebrated her adoption at the courthouse, the only gift she wanted from her forever family was a dog of her own!

Over the years Coco and I took on more and more special assignments and with every new child, facility, and relationship, I recognized how the human-animal bond can not only augment traditional therapies, but sometimes surpass them.

Having known the joy of working with Nina and the other children at New Alternatives for Children, we felt that we could take on more and began visiting the children in the Child Development Center at Lighthouse International. These children, who were vision impaired, blind, or multiply challenged, took to Coco immediately and never missed a Friday when Coco was coming to school. And what I loved about our newest assignment was the opportunity for me to learn about new therapies and how to relate to such little children with such big obstacles. On our first visit, we were greeted by a row of "Coco Poodles" on the floor of the hallway— drawings of poodles to which the children had glued cotton balls— leading us to our first classroom. This told me not only that the children were special, but that the teachers, principal, and therapists were also special, as they had so engaged the students before we even arrived. The children greeted Coco and showed her the picture they had made just for her, so that she would have friends at school and not be afraid.

Coco was quite young still and she liked to "twirl on her tippy toes" for the children. They would ask her to dance and she could twirl forever. Some of the children would get up and take her paw and twirl away with her, or just feel her fur flying by. When the weather was nice, we would play in their outdoor playground. Coco's favorite activity was sliding down the plastic slide. The children would help her up the stairs to the little platform. Then they would line up on either side of the slide and we would position her "catchers" at the bottom. Every child got a turn at being a catcher because that was the most serious job – they had to make sure that Coco didn't fall off as she swooshed down. The pride the children felt when they caught her was palpable. Big smiles filled the air. And then up Coco would go to do it all over again. Of course, some days Coco just didn't feel like going down the slide. And the children learned that they couldn't make her do something she didn't want to do, thereby learning empathy and patience. Yes, Coco was an animal, but she had feelings and moods and days when she just didn't feel right – just like them.

When we didn't go down the slide, the tunnel was a great alternative. The children would position themselves at the open end of the tunnel and sweetly encourage Coco to come to them from the other end. Coco did not like the tunnel at first – it was dark and scary and if she got stuck in the middle, a child would have to crawl through to help her find her way out. But because Coco tried and tried to do something that was not easy for her, the children followed her example. Every child tried to go through the tunnel like Coco. She was the greatest role model.

Then I began to notice life's ultimate lesson of all. While the children grew up, Coco grew older. While the children got more confident and quicker in their mobility, Coco got slower and more hesitant. And when we discovered three years ago that Coco has

diabetes, it was our friends we visit who allowed me to be fearful and hopeful, scared and empowered, worried and optimistic, and while stuck in grief for my Coco, able to move on and learn how to care for her. For, as they kept telling me over and over, I am a great mommy and *Coco doesn't have to be perfect.*

It was now time for me to watch for signs of Coco's fatigue and make sure that she ate well and had her insulin. It was now time to encourage her to play and get out into the world. Coco has been our greatest teacher, and now all the lessons she has taught us about patience and determination and unselfish love are enabling us to care for her.

Now the special dog shows her special children how to live their lives with strength and joy and hope and dignity. As Coco's own sight is failing due to double cataracts, the children at Lighthouse take her by the leash and guide her through the hallway, telling her not to be afraid and to use her nose to find her way.

As her illnesses started to take a toll on her energy, she stopped twirling and dancing, chasing after balls, and playing hide 'n' seek. The children would simply show her the slide and let her smell the stairs and gently help me lift her to the platform – where she promptly laid down for a nap!

I asked the children if we should find other games that Coco could play and one sweet little girl told me, "Coco doesn't have to *do* anything; she just has to love us because she's the Love Dog." And when Coco could no longer see with her eyes, one gentle child told me not to be sad because Coco now "...sees with her heart."

So when you ask me what impact this one little dog has made on the lives she has touched, it is the pure love and hope she generates. That day, she became Coco the Love Dog.

Through the years at the other end of Coco's leash, I have been witness to many breakthroughs and learned from children who cannot see that Coco feels like cotton balls and that her kisses tickle. I learned from adults living with AIDS or catastrophic illness that we may be their only link to the outside world. I learned from teens who feel invisible that Coco never forgets them, and that every being is important and deserves to be remembered. I learned from children that "...Coco licks so much because she has so much love it oozes out in her kisses." I learned from adults who may not remember their own family members that Coco is memorable. And I learned that as Coco gets older, she depends on me to know when it's time to slow down and to love her for who she is *now*, and not for who she was years ago in her youth. Thus, she has taught me the greatest lessons in her senior years: Never look back, only forward. Never dwell on what you cannot do but relish in what you can.

As Coco retires from regular pet therapy visits, we continue to give presentations at schools and facilities and meet with clients of every age, able-bodied and challenged. We discuss living with adversity, overcoming challenges and fears, creating a life of balance and joy. I share my story with the students, as well as Coco's journey. I share with them Coco's daily routine. As I bring out the bag filled with her medications, needles, lotions, eye drops, and salves, they begin to understand what it means to make a commitment and the responsibility of pet guardianship (and parenthood). I am often asked if I knew she was so sick when I adopted her and I tell them yes; then they begin to understand empathy and selflessness and that for every helping hand you give out, you get back tenfold.

Having spent over 30 years as a corporate executive, Coco has so inspired me that I not only changed the focus of my life by devoting so much time to our volunteer efforts together, but I also joined the Board of Directors of the visiting program with which we work. Additionally, I joined the advisory boards of the facilities we visit. We serve as the "spokespair" for the Visiting Pet Program, for which we attend numerous fundraisers and events throughout the year. I leverage Coco's birthday each year as a fundraiser for a chosen non-profit. I wrote a children's book *Coco the Love Dog* and produced the *Coco the Love Dog* doll so that Coco can share her love with many more children than we could ever visit. I developed Coco's website so that children

could e-mail her and have a special pen pal (www.cocothelovedog.com), and, as Coco herself is now a philanthropist, we've donated over 2,500 books and toys. I changed my schedule completely when Coco was diagnosed with diabetes in order to maintain her insulin regimen, and now this summer we are both retiring from our hectic lives in New York and moving to Las Vegas to enjoy the beautiful weather and mountains – and spread the Love Dog message to children there.

I never imagined 13 years ago that I would not only get my life back, but that it would be even richer. I am taking early retirement because now it is *my* turn to take care of Coco as she has cared for me, and time is an even stronger currency for us both. With every shot of insulin I give Coco, I am reminded of how much she has given to others and how much she entrusts me with keeping her strong and healthy so that she can continue her mission. Our relationship has come full circle and there is nothing I would not do to ensure her living a peaceful and meaningful life...as she has done for me and hundreds of others her whole life.

As Coco continues to live her life with love and strength, she exemplifies the healing power of pets...and how one very special fluffy poodle can change lives at both ends of the leash.

Sue Grundfest has recently retired from 24 years as the Vice President of a major cosmetics company in New York to devote full-time to promoting the human-animal bond. She and Coco the Love Dog now live in Las Vegas and have partnered with several organizations to develop pet-assisted therapy programs in their new home. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: suegrundfest@aol.com

Coco at Work. Photograph by Sue Grundfest.

Describing that which Cannot Be Measured, Catalogued, or Classified

Nancy R. Gee, Ph.D., State University of New York, Fredonia

In this narrative, the author describes the case of a three-year-old boy who suffered from physical and cognitive disabilities, and who was severely withdrawn. Over the course of two years and extensive weekly therapy visits, the child developed a strong bond with the author's miniature poodle, Louie, who is a certified therapy dog. At first, he vehemently preferred to watch Louie from a distance. But slowly over time, and with Louie's seemingly intuitive understanding of his special needs, the two became the best of friends. Additionally, the author explains how Louie was integrated into the child's physical therapy regimen to provide variety and motivation. Note: Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Nancy Gee and Louie at Work. Photograph by Robert A. Siedentop. Used with permission.

For several years, my two therapy dogs and I have been making weekly visits to an integrated preschool classroom that consists of "identified" and "typical" children. The "identified" children have a variety of developmental delays ranging from language impairments to diagnoses such as Down's syndrome or autism. Our role in the classroom has been focused on increasing and improving verbalizations and the execution of gross motor skills.

In addition to the widely accepted benefits of physical activity for people of all ages, physical activity is considered crucial to the overall development of children (Trost, Fees, & Dzewaltowski, 2008). It has been shown to facilitate cognitive and social development (Olds, Kranowitz, Porter, & Carter, 1994; Sollerhed, Apitzsch, Rastam, & Ejlertsson, 2007; Stork & Sanders, 2008), and there appears to be a strong relationship between the development of gross motor skills and language (Rarick, 1980). As children develop more sophisticated motor skills, their capacity for language improves as well.

Initially, our approach was limited to classroom visits during which the children interacted with the dogs in a variety of ways. First, we taught them appropriate ways of interacting with dogs and then we taught them the verbal commands they could use to produce specific behaviors. We also taught them nonverbal signals to give to the dogs to produce the same behaviors. Later, we began a more physical program that involved playing games like "follow the leader" and "Simon says." In each case, the dog was the leader of the activity.

As you might imagine, the anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of our visits was plentiful. For example, it appeared to the teachers, aides, and some parents that the children were more willing to try to speak in the presence of the dog. They talked about the dogs before they arrived, they talked more during the visit, and they went home and told their parents about the dogs. Further, they seemed to enjoy giving the dogs commands to perform tricks and they seemed to want to play physical games that involved the dogs. But because I am a cognitive psychologist by training, I felt the need to examine this

scientifically. Four years ago, my students and I began conducting controlled laboratory experiments where we have investigated the effectiveness of Animal-Assisted-Intervention (AAI) on a variety of cognitive and motor skills in this preschool population. To date, this research has demonstrated that preschool children perform gross motor skills faster in the presence of a therapy dog while not sacrificing accuracy (Gee, Harris, & Johnson, 2007), they are more likely to adhere to instructions in the presence of a therapy dog (Gee, Sherlock, Bennett, & Harris, under review), and they make fewer errors on a categorization task in the presence of a therapy dog than either a human or a stuffed dog (manuscript in preparation).

Since I began doing this research, I've come to realize that certain aspects of the relationship that children can develop with a dog are scientifically measurable, such as those just described. However, there are other aspects of this relationship, or bond, or connection, between a dog and a child that are unique and thus very difficult to examine scientifically or in the aggregate. The true value and depth of these connections can only be experienced through examination of individual cases. Although I have many examples of heartwarming experiences related to my line of research and the many therapy visits my dogs and I have made over the years, one individual child really stands out.

Adam was about three years old when I first met him during a classroom visit. He was nonverbal, withdrawn, and severally physically disabled. The teacher told me in advance of our visit that she was unsure about how he would react to the dogs, but it was possible that he might not even notice their presence. The children were all sitting "criss-cross apple sauce" in a circle on the floor when I came into the room, except for Adam, who was being held by his aide slightly apart from the group. The teacher and I carefully watched Adam's response to the dogs.

My two certified therapy dogs are both miniature poodles. Louie, a neutered male, is very mellow and loves to be held and hugged, and he also enjoys performing his large repertoire of tricks for the children. Nikki, a spayed female, can perform tricks also, but her favorite thing in the whole world is to play fetch and tug of war. Nikki is very active and enjoys counting with the kids. I will hold up one finger and ask "How many?" and the kids will shout out "One!" and Nikki will bark one time. Then I will hold up two fingers and ask "How many?" and the kids will shout out "Two" and Nikki will bark two times. Nikki can count to 10 in this fashion and she does so at the top of her lungs.

On this particular day, Louie had done some of his tricks and was sitting quietly on the floor next to me while Nikki was playing fetch and tug of war and counting with the group of kids. I noticed that Adam was intently watching Louie, who wasn't doing much of anything. I also noticed that he cringed and shrunk away each time Nikki barked during the counting game. At the end of our session, I asked one of my students to take Nikki outside for a walk and the teacher and I asked Adam if he would like to meet Louie. We got no response. So we brought Louie closer to Adam, who immediately went into a defensive posture and began screaming. That reaction made this first meeting feel a complete failure, since Louie hadn't actually gotten within three feet of Adam that day. Adam had seemed completely mesmerized by Louie, so I really thought that he would want to meet him.

The next few sessions went similarly, except that each time Adam seemed to show a bit more interest in Louie and Louie was able to be closer to Adam as long as we didn't make a point of purposely approaching him. Louie could walk right by him on the way into or out of the classroom and that didn't seem to bother Adam at all. Louie could also lie down next to Adam and his aide as long as this was incidental to the day's activities and we didn't act as if it were being done for Adam's benefit. One day, Adam's aide was able to pet Louie with Adam watching intently, but when asked if he wanted to pet Louie, Adam again went into the defensive posture and began making guttural sounds that clearly indicated that the answer was "NO!"

Adam had physical therapy sessions every day that involved, among other things, walking exercises. One such exercise involved his aide

holding both of his hands and helping him to take steps in the hallway outside of the classroom. One day, Adam and his aide were in the hallway when I happened to walk by with Louie on his leash. Adam saw Louie, perked up, and took several steps in our direction with his aide hard pressed to hang onto his hands. Adam was trying to follow Louie, so I stopped to let him catch up. He stopped dead in his tracks and did not approach any closer. I decided to move on our way and Adam did the same thing again, but we quickly outpaced him. The aide told me later that Adam continued to search the hallways for us for several minutes after we were gone. Adam's aide also revealed that he had very little motivation for his physical therapy exercises and she was surprised when Adam had moved so quickly to follow Louie.

More in-class sessions followed, during which we made a point of routinely walking Louie past Adam without ever actually approaching him directly. One day, after the kids sang the Louie and Nikki song that always marked the end of the session, Louie and I were walking past Adam when he tentatively reached out his hand and let it rest on Louie's back. Demonstrating the intuitive understanding of humans' needs that makes him a remarkably successful therapy dog, Louie didn't react to Adam's touch or turn to face him, as he might have with another child, but just kept walking. Adam's eyes grew wide and he seemed to tense as he waited for Louie to react. When Louie didn't react by the time we were several feet past Adam, he laughed the biggest, most joyful laugh I'd ever heard him produce. He was still laughing when we left the classroom.

This went on for several more sessions. Adam would reach out and touch Louie as he walked by, Louie would completely ignore him, and then Adam would laugh hysterically. During some of the sessions, we would take all of the kids upstairs to my lab, which is in the same building and is set up like a big playroom. They would take turns following Louie and Nikki through tunnels, over jumps, and through a set of dog agility weave poles. Adam, whose physical disabilities really limited his mobility, was asked if wanted to crawl through the tunnel and again he didn't respond. However, when he saw Louie do it, he began squirming to get away from his aide. The next thing we knew, Adam had crawled into the tunnel. He was halfway through the tunnel before we realized that he wasn't planning to come out the other end. He was laughing hysterically at this point because he saw that it could be difficult for an adult to squeeze into the tunnel to get him out. Louie, again demonstrating his ability to assess human circumstances, dashed into the tunnel and did a play bow just out of Adam's reach. Adam didn't know what to make of it, so he just sat there. Louie turned around and ran out of the tunnel. Adam still sat there. Louie did it again, but more slowly, and this time Adam tried to reach out and touch Louie as he exited the tunnel. Louie continued this process, staying just out of Adam's reach until he coaxed Adam into following him out of the tunnel. When Adam saw that he was outside the tunnel, he puffed out his little chest and smiled as if he had just accomplished something really big, which he had. He had never crawled through a play tunnel before.

Over the course of the next two years that Adam attended the preschool, we capitalized on the connection he was developing with Louie. I taught Louie how to push a roller board around with his front two paws on the board and Adam would push his roller board in pursuit of Louie. When Adam began working on walking up stairs as part of his physical therapy regimen, we used Louie as a motivator to encourage Adam to go up the stairs in pursuit of Louie. At first, Adam couldn't lie on the ground and roll his own body over, but he would watch Louie roll over and try it himself. His aide would help him to complete the rollover and Adam would laugh, apparently because he really loved doing what Louie had done. Ultimately, Adam learned to roll over by himself, and then we would have rollover competitions to see who could roll over and over faster. We even set up a start line and finish line. Louie beat him regularly at first, but ultimately Adam won the race. Then we set up miniature obstacle courses where Adam would follow Louie over the jump, through the weaves, and through the tunnel. Adam's connection with Louie grew stronger and

stronger. He was happy for Louie to approach him and he readily petted and hugged Louie as if they were long lost friends. I'll never forget the first time I heard Adam say Louie's name.

Adam grew and matured quickly. When I first met him, he was nonverbal, withdrawn, and severely physically disabled. Over the course of our time together, I saw Adam learn to walk on his own and even go through obstacle courses. He could speak, although his language skills were still delayed relative to his age-mates, and he was able to communicate and interact with those around him. Louie certainly wasn't responsible for all of these things, but there was something special about his interactions with Louie that contributed to these accomplishments in a way that can't be measured, or classified, or catalogued. But it is real nevertheless.

Adam graduated and Louie and I haven't seen him since that time. Frankly, I'm not sure that Adam will even remember us when he grows up, but I can assure you that I will never forget him and that special connection that he had with Louie.

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In addition to their therapy dog sessions with preschoolers, Associate Professor of Psychology Nancy Gee and her miniature poodles Louie and Nikki conduct research in the area of canine-human interventions at the State University of New York at Fredonia. They are interested in learning more about which specific aspects of the interaction between dogs and children can be most helpful to the children's development. They also moonlight in the world of dog agility, where Nikki has finished among the top dogs in her size in national competitions. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: gee@fredonia.edu

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Lessons Learned from Aging Dogs about Meaning and Continuity in Our Personal and Professional Lives

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This narrative is about the integration of the author's personal and professional life as told through the stories of her aging dogs. Each dog's unique contribution has given the author and her husband lessons learned about meaning and continuity in their personal relationship as a couple, in their individual predispositions toward dealing with life and loss, and in how the communication link of telling animal stories bonds them to colleagues who have their own stories to tell.

Karl and I met in 1967. I was entering as a freshman in a small United Methodist college, and he was a senior. He was a member of the football team, and the football team had agreed to help the freshmen women move into their dorms. I suspect there were more reasons for this set-up than just helping us get our things carried from cars into the building, but all I know is that I fell in love at first sight. I turned to a friend and declared, "I don't know who he is, but I plan to marry him!" She studied me for a moment and replied, "That's Karl Netting. Everyone knows him. Don't get your hopes up." I knew I had to act fast. Karl would be graduating in May and it was already September. We were friendly all during the fall, we began dating in January, and the rest is history. A year and a half later we were married. I transferred as a junior sociology major to Duke University, where Karl was in his second year of seminary.

As we dated I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Karl was an animal lover. He showed me pictures of beloved childhood pets named Ralphie (a Welsh corgi mix) and Rascal (lineage unknown). A pet skunk had followed him on his paper route until she developed a bad disposition. He had incubated eggs, which precipitated his father's going to court for disturbing the peace when one cracked open to reveal a gamecock that grew up to crow before dawn in Arlington, Virginia. Arlington was not a farming community!

I told him that when I was in the second grade, my first dog Bert had been hit by a car (my first experience with death). During my teen years, Petey (a silver poodle) was my steadfast companion. A favorite story was about Lover, my Easter duck, who had grown up to move to Uncle Mac's farm but who never liked to go near water.

The first spring that we were dating, we purchased a rabbit who lived a secret life in my dorm room until it was discovered by an unsuspecting housemother. Wherever we went we stopped at every petting zoo and agreed that we could not see how anyone would not like animals.

As newlyweds we lived in a little duplex apartment with an alley in the back. The alley was frequented by stray cats and dogs, and we served as a way station for any visitor looking for a short or long term stay. Hotdog, a redbone hound mix, recuperated on the rug at our front door whenever he needed a breather from alley life, and a beautiful tuxedo cat we named Boots became a permanent member of our little household, bringing our first litter of kittens into the world. When we moved from Durham, an aging Hotdog proudly sat in the moving van beside Karl as he drove out of town. Hotdog retired from the vulnerabilities of alley life to the country. Over the years Hotdog was joined by Sally (a coon hound who took an interest in Karl's parishioners' chickens next door), Pooker (a feisty little peke-a-poo), and Mildred (the dirtiest white cat we'd ever seen).

Our move to the country followed on the heels of our graduation from Duke University. I earned a B.A. in Sociology and Karl graduated with his M.Div. We were in our early

20's, eager to embrace the "real world." Karl was placed in a two-charge circuit as a newly ordained United Methodist minister, and I could only find part-time work at Sears with my sociology degree and no experience. We hit this rural country parish like a ton of bricks, bringing our newly minted ideas from a liberal institution into a very conservative countryside nestled in the Bible Belt. When the parishioners found out that we had pets in the parsonage, we were told that they were not allowed. That first year, two of Karl's parishioners who were part of a dog stealing ring pulled into our gravel driveway in the middle of the night, confiscated Hotdog, and took him to North Carolina where they were selling hunting dogs. Poor Hotdog had only hunted in alleyways and it was months before we figured out what had happened to him, too late to track him down. We returned Sally to my aunt who raised coon hounds because we were worried about her future, and we kept Pooker and Mildred in the house (despite the parishioners). These were hard years, and we were often mired in ideological and theological conflicts.

I realized that I needed to go back to school for a master's degree if I were to have the background to do what I wanted to do, and after two contentious years in a rural parish, the Bishop thankfully moved Karl to another church. By then, Pooker was a part of our family and provided a sense of continuity as we all moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, from southwest Virginia.

The Humane Association

By 1981, Pooker was 10 years old and an only pet. Karl and I had been married for 12 years, and I was writing my doctoral dissertation. One can get a little disoriented in the midst of a doctoral program. I was also working part time at the Area Agency on Aging where I had worked for several years after receiving my M.S.S.W. I spotted an ad in the local paper advertising for a professional person who was organized and had good management skills. The Knoxville-Knox County Humane Society was advertising for an Executive Director. I applied, even though I was planning on finding a teaching job and needed to finish the dissertation; I just needed to do something in the "real world." And something with animals might be fun.

I can vividly recall that Sunday afternoon at one of the high rise, all glass bank buildings in town. It was early fall and the board of directors of the humane society was meeting to interview candidates. I suspect that they were as curious about why I had applied as I was about them. I was doing well in responding to the interview questions, relieved to be in a world somewhat removed from analyzing my data.

Then it happened. One board member said something strange: "Would you be able to euthanize an animal?"

I was stunned. "Excuse me?" I asked. I was certain I hadn't correctly heard this question. He repeated, "Would you be able to euthanize an animal?"

I protested, rather weakly, with: "But I thought this was the executive director position." "It is, but there are holidays and times when people are on leave or out sick, and someone has to be able to euthanize the animals."

I paused only a minute. "Then you don't want me. I'd have a house full of animals before that would happen."

I stopped the interview at that point, then asked how many animals were killed at the shelter. The numbers were in the thousands.

As I left the room, I remember driving in a fog to a dear friend's house, a public health educator who owned two large dogs. When Cindy opened the door, I blurted out the story of my aborted interview and she sympathized. We ventilated. Two hours later, when I left her house, we had a plan to save the animals.

I had discovered in the interviewing process that the senior program officer of a national foundation was on the humane society board. The foundation was known to be funding community-based intervention projects with a special emphasis on elders. I just happened to be on the board of the local senior citizens home aid agency. It didn't take much time for Cindy and me to come up with a proposal.

Several weeks later we were having lunch with the foundation officer. We proposed that

we would work with the University of Tennessee School of Veterinary Medicine to develop a human-animal companion program for older people receiving in-home services. Thus began a collaboration between the School of Veterinary Medicine, the undergraduate human services department, the Area Agency on Aging, and the Senior Citizens Home Aide Service. With my social work background, Cindy's public health background, and our new colleague from veterinary medicine, we began a pet placement program. Human service students were trained to conduct assessments of the older people to be sure they would be able to care for a pet and veterinary students assessed the animals.

We learned a great deal in the process and those results have been reported years ago (Netting, Wilson, & New, 1987; New, Wilson, & Netting, 1986; Wilson, Netting, & New, 1985). It was our first funded research project. But it was our love of dogs that motivated us to save at least a few animals if we could. As young "pracademics" we learned so much from one another as we cut our teeth on interdisciplinary collaboration – for the love of dogs. In the process we tried not to project our love of dogs onto others, although it was hard not to do at times.

Just as we studied the human-animal bond over the years, I realized that I was living it out on a daily basis in my personal life. Karl can attest to the bonding that has occurred between us as human beings and those cherished creatures who have become so much a part of our lives over the years that their stories provide continuity and meaning for who we are. He told me the other day, "If someone hands me a dog in the nursing home, I will be one of those people who responds even if I've been very far away up until then."

Pooker

Maybe it's because I'm a gerontological social worker, and maybe it's because I'm an only child who was always close to adults, but I've always liked old dogs. The only puppy we had in our married life of 38 years was Pooker—and he lived to be 16. He was a high maintenance peke-a-poo that we bought for $20 from an old lady in Abingdon, Virginia, back in 1971. We know he had poodle in him, but we aren't so sure about the "peke" part. We think he really didn't know who his father was, nor did the lady who raised him. Pooker was so much a part of our lives that when we were searching for additional educational opportunities, the deciding factor that determined where we would go was whether married student housing allowed pets. I'll never forget it—Karl and I had applied to four locations, one eastern, one midwestern, and two points in the west. Karl was seeking an advanced clinical pastoral education program, and I was seeking a Ph.D. in social work. We would sigh with relief when the acceptance letters arrived and then lie in wait for information on married student housing. When I opened the first brochure from a far western location, there was a statement about no pets being allowed, and Karl would say, "Well, we just can't go there." I would agree, and we'd wait for the next brochure. Finally, the University of Chicago married student housing brochure arrived and it read "pets are welcome." In fact, pets were encouraged for safety. When I opened that brochure and read it aloud, Karl said, "Then I think we need to go to Chicago." Years later, when people in academe would tell me what a good school Chicago is, I could only thank Pooker for contributing to my quality education. He was, in all truthfulness, the deciding factor.

Pooker's life was so intertwined with ours that we carried a repertoire of stories about Pooker with us. There was the time when a workman had left the cover off a manhole and Pooker fell into the hole, or the time he was hit by a taxicab on a Sunday afternoon, or the time that he took on a Doberman who almost bit him in two. He was a spunky old boy!

But it was what Pooker taught us about old age that was most revealing. One day, I remember finding something strange on the kitchen floor, a crystallized substance. It was close to the refrigerator so I decided that something must be leaking. Karl came in and we scrutinized the material but couldn't figure out exactly what it was. We cleaned it up. The next day another crystallized substance was found, but now it was in another part of the kitchen. We scratched our heads. It took

us days to realize that Pooker was having accidents (something totally unknown because he was the best housetrained dog we'd ever seen). His urine was literally so full of sugar that it was crystallizing. It is amazing the dog wasn't in a diabetic comma and it took two helping professionals days to figure out that he was diabetic. We immediately took him to the vet who put him on insulin. Karl would go out in his bathrobe at the crack of dawn, wait for Pooker to hike his leg, then catch as much urine as he could in a paper cup. He'd test the urine to determine just how much insulin to inject into that little dog.

Now this went on for weeks, perhaps months, before Pooker had finally had it with Karl. Being stuck with a needle every morning was not his cup of tea. One day, this dog who adored Karl and would have never turned on his owner growled at Karl when he went to give him his shot. This was unthinkable! Karl was a hospital chaplain at the time and he said to me, "I should have known better. I was showing no bedside manners, just taking care of business. From now on I'm going to love on that dog before and after his shot, so that he knows that I care about him." This intervention worked, and Pooker never growled at him again. Karl and I would both use Pooker as an example in our teaching experiences after that – talking about the importance of emotional care when instrumental care or treatment was being given.

It was not long after that that Pooker began running into things. We knew that he had cataracts and his cloudy eyes were fading, but now he was going blind. We used what we knew about working with people with sight problems – keeping everything in the same place so that he could safely negotiate the house. This worked well. Being a person who moved furniture as a form of therapy, this put a bit of a crimp in my lifestyle, but it was worth it to see Pooker negotiate his environment. Karl had always joked about my furniture moving, quipping, "Just as I learn to negotiate the house in utter darkness, Ellen moves the furniture!" Now we talked about not moving things as a collaborative effort to make the house safe for the dog, but it revealed how often we talked through Pooker about our own relationship and what we liked and didn't like.

It was during this time that we began to talk with one another about quality of life and what that might mean to a dog. What we were really talking about was what quality of life meant to us. Pooker was blind and diabetic. He had arthritis, exacerbated by his fall into the manhole years prior, and he walked with what we affectionately called "the Poo-Bear shuffle." But he ate every bite of food offered to him and seemed to enjoy lying around the house. We began to talk about how we would want to live (or not live) in what condition and how long. We agreed that as long as Pooker didn't seem to be in pain, we would do whatever we could to make him comfortable, but we were also learning about what pain and comfort meant to us.

We both worked and left Pooker alone a lot, so we went to the pound to find a companion for him in his old age. With hindsight we realize that we were also getting a transitional animal so that we would not be without a dog when Pooker was no longer with us. We were taking care of ourselves as much as were taking care of him.

Lady

It was during this adventure to the pound that my ability to divine a perfect dog became evident, a skill that would follow me into my old age. I would walk up and down the row of cages, and when I came upon a dog that made me totally break down in tears, that would be the dog we chose. It didn't take long for me to break down when we went in search of Pooker's companion, because a little black, mixed, six-year-old dog stood on her hind legs and begged. She was ours in a heartbeat and we named her Lady.

Pooker was not at all sure he wanted a companion, and Lady had a great deal more energy than he. She was also less well house trained and sneaky about it...but she was the sweetest dog we'd ever seen and she tolerated Pooker's irritability. So they lived in toleration of one another until one day he slipped away into a diabetic comma when we were out of town and the kennel keeper forgot to give him his insulin. Pooker was 16.

Karl called me at work after he had gone to the kennel, only to discover that Pooker was dead. I came home to find Karl sitting in the bathtub (he was a shower person) and just soaking his grief away. I asked him if he was all right, and he said, "Oh, I'll be okay, but Lady is really sad and could probably use some attention." I remember thinking at that point about how many times we had projected our feelings onto our animals and had used them to convey how we were feeling. Lady was her usual joyous self, dashing around the yard and sitting up on her hind legs. Karl was really sad, but he wasn't yet ready to talk about it without crying. A few hours later we had a good cry together.

Lady was a joy and actually seemed to thrive once Pooker was gone. She was affectionate and dear, her sneaky toilet habits being her only vice. We loved her dearly and one day when Karl was petting her he discovered a lump that female dogs are wont to get. However, this lump was anything but benign and even with aggressive treatment, it came back with a vengeance. I would find Lady lying under our bed, panting, and I would gently pull her out and lie down on the floor with her, putting my face next to hers. One morning, the growth had become so large that she was having trouble walking and she pulled herself around the yard in obvious distress. We knew that the time had come to put her to sleep and we tried to prepare ourselves. That was one sad morning as we stood in the examination room with her and as she peaceably died. What we discovered is how differently we dealt with grief. Karl called the hospital, explained what had happened, and took the day off. He went to bed and slept most of the day. I busied myself cleaning up the house, gathering her things and getting them ready to give away, and trying to keep my mind occupied. It was a very sad day, and we were dog-less for the first time in18 years.

We vowed not to rush into anything – we needed to get over both Pooker's and Lady's deaths, which were within a year of one another. We said all the typical things about how we didn't want to go through that again, that we never wanted to be so attached to a dog, etc., etc. We knew all the platitudes and yet we seemed to be repeating them all. We also had a three-week trip planned in the months ahead, so it would be ridiculous to get a dog when we would only have to leave. But we also found ourselves wandering toward any pet shop we could find and spending an inordinate amount of time petting all the animals.

Jessie

One day, Karl came home from the hospital with a newsletter, in which there was an advertisement for an 18-month-old sheltie who needed a home. We would just go and "look" with no intention of getting a dog and of course we came home with Jessie. As it turned out, Jessie was raised to be a show dog but was too fearful to show. The breeder no longer wanted to keep her and was not sure that she could even go to a pet home. Jessie was painfully shy. When we brought her home, she was so fearful of Karl that she wouldn't move a muscle when he was around. She had only known women and men were obviously not to be trusted. Jessie stayed on a small rug in front of our kitchen sink in a catatonic state. We soon discovered that her view of the world was the size of the former cage to which she had been trained. The rug, even without barriers to impede her, was about the size of her cage. Our mistake was that we put her water dish next to the kitchen door, several feet from the rug. Had we not figured out that her view of the world was the rug, she would not have had enough to drink. When we moved the water dish onto the rug, she lapped up water as if she were dying of thirst. Then she would lie on the rug, not moving for hours. We would open the kitchen door and encourage her to go into the yard. She would race into the yard, do her business, and then come back to the rug, returning to her catatonic condition.

After almost a week of this behavior (or lack of behavior) on her part, Karl was convinced that she would never warm to him. I faced having to counsel him not to feel rejected. But I was perplexed about Jessie. I had had two colleagues come to the house to work on a book manuscript and when they went into the kitchen to get some coffee, they literally did not notice that there was a dog on

the rug because she was so still. Another week passed. She only moved to go outside, then returned to her rug. We always knew where to find her.

In the second week, I sat at the computer writing one summer afternoon. The house was quiet and I heard a rustle, then a collar jingle. I realized that Jessie had left the rug. I kept composing, not looking up. The next day as I worked, I heard another rustle and I was convinced that Jessie was moving down the hallway toward my office. I looked around and she ran back to her rug, settling in for the remainder of the afternoon. On the third day, she moved into the hallway and looked for me. I decided to get up from the computer, walk slowly down the hallway, and move past her, almost as if she were not there. I did not dare reach down to her or act like I knew she was there for fear of frightening her. I walked past her, heading for the living room. She followed me. She looked at me. Then she frolicked around me, running around the room, almost joyously. I frolicked with her for at least a minute and then a strange look appeared in her eye, almost like a wild animal, and she quickly turned and headed for the kitchen rug. It was as if she'd caught herself and remembered who she was. When Karl came home that afternoon, I told him about this. He looked at the catatonic dog on the rug and then looked at me like I had been working too hard. It was almost impossible for him to believe.

Jessie and I frolicked for a few minutes every afternoon the next week. Each time she would quickly return to her rug. Karl would come home and I would tell him about this magical experience and he would shake his head in disbelief.

Mitzi

As several weeks went by and Jessie would only connect with me for short intervals, Karl was beginning to feel very disillusioned. Then I struck upon an idea. Jessie needed a role model. She just didn't know how to be a dog and another dog needed to teach her. I recalled that the breeder who was anxious to give Jessie away also had her mother and grandmother. The grandmother was retiring from the show ring and might be available on loan. So I called the breeder and inquired. Ironically, since Mitzi (the grandmother) was retiring, she was up for adoption to a pet home. It never failed to amaze me how people could give up dogs once they were not useful, but then I have never understood raising pure breed dogs either. That is likely another story...but on this occasion my timing was right.

Mitzi was Jessie's grandmother and both were beautiful tricolored shelties. We learned that Mitzi had become so stressed in her years as a show dog that she had actually killed an entire litter of pups. Mitzi had a record. But when we brought her to the house and Jessie saw her, it was if a light had gone on in Jessie's eyes. She leaped forward and ran to her grandmother. They frolicked in the living room, much as Jessie and I had done. Jessie literally came alive when her grandmother walked in. Karl kept saying, "I can't believe you knew that she needed her grandmother." But truth be known, my grandmother had been my best friend, so I figured it might work for another species as well.

Jessie and Mitzi were a bit neurotic in many ways, but they were constant companions. Mitzi didn't seem like a dog who could be a murderer of her own children, but then she had been living a life of stress. She settled into her retirement from the show ring with us and followed Karl around the yard, inspecting every plant planted and every seed sown. Jessie would imprint after her grandmother, then seek some solitude in another station in the yard. When a lightening storm would come, they ran out into the rain and looked up at the sky, the exact opposite of most normal dogs. As shelties, they were herders, so whenever we pulled into the driveway, they would try to herd the car until we'd have to get out and put them in the backyard so that we didn't run over them. They didn't appear to have any common sense, but they were beautiful animals.

When we moved across country, they sat side-by-side in the backseat of the car and didn't move a muscle. We had to coax them out to go to the bathroom. And when we arrived in Richmond, after three days on the road, they got out of the gate of our rental house and disappeared into the night. We

searched the alleyways and streets until 2:00 a.m. and finally gave up until dawn. They were located at least four miles away, having crossed one of the busiest thoroughfares in town, at the Purina Dog Chow Company next to the railroad yards. A bunch of railroad men used cell phones and trucks to round them up for us. We figured that they were going to hop a train and head back west, once they'd rounded up some grub. When we tried to give the railroad men money to go out and have lunch for finding them, a man in bib overalls looked at Karl and said, in a deep southern voice, "Son, you don't have enough money to feed a hungry railroad man!" Instead, we wrote a letter to their supervisor, thanking them for welcoming us to Richmond in such a helpful way.

Ironically, Jessie and Mitzi ended up being the transitional animals who introduced us to our new work colleagues. A human interest writer for the local paper picked up on the story of our lost dogs and put a piece on the front page of the paper about our arrival in town and how the dogs were rescued by the employees of the railroad company. When Karl appeared at the hospital for his first day of work, and when I came to the faculty retreat for the opening day of fall semester, everyone said, "Oh, you're the one who lost the dogs!" This made for a smooth transition as new colleagues shared their animal stories with us.

Jessie and Mitzi both went deaf over the years. We got used to calling and not having them respond. I would go out into the yard and wave until they saw me motioning that dinner was ready. Or if they were sleeping soundly, we'd go over and touch them to alert them to whatever we needed them to know. Neighbors often said quietly, "I hate to tell you this, but I think your dog is dead. She's been lying in the yard not moving, even when I turned the lawnmower on." We'd simply reply, "Don't worry, she's just deaf." And for a long time that was true.

At age 16, we found Mitzi outside the back door, lying in the gravel one Saturday morning. We knew that she was dead as soon as we saw her, lying there quietly, her tongue somewhat distended. We wrapped her in a large towel and carried her to the veterinary office where they took her body to dispose of. Her death was not unexpected, as we had set up a little clinic in the laundry room, hanging a bottle of saline from a large plant hook in the ceiling, setting her on a nonskid rug on top of the washing machine, and then hydrating her every few days so that she would not be overtaken with kidney failure. Death was inevitable but we prolonged her life for months with this procedure. Being the chow hound that she was, we think we prolonged her quality of life because she ate ravenously until the day she died, enjoying every morsel and seeking treats at every opportunity. She reminded us of Pooker who was always ready to eat.

Sandy

By the time Mitzi died, we had acquired a third dog. Sandy was about two years old when Karl brought her home. She looked like a golden on corgi legs and she had the disposition of a golden – incredibly dear with soft brown eyes. Sandy had been raised with a yardful of dogs of all extractions and her owner was an old man who was the son of slaves. He loved his dogs, but his wife was not particularly fond of them. He wanted his dogs taken care of before he died, so Karl said that he could take one. At that point Karl had moved to hospice chaplaincy so he was visiting patients in their homes. Sandy was often picked on by the other dogs, so Karl had bundled her up and brought her home. Sandy was shy, like Jessie. She cowered whenever we'd have a broom or rake in our hands, making us think that she had been struck at some point. She and Jesse were good companions for one another. When Mitzi died, Jessie was 13 and Sandy was three.

Jessie lived to 16. It was strange how 16 seemed to be the lifespan for our old dogs. Jessie was following Karl in the yard when she stumbled and fell over. Karl thought that she was dead, but he was able to pump on her chest and revive her. However, something devastating had happened and she never fully regained herself. She began slipping away, retreating and not eating. She moved into her catatonic state of solitude almost like she had begun her stay with us many years before.

Soon she was not eating or drinking at all. She was dying, but very slowly. I would spend time with her, trying to help her up, but she moved very little. We waited and she was starving to death. On Karl's birthday we made the decision to have her put to sleep and we felt as if we had waited too long. As we carried her into the veterinarian's office, she was limp and close to death. She slipped away very quietly.

Sandy was devastated. She grieved like nothing we had ever witnessed in an animal. She was not hungry. She kept going under the deck and staying for hours and hours, not moving around the yard very much. She was so sad that it made us sad to see her. She had always been around other animals and she grieved the death of Jessie. We vowed to find her a companion and went to the shelter to rescue a dog.

Pitiful

We looked at a number of dogs, trying to find one that would be gentle with Sandy and about her same size. I saw a row of cages along the far wall. I asked about that row and the attendant told me that that was death row. Those dogs were old. I asked her to open a cage along that row because I could see two eyes but the dog was way back in the recesses of a dark cave. She pulled out the most pitiful animal one could image. This dog was so thin that her bumpy backbone was sticking out. She looked like an old poodle mix with sad eyes and totally matted fur. I broke down and started crying. Karl said, "Honey, I don't think this dog is well." The attendant said that we couldn't take her anyway because their policy was to keep a dog until the day of its being euthanized in case someone claimed it. Her day was on Monday and this was Saturday.

On Sunday night I awakened in the middle of the night and said, "I can't live with myself if I don't rescue that dog." So Monday morning when the shelter opened, I called ahead and said that I was coming to pick up number 334. When I picked her up, she was emaciated and I headed straight for our veterinarian's office. Our veterinarian took one look at this old poodle mix, guessed her age to be at least 12 or older, and ran her finger down her bumpy spine. "She's SO thin," she kept saying. "You've got to get her to eat." I took her home and fed her. She ate well. Within hours she was trying to climb over the doggie gate between the kitchen and the laundry room. When Karl called, she let out a howl that would disturb the dead, and Karl said, "I can't believe it...that sounds just like Pooker!" (Pooker had had an incredible ability to throw his head back and give a soprano glass-breaking howl.)

When Karl arrived home, I asked him what we should name her. "She's pitiful," he said. "I know she's pitiful, but what should we name her?" "Pitiful," he repeated, "Look at her, she's pitiful." So, that's how Pitiful got her name. Gradually we introduced her to Sandy, who was still grieving over Jessie. Sandy thought that Pitiful was the grand dame of all dogs. She was enthralled with this ancient creature and followed her everywhere she went. Pitiful strolled around the yard like a queen, looking over her shoulder at Sandy as if she were holding court. But Pitiful was not to be a yard animal. She staked out the best seat in the den and spent hours lying on the couch. Each week she gained strength and when we bathed her, she looked soft and wooly white with spots of gray. Sandy adored her.

It was a Saturday morning, exactly six months after we had brought Pitiful home, and Karl had gone down the steps to the back deck, ready to do some gardening. As he glanced back up the steps, Pitiful teetered on the top step, went limp, and fell down the steps at his feet. He brought her limp body into the house and handed her to me while he called the veterinarian's office. She was alive, but leaned her body into mine as if she would melt into me. By the time we got her to the office, she had come around a bit, but something was decidedly wrong. Our veterinarian wondered if she had had a stroke. That afternoon, she died in the clinic as a team of practitioners tried to revive her.

Schnapsy

Sandy was alone again and Karl and I were devastated. There had been something about that old dog that had reminded us of Pooker – spunky and strong willed, in control and able to ask for what she wanted. We saw

in the paper that someone was advertising schnapoos (schnauzer/poodle mix) puppies. We drove for an hour way out into the country and found the trailer in which an older woman lived with a house full of dogs. Two of the cutest schnapoos were racing around the living room with a full bred schnauzer, a two- or three-year-old schnapoo, and a poodle mix (the mother of the puppies). The two- or three-year-old was in distress and a bloody patch oozed from his chest. She explained that her grandsons had been helping her clean up the dogs and had taken the scissors to this male dog, trying to cut out mats, and had cut him.

I didn't miss a beat. I went over to him and asked her what he would cost. She was her daughter's dog, but her daughter couldn't keep him in an apartment. She replied, "I guess it would be $25.00." I opened my purse and gave her the money. Karl looked at me in bewilderment. We thanked her and left the trailer, with the bloody adult schnapoo in tow. When we got into the car, Karl looked at me and said, "I thought we were coming for a puppy." I simply replied, "We have to get this one to a vet. He's hurt." The dog, who would later be named Schnapsy, leaned up against me and we drove away.

Fortunately, Schnapsy was not deeply cut and healed well. When we introduced him to Sandy, she did something that I've never seen another dog do. She moved away from her food dish and let him eat her dinner. From that moment on, Schnapsy and Sandy were companions. Neither had the need to be an alpha dog because they looked to Karl as the alpha dog. Today, Sandy is about 12 and Schnapsy is about eight. We're all aging in place together.

Lessons Learned

Karl and I brought a love of animals to our relationship. We each had a history that involved numerous pets of various kinds. In my household growing up, animals served as a source of companionship in a quiet home dominated by a good provider, my engineer father. In Karl's home, animals served as a source of social support in an environment dominated by an unhappy mother. For different reasons as children, we grew to appreciate the companionship provided by animals and appreciated their unconditional affection. We then brought that appreciation to our relationship; in sharing our pet stories, we got to know one another. One of the values we held in common was a basic respect and sensitivity for nonhuman animals.

Our animals have provided us with insights into both our personal and professional lives. As a gerontological social worker, I often witnessed the importance of companion animals to their elderly caregivers. Older persons would tell me that they could not move to public housing because their pets were not allowed to go with them. Colleagues and I were involved, now over 25 years ago, in advocating for public housing laws to change those policies. When others could not understand why an older client would not move, I could explain the importance of that human-animal bond. As a hospice chaplain, Karl visits in people's homes. He comes home covered with animal hair, telling me stories of how he connected with his patients when they saw that he was willing to let Muffy sit on his lap or when he disclosed about his pets. The language of pet ownership is a way to develop relationships with those patients who have those attachments.

I was involved in human-animal companionship research early in my career. Our research team could cite all the platitudes – dogs are nonjudgmental, they are always glad to see you, they serve as communication links with others (Wilson, Netting, & New, 2006) – but it was in our personal relationships with Pooker, Lady, Jessie, Mitzi, Pitiful, Sandy, and Schnapsy that Karl and I learned the most about ourselves.

Pooker taught us the importance of the human touch in our professional, instrumental practice. Giving treatment without a warm bedside manner could do more harm than good. He was the final factor that influenced our decision about where to go to complete our graduate education. Pooker was a conduit to our dialogue about the meaning of quality of life and quality of care. He literally became our communication link, facilitating our talking about what quality of life would mean for us and then jointly trying to decide what we might

need to do to make his life as comfortable as possible. In the process we learned how one another viewed quality of life and what we would want for ourselves as we age in place. Karl and I still talk about Pooker and use him as an exemplar of resiliency in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. He is part of our story for we literally grew up together with Pooker as our companion. As a couple our small talk with others is often based on Pooker stories – the time in fell in a manhole, the time he was hit by a taxi in Chicago, how he chased rabbits in the dessert when we moved to Arizona, etc. He became part of our narrative as a couple.

Lady and Jessie taught us that dying is a very personal process, and that withdrawal is okay and must be respected if that is needed. I have learned to admire Karl's incredible, almost uncanny ability to recognize what dying people are telling him even when they cannot speak. He is a master at interpreting symbolic cues and messages, both verbal and nonverbal. We both have learned a great deal from our animal companions who communicate in nonverbal ways and I think it has made us more observant in our work and in our personal relationships. We have also learned how to respect one another's need for silence and to read one another's nonverbal cues.

Jessie also reminded us of the importance of relationship when she frolicked with her grandmother and came out of her shell. Mitzi taught us that a quality life can be maintained until the end if palliative care is administered with gentle attention. It was Jessie and Mitzi who served as the communication link with our new colleagues in Richmond, facilitating our transition through the medium of animal stories. In Chicago, Pooker had been our communication link to other people who lived in our building and we watched the formation of a dog walkers' culture of protection and caring in what could have been an unsafe environment. In large cities we learned that dog walkers are on the streets for a purpose, and therefore they are likely to garner more trust than persons who have no obvious purpose for being there. People would start conversations with us because we were walking a dog.

Lady and Pitiful were pound dogs and both lived much shorter times with us than we would have wanted. But they were incredibly full of life, even though they both had come from death row. Lady was six, and Pitiful was 12 at a minimum, and both were not likely to be adopted because puppies and younger animals simply stand a better chance. They taught me that I was absolutely right to stop the interview with the humane society. It would have broken my heart to have euthanized an animal just because no one wanted to take him or her home. What it did for us as a couple is incredible because it opened an ongoing dialogue about the stewardship we owe our environment and the value we place on life, both human and nonhuman. Karl and I are deeply connected in this value and now that we are approaching retirement, we talk about ways by which we might volunteer to work for the betterment of animals.

Pitiful was with us just six months, an interesting length of time since Karl works for hospice where a diagnosis of six months or less is the norm. We believe that those six months were exemplary in terms of what can happen in hospice care. Pitiful reminded us of the spirit of resiliency and a determined nature. She was with us a short time, but her impact was greatly felt. She was a beacon of hope for Sandy and helped her work through her bereavement process in a way that we could not. For us, she allowed us to cry (again) together but more freely this time as we are less concerned that we not break down in front of one another. In our early years, I cried freely, but Karl tried to hold back. Now we both cry and it's okay.

Sandy showed that even a dog can befriend a stranger, moving from her dish to allow Schnapsy passage. And Sandy reminded us of the importance of relationships, something we had witnessed when the light went on in Jessie's eyes as her grandmother (Mitzi) came into the room. As they frolicked, we saw playfulness and joy come to Jessie. I have watched Karl gently stroke Sandy and sit with Schnapsy, his head on Karl's lap. I see in this man a sense of compassion and caring. In our relationship I have discovered that Karl is a person who can seize the moment, who lives

for the day, who does not dwell on the past or live in the future. We are so different because I am always living years ahead, planning what I need to do, pushing to make it happen. Finally, I am beginning to recognize the importance of just "being with and being present." Karl respects my ability to plan and says that he benefits from those skills, but we have often talked about how our dogs know how to live in the present, and Karl and the dogs have taught me to be more present in my relationships.

Sandy and Schnapsy are sitting on the couch with Karl as I write this. They think that he is the best thing since sliced bread – their alpha dog. I think that they have enriched our lives beyond words and their stories have become part of our narrative as a couple. Their stories have been told in our professional circles as well, for it is in their telling that many lessons about aging, illness, intervention, relationships, and the bond among living creatures contributes to our understandings of ourselves and others.

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Karl and Schnapsy. Photograph by F. Ellen Netting.

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"His Ears Are So Soft!" VETPETS: An Animal-Assisted Visitation/ Activity Program for Children and Families at the Philadelphia Ronald McDonald House

Christina Bach, M.S.W., University of Pennsylvania

Animal-assisted activity and therapy programs (AAA/Ts) are becoming more common in various physical and mental health settings and with a variety of populations. VETPETS is an animal-assisted activity program sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. Weekly volunteers from the school visit the Philadelphia Ronald McDonald House (RMH) with certified therapy dogs. By partnering with Penn Vet, RMH is able to bring a little piece of home to the families residing there by acknowledging the importance of the human-animal bond and its impact on human physical and mental health. In addition, VETPETS provides much needed diversion, recreation, and social support to families who are often facing a life threatening or life altering medical crisis. This narrative describes the history, mission, and goals of VETPETS as well as highlights the experiences of children benefiting from the program at RMH.

Gus. Photograph by Christina Bach

Every day on the way out the door to go to work, I review a mental checklist of what I need to take with me. Blackberry... check. Pager... check. Notepad... check. Beagle... check. Beagle? Who takes a beagle to work with them? I am the coordinator of an animal-assisted visitation program and a veterinary social worker and I am lucky enough to take my six-year-old beagle, Gus, to work with me on a regular basis. Gus has a job too – he is a companion animal who gives unconditional love and support to the children and families he interacts with as a therapy dog.

VETPETS is a unique collaborative relationship between the Ryan Veterinary Hospital (Ryan), the School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania (Penn Vet), and the Philadelphia Ronald McDonald House (RMH). RMH "provides a home away from home for families of critically ill children receiving treatment at local hospitals" (Philadelphia Ronald McDonald House, May, 2008). Each week human volunteers (all staff, faculty, students, or alumni of Penn Vet or Ryan) and their therapy-certified dogs visit children and families residing at RMH. The two facilities are just three blocks apart; thus, the connection between the agencies was easy to build and maintain. However, it is only in the last year that the program has begun to establish itself more formally as an animal-assisted visitation/ activity program with a mission statement and action toward the development of policies, procedures, and guidelines for volunteers, both human and canine.

History of VETPETS

The idea of taking animals to the Philadelphia Ronald McDonald House was the brain child of a veterinary student in the early 1980's. She approached the Dean of the Veterinary School, who directed her to the social worker. Together, they approached the administration at RMH and VETPETS came into existence. Animals were first evaluated by the behavior staff (behavior veterinary assistants) at Penn Vet. Then, volunteers were

instructed to focus on recreation. Families were provided with Polaroid photos of the children with the animals. There was no formal mission statement, organizational structure, goals, grievance procedure, or evaluation of the program. Animals were not required to be formally certified as therapy dog by groups such as the Delta Society or Therapy Dog International. Despite the lack of program formality, VETPETS was able to sustain itself throughout the years due to recruitment of volunteers by the social worker at Penn Vet.

The Missions of Ronald McDonald House and VETPETS: A Perfect Complement

In a recent study by the American Veterinary Association, the number of U.S. households with pets climbed by 7.6 million, to 59 percent of all homes, up from 58 percent in 2001 (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2008). In other studies it was found that 80 percent of households with children also have pets (American Veterinary Medical Association, 1993; Beck, 1996; Spence, 2002). Given the number of children with companion animals in the home and the number of families coping with chronic illness, it is clear that pets play a key role in providing love and companionship and improving quality of life (Spence & Kaiser, 2002). Therefore if children with chronic illnesses are already benefiting from companion animals in their homes, it is logical to bring the benefits of that relationship to them when they are not at home.

Due to medical conditions, allergies, and space, RMH does not allow families to bring pets with them during their stay. By partnering with Penn Vet, RMH is able to bring that little piece of home to the families and recognizes the importance of the human-animal bond and its impact/influence on human physical and mental health. In addition, VETPETS provides much needed diversion, recreation, and social support to families who are often facing a life threatening or life altering medical crisis.

I took on the role of Coordinator of VETPETS in September of 2007 as part of my job as Director of Veterinary Social Work and Pet Bereavement Services at Penn Vet. After observing and participating in the program for nine months, it became clear to me that VETPETS desperately needed guidelines, structure, and a mission statement to continue to be a viable, vibrant, valid, sustainable animal-assisted activity program as well as potentially to expand to other sites. I utilized the Delta Society's *Animal-Assisted Therapy Standards of Practice* (1996) and Ann R. Howe's *Starting a Visiting Animal Group* to help guide the development of the VETPETS mission statement, structure, and goals. In identifying the mission of the program, we, as a group with common purpose, can also establish short- and long-term goals for the program, including Therapy Dog International certification for all participating dogs, development of an interdisciplinary advisory committee, website development, and possible expansion to other sites. I have developed web resources and photo sharing for parents through the Penn Vet website. This enables parents to share photos and stories from VETPETS with relatives and friends all over the country.

The mission of VETPETS now is "to enrich the lives of patients and families residing at the Philadelphia Ronald McDonald House by providing high quality animal-assisted activities/visitation by members of the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine /Ryan Veterinary Hospital community" (VETPETS Policy Manual, June 2008). The immediate goals of the VETPETS' program include development of a policy manual and volunteer orientation program, Therapy Dog International certification for all canine volunteers, creation of an interdisciplinary advisory committee, and recruitment of more veterinary student volunteers. The development of an interdisciplinary advisory committee, made up of representatives from RMH, Penn Vet and VETPETS, will assist in making decisions about VETPETS' goals and future direction. The advisory committee is also essential in the development of a grievance policy to help manage any conflict within the organization.

At this time, RMH is the only site available for visitation by VETPETS volunteers. In the future, other sites, such as the Living Independently for Elders (LIFE) Day Program and the Inpatient Hospice Unit of Penn Homecare and Hospice, may be included. Should expansion of the VETPETS program occur, the mission statement will need to be altered to incorporate other sites and the needs of other types of clients.

Definitions of Animal-Assisted Therapy/ Activities (AAT/A) and Benefits of Participating in Animal Assisted Visitation/Activities

Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA) provide an opportunity for relaxation, play, and learning as part of an informal visitation by an individual or group of companion animals and their owner/handlers. In AAA, the emphasis is on utilization of the presence of companion animals to improve quality of life. AAA may be provided by volunteer owners/handlers who are co-certified with their pets as animal therapy teams. Animal-assisted activities differ from animal-assisted therapy (AAT) in that AAT is part of a variety of clinical encounters with a trained mental health provider whereby the animal is utilized as a therapeutic tool. The presence of the animal during the therapy session serves the client's and therapist's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical treatment plans and goals (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007). When developing and maintaining a program such as VETPETS, it is important for volunteers to recognize the difference between AAA and AAT and embrace the unique roles and functions of AAA in this setting.

AAA can be beneficial to physical and mental health and emotional well-being. Per Dr. Alan Beck, "Pets help children, improving their morale, and are a welcomed distraction" (personal communication, June 6, 2008). The literature about AAA/T clearly demonstrates that AAA/T provides participants with emotional support, diversion, recreation, sensory integration/tactile benefits, social support, companionship, and relief of symptoms of pain and stress. AAA/T can decrease anxiety and isolation and homesickness (if provided in a residential setting, such as VETPETS). AAA/T programs also teach children, through modeling, how to interact safely with animals, the potential benefits to humans and animals from the relationship, and humane and responsible care of a companion animal (Allen, 1997; Burch, Bustad, Duncan, Fredrickson, & Tebay, 1995; Cole, Gawlinski, Lindquist, & Kirksey 2000; Friedmann, 1995; Kaminski, Pellino, & Wish, 2002; Triebenbacher, 1998).

VETPETS introduces or continues this type of relationship among children and their families residing at RMH. Serpell writes, "...animals...are able to induce an immediate physiologically derousing state of relaxation simply by attracting and holding our attention...companion animals are capable of providing people with a form of stress- reducing or stress-buffering social support" (Serpell, 2006, p. 15). Above all, VETPETS supports Serpell's notion of animals contributing to human well-being.

Lauren's Story

I headed to RMH on a warm spring night in early April. My role that night was as a photographer since the program had just purchased some new digital equipment for instant printing. We provide the children/ parents with photographs of themselves with the dogs: posing, interacting, and playing. That was the first night I met Lauren. She was instantly drawn to the dogs as she walked out of the dining area after dinner. She got right down on the floor and started to stroke Taylor, a yellow lab who lost her tail after an injury and was subsequently abandoned. Taylor's owner, a veterinarian, rescued her and nursed her back to health after her amputation. Taylor is a joy, with a constant "dog smile." She loves to have her tummy rubbed. The bond between Taylor and Lauren was immediate.

There were six dogs there that night and Lauren made her "rounds" to each one, making new friends, hearing their stories, and relaxing. I madly snapped photos of Lauren; she quickly became my muse. When I told Lauren this, she asked, "What is a muse?" I said, "It means you inspire me."

While she was playing with the dogs, I talked with Lauren's mom, Marianne. She said that they would be staying at RMH for several weeks while Lauren underwent treatment. While Lauren visited with the dogs, Marianne had some time to unwind and watch her daughter joyfully interact with the canine volunteers and their loving owners.

Aside from taking photos, I had Gus with me that night. Lauren instantly formed a friendship with Gus. She would talk with me about him and what he enjoyed doing, all the while stroking his ears, proclaiming, "His ears are so soft." What I didn't know about Lauren at that time was that she is blind in one eye and has minimal vision in her other secondary to tumors on her optic nerve. The tactile interaction that Lauren had with animals was that much more significant for her given her impaired vision.

As the weeks of Lauren's treatment went on, she looked forward to every Wednesday evening. She developed relationships with each of the dogs and their owners. She loved watching Dolce do his tricks. Dolce is a parvovirus survivor rescued by an emergency veterinary at Ryan. Dolce loves to dance. Lauren smiled and laughed as Dolce spun around on his hind legs.

As her treatment continued, I felt myself developing a strong connection to Lauren and her mom, and I looked forward to seeing her interact with the dogs every week. VETPETS also helped Lauren's mom overcome a fear of most dogs. She enjoyed watching her daughter relax, laugh, and be a child while she played with the animals. This was a welcome diversion from the daily life of coping with Lauren's illness. Through relationships with animals, Lauren and Marianne built trust, comfort, and rapport with the canine and human volunteers.

In interviewing Lauren for this article, she shared her story with me. This is Lauren's medical story, from her Caring Bridge pages, written by her mom. (Caring Bridge is an online community providing free personalized websites that support and connect loved ones during critical illness, treatment, and recovery).

Lauren was born with a genetic disorder called Neurofibromatosis Type I. NF1 is an autosomal dominant genetic disorder which causes tumors to grow along nerves and can affect the development of non-nervous tissues such as bones and skin. It causes tumors to grow anywhere on or in the body and may lead to developmental abnormalities. It is the most common neurological disorder caused by a single gene, affecting one in every 4,000 births....As a result of NF, Lauren developed brain tumors, bilateral optic and hypothalamic gliomas, just before her second birthday. She had been on chemotherapy for about four years, with periods of progression and stability, and development of a new lesion in her brain stem, when she developed Evan's Syndrome, a rare blood disorder in which the body makes antibodies that destroy red cells, platelets and white blood cells. Her chemotherapy for the brain tumors had to be discontinued, and a different chemotherapy, coupled with synthetic steroids, was introduced to try and control the blood disorder. In the meantime, vision in her "good" eye had deteriorated. She started back on a new chemotherapy regimen in the fall of 2004. It kept her stable until January 2006, at which time scans showed that one of her tumors more than doubled in size. She was enrolled in a Phase I clinical trial of Lenalidomide from January 2006 until March 2007, at which time she developed demyelination in her cerebrum and had to discontinue. Most recently, she was

diagnosed with malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumor, an aggressive soft tissue sarcoma....Like so many children battling brain tumors, both the disease and the side effects of treatment have taken their toll on Lauren. She is blind in one eye and has visual deficits in the other. Her endocrine functions have been affected, requiring treatment, and chemotherapy has damaged some of the nerves in her extremities, requiring leg braces. She has endured surgeries; needle sticks; port flushes; bone marrow biopsies; blood transfusions; chemotherapy infusions; hospital stays; physical, occupational, and speech therapies; and too many doctors' visits to count. Despite all she has been through, she is a happy, enthusiastic, and optimistic child, with a crazy, infectious laugh and a true love for life. She takes great joy in helping others, finds treasure in what others may see as ordinary or mundane, and never lets a day go by without some kind of exciting discovery. No matter what challenges are placed before her, she never gives up. Her courage, resiliency, and relentless spirit are an inspiration to those who know her. (Loose, 2008)

Lauren completed her treatment after five weeks and it was time to say goodbye. When I asked Lauren what she liked best about VETPETS, she said, "Everything. It is just amazing." In email communication with Lauren's mom after Lauren returned home, Marianne told me that Lauren talks about VETPETS regularly, shares her photographs with friends, and has wonderful memories of her canine interactions during her lengthy treatment. For Lauren, VETPETS was an "exciting discovery."

The Garcias' Story

It was another Wednesday night at RMH and the atmosphere brought about by VETPETS was excited and joyous. Six dogs and their owners were present. There were also many children and families that evening. The children were thrilled to play with the dogs, feed them treats, watch them do tricks, and hug them. A young girl, Ana, around age 14, approached Gus. I had talked with her on previous occasions. Her family had been staying at the house for several months. Her two younger sisters (ages eight and three) had always been particularly interactive with the pets, but Ana was more like the observant, parentified child. She watched over her sisters with pride, joy, and a protective stance. Tonight, Ana seemed different. She sat down and started to gently pet Gus. "We are going home tonight," she said. I responded, "That's good. Are you happy to be going home?" Ana continued to pet Gus, took a deep breath, and told me, "Well yes, but...we are taking my brother home...not the way we wanted to. He died." She then proceeded to tell me about Miguel. He was 18 months old and had been sick his whole life. They had been staying at RMH for over eight months and were always hopeful. Sadly, Miguel lost his fight. Ana's mother was watching nearby. She spoke very little English but seemed to know that Ana was telling me about what happened. Quickly, she pulled out a huge photo album of Miguel and shared photos of him with me. We hugged and cried together. Gus served as a catalyst for Ana and her mom to share their grief. Before they left, Ana's mom asked if I would take a photo of her three girls with Gus. In the photo, the girls are all smiling, happy, and joyful, despite this being a time of great sadness for the family.

The Inspiration of Children: Implications for Social Work Practice and the Future of VETPETS

Through these personal experiences as a volunteer and coordinator of VETPETS, I have become especially aware of the importance

of pets in therapeutic, non-traditional clinical settings. I am inspired to educate other social workers about the importance of animal-assisted activities and therapies. Social workers should embrace the role of vehicle in the initiation, coordination, and continuance of AAA visitation programs at various sites throughout our communities. The power of group organization and visitation (in contrast to an individual visiting independently with a therapy-certified animal) helps to build community coalitions and relationships between agencies that might never before have interacted. Group visitation as a member of an AAA/T organization provides the opportunity to confront challenging situations in the setting together, counters isolation, inspires members to return, instills hope, encourages sharing of mutual experiences, provides an opportunity to share information, and above all reinforces and supports the sense of altruism experienced by volunteering with such a program. These are parallel opportunities and experiences demonstrated in psychotherapy support groups (Yalom, 2005).

Organizational structure, policies, and procedures in AAA/T and visitation programs yield program viability and success. AAA programs that reach out to children can also provide a unique opportunity for humane education regarding safe, effective, and positive pet ownership as demonstrated by the volunteers.

I'm inspired not only by the participants in the VETPETS program, but also by the energy, vitality, and exuberance of the program itself. In the future I hope to expand the program by building coalitions with other possible sites and reaching out to other populations (the dying, the elderly). This will also present new opportunities for practice in AAA/T and research. In devoting time to the development of a mission statement, program structure and goals, and volunteer guidelines, the credibility and viability of VETPETS as a community outreach AAA program has been reinforced and validated. Through further development of volunteer guidelines, training, and a volunteer handbook, as well as with the guidance of our advisory committee, VETPETS is expected to grow and prosper.

In developing helping relationships with children and families with the assistance of my faithful companion Gus, I have discovered a new method of clinical social work practice that has become a most rewarding, professionally fulfilling experience. Watching Gus with the children, seeing smiles, hearing laughter, generating a release of stress and anxiety, taking photos, hearing stories...it makes Wednesday night the most exciting night of the week and...it's *work*.

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Note: Lauren's and Marianne's names are used with permission. The names of the Garcia family have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

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My Seven (Dog) Month Itch

Peter V. Nguyen, Ph.D., Virginia Commonwealth University

This story is about the lessons taught to the author by his dog. By using the tools of self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-examination, the author was able to discern his shortcomings to improve the relationship between him and his dog. Lessons learned from the experience also parallel social work practice.

In slow motion we glance fleetingly at each other then quickly turn away. Within milliseconds, we turn again only to catch our stares searing one another. Slowly and cautiously, we begin our march and float toward each other, as if gravity is being lifted by the air below. Our bodies crash unto each other with me picking up and lifting him as if we've been missing each other all these years. So locked into the moment that everyone and everything surrounding us cease to exist with only the earth still spinning for those very seconds. We were oblivious! We were one!

It was a cold January and that was my running "boy and his dog" fantasy as I was embarking on a nine-hour trek to Indianapolis to retrieve Colt, an eight-week-old Weimaraner puppy. Nine hours later and upon our initial encounter, the romance that I'd conjured above remained a fantasy. There were no fleeting glances or searing stares. There was no floating or lifting. In fact, Colt barely noticed me. He was too busy playing with his brothers. The fantasy, however, serves as the starting point for many of the lessons that eventually took place in the span of the next seven months. This story is about the lessons taught by Colt and learned by this author. These lessons involve many social work aspects such as self-examination, self-reflection, self-awareness, projection, and cognitive restructuring. Although the lessons took place between me and Colt and had direct effects on our relationship, they also permeate the author's personal and professional lives.

Completing the Collage

The idyllic American dream can be constructed from a collage of Norman Rockwell's paintings. The collage comes together as a picture of a family living in a nice quiet town where houses with white picket fences envelop perfectly manicured lawns that front pristine streets. These are communities in which children grow up to perpetuate this cycle of simplicity by having a job, purchasing a house to start a family of their own, and of course, along the way, integrating a dog into this perfect picture (but not necessarily in this order). I began to put together my collage at the ripe age of 37. After graduating and finding my chosen vocation, I got my dream job of being a Professor of Social Work teaching at a great university. To boot, I was living in a city that fits my personality and lifestyle. Although the family route is temporarily on hold, I did manage to find another form of commitment by purchasing a house (but without the picket fence and for sure not the perfectly manicured lawn). In this sense, the construction of my Rockwell collage was near completion with only a couple of missing pieces. Since I was having a difficult time locating the "love" piece, and with the "dog" piece more readily available, the dog was logically the next move in my overall effort to finish painting my own Rockwell.

In Preparation

Choosing academia afforded me the opportunity to pursue my passion for teaching, researching, writing, and publishing. Moreover, due to its flexible schedule and working venues, this position also afforded me the luxury of maintaining an active lifestyle that involves numerous sports activities. Hence, my days often involve many hours of teaching,

researching, and writing either from home or the office in addition to participating in sports activities to reenergize myself for another round of intellectual pursuits. During this routine I began to imagine a four-legged companion lounging around my desk while I was working or accompanying me on one of my runs in the woods. As such, having a basset hound would not have been the appropriate breed. What I needed was an active mate. After doing much research about dog breeds, I concluded that a Weimaraner would be the best fit for me, personally and professionally. I also decided to name him Colt.

Reflecting on the process of deciding whether a dog would fit in my life, like a movie, I now recall only thinking of the trauma-free scenes of Colt lounging while I was working or running with me through the trails of my bucolic environment. What was neglected in the screenplay was the everyday ongoing responsibility of providing a structured routine; crate training; waking up in the night or being away for only for a few hours for potty training purposes; making numerous trips to the veterinarian and obedience school; daily walks to the dog park in the morning and evening; learning about and feeding him the proper food; dealing with my over reaction to his swallowing unknown objects, vomiting, or having diarrhea or blood in his stool; etc. In short, it was the nuances of everyday detail that were not included in the assessment process which would come to alter my personal and professional lives. On the other hand, little did I know that there were many life lessons embedded in these various responsibilities that would directly impact not only my relationship with Colt, but also force me to examine some issues which helped me grow as a person.

Life surrounds us with many learning moments. The clear learning moments usually take place when the events are obvious and impact us profoundly. We absorb those lessons with the hope of preventing history from repeating itself. Other times, some incidents occur ever so subtly that only those with an intuitive knack are able to recognize and tease out the deeply hidden learning lessons and their meanings. By "knack" I am thinking of the ability to reach deep into our "self" to reflect, critique, analyze, and even at times uncomfortably acknowledge and admit shortcomings. After all, self-awareness, self-reflections, transference, counter-transference, projection, framing, and cognitive restructuring are the terms we often use in social work classes with the common goal of sending future social workers out into the world to make a difference. These are the very elements that social workers ask of their clients. The title of this article, "*My Seven (Dog) Month Itch*," reflects a point in time that took place during our seventh month together. Scratching below the surface bleeds the lessons that positively infected my relationship with Colt as well as my personal and professional relationships.

Single Dad

Colt was born on Thanksgiving Day. He wore a dark grey coat with piercing blue eyes. The first half of his body was literally covered by long droopy ears as he wobbly pranced. At eight weeks old he weighed about 11 pounds. With all of his other six brothers looking identical to each other and uniformly displaying the same demeanors, I decided to throw out my fantasy or any other technique of choosing a puppy that I'd read earlier. Instead, I just blindly reached out and gently picked up the first patch of fur that I felt. From that moment on, Colt became a part of my idyllic Rockwell painting.

Although nowhere near the same intensity, I am now better able to have some sense of empathy when I talk to single parents. Despite reading numerous books in preparation for Colt, I thought I was prepared for this awesome responsibility. As it turns out, one can only be educated so much on an intellectual level (theory) but nothing beats real live experiences (practice). Frankly, the two do not always connect.

After a couple days of Colt being home, the first thing I noticed was my lack of sleep. I was no longer able to sleep as late, for as long, and wake up as late as I wanted – for I had potty training duty every three hours. Luckily, my schedule at school was relatively flexible but feelings of severe panic and fear

of Colt soiling his crate would occupy me if he were left alone longer than three hours. On days when I taught or had meetings, I found my head speeding home just as fast as the odometer in the car for fear of his soiling. The same feeling persisted while I was away attending a social or sports event. Wherever I would go, I would feel the tug of Colt and as a result I began to sense that my professional, personal, and recreational lifestyles were inconvenienced. This every three hour dance with Colt would go on to take its toll for the next three months until I received advice from a fellow dog owner that I was creating a bad habit by having him conduct his business so often. Further, on the days when I was working from home, I found myself feeling uncomfortable and guilty watching him inside the crate. As a result, I spent more time taking him on walks or playing with him. Hence, my work production dropped which, in turn, created more uncomfortable feelings of anxiety for me in my tenure track position.

Additionally, Colt had to be constantly monitored almost every second of his waking moments since he was chewing anything and everything that he was able to reach with his paws or teeth. No toys were able to keep his attention span for more than 30 minutes so the search was always on for the next taste test. Once found, the chew fest would take place. For socialization purposes, Colt and I would make our morning and evening pilgrimage to the dog park where he was lavished with praise and felt the touch of human hands while enlarging his own social circle by making new canine friends.

The trips to the veterinarian or obedience school often became raucous events since he would not sit still in the car (crating him was not an option since the big crate would not fit in my tiny car). While sitting on the front seat, it was as if he wanted to test his leaping ability to see if he could jump onto another parallel moving object. I became ambidextrous at driving with one hand while attempting to hold him down with a leash with my other hand. As mentioned earlier Colt eats or chews everything in sight. In spite of my vigilant surveillance, it was not unusual for him to be sneaky and swallow various foreign objects as we took our daily walks. I recall one time when I unsuccessfully wrestled a foreign latex object which was eventually swallowed by Colt. In my panic and frustrated state of mind, I contacted a friend whose husband is a veterinarian and was advised to give him two spoons of hydrogen peroxide, forcing him to vomit. Like most first-time parents or dog owners, any sign of him feeling ill, such as throwing up, having diarrhea, or displaying blood in his stool, would send me into crisis mode. A million "what-ifs" without any solutions would emerge. Unfortunately, these incidents never traveled alone as the entourage of stress, panic, anxiety, and frustration would cascade and descend at the same time.

Summer is now at its peak and proving its presence with oppressive heat. Colt and I have now coexisted for seven months. Weighing in at 67 pounds, he now is a gangly teenager, but still a puppy, with the energy of a turbo charger. He is able to leap as high and run as fast and far as a gazelle. He has also become a social butterfly by greeting and befriending every living object, whether humans, dogs, squirrels, or cats by wagging his short, docked tail. "Hello, my name is Colt! Wanna play?" I was proud of myself to have potty and crate trained him. However, despite the gains in size, speed, and strength, none of the previous behaviors of chewing or swallowing foreign objects inside and outside the house; occasional bouts of vomiting, diarrhea, or blood in his stool; quick boredom with toys; or riding safely in the car have changed. For me, the constant feelings of stress, panic, and anxiety continue to appear at their highest intensity every time one of the above incidents occurs. Further, I continue to feel guilty about the concept of crating Colt for several hours even after having read that the crate serves as a comfort den for dogs. Consequently, the tug of attending to Colt never went away after all these months and the interference with my professional and personal lives continues to persist. It was a constant that never faded. Bluntly, I became emotionally tired without realizing it.

Awakening

Emergence is a curious process and its meaning is not always transparent. Instead,

emergence can be like a "psychological collage" that is made up of images from various sources that seeped into our subconscious without any explicit effort. The outcome of this process can emerge slowly—or in my case, abruptly, and unexpectedly— but for sure not accidently. Put differently, I suspect that it is usually an amalgamation of events that get processed subconsciously and eventually a product or decision emerges. One day recently, without any provocative incident from Colt or in my own life, I simply decided that Colt and I were no longer a fit. My "itch" was taking place without a specific precipitating event. Admittedly, I was surprised at the timing and level of intensity. Feelings of emotional drain and the burden of Colt enveloped me like a blanket on a hot summer day. Along with this came a layer of guilt for having such perverse feelings. Feeling a little surprised and very uncomfortable, I unsuccessfully attempted to lift the layer of guilt. At the same time, in order to feel the freedom, I knew that I had to liberate myself by removing the physical and emotional cuffs of the past seven months. While I was feeling guilty, confused, and somewhat surprised at this newly arrived epiphany, I also knew that I needed to let this episode simmer before making any drastic and regretful decisions.

The Learning of "Self"

As a social worker and professor, I believe that self-reflection, self-examination, and self-awareness are usually the very first steps in assessing any situation. This is applicable in both personal and professional venues. Equally important is acknowledging the issues and their accompanying feelings. A day after my emergence, I began to practice what I teach and commenced my analysis. I concluded that the epiphany did not happen in isolation but had been in the works for a long period of time. Psychologically, I never rested and began to walk the tight rope from the very moment I got Colt, if not before. Further, I had to admit that my expectations of Colt were developmentally unrealistic. Specifically, Colt was and is still a puppy; yet I was expecting him not to chew on objects, dip his head into the trash can, test his limits with me, chase after squirrels and cats, and perform a host of other normal puppy behaviors. In essence, I was expecting adult behaviors from a puppy and in truth, even adult dogs may not have granted some of my unrealistic wishes. Subconsciously, I may have been expecting him to be "perfect," which may be an expectation that I also have for myself and people in my life. After more contemplation, I also realized that the continuous feelings of being tugged that eventually transformed into burden when I was away from Colt were the result of *me* not wanting to be confined in a crate for hours. I also failed to take into consideration that millions of other dogs spend much of their time in the crate while their owners are at work.

In order to alleviate my guilt, I decided to run two experiments to connect my intellectual knowledge of crate training and its application in real life. The first experiment was to be away for at least seven hours instead of the usual three to four hours that I had imposed on myself. The second experiment was to work at home and take Colt out of his crate every few hours for a walk. Colt came through both experiments brilliantly. He neither soiled in his crate from being there over a relatively long period of time nor did he complain about being in the crate while I was working. I concluded that I felt more uncomfortable watching him in the crate than he, himself, felt in the crate. This led me to an overarching uncomfortable conclusion: I was projecting my own feelings of burden and imposing my own values of unrealistic expectations and perfection onto Colt. Put differently, I was blaming him due to my own shortcomings, whereas he really was just being himself. Behaviors such as chewing or darting across the street to greet people are developmentally and age appropriate. Episodes of Colt vomiting or having diarrhea or blood in his stool are no different from those of humans. And the constant need to attend to Colt or the tug of guilt by having him in the crate was all self-imposed and dispelled when he performed just fine and appeared happy relaxing in his den.

The lessons that emerged from this episode between me and Colt can also be translated into social work practice. For

example, it is essential that social workers are knowledgeable of human developmental stages in order to discern and distinguish between healthy and unhealthy behaviors of clients. Further, it helps the social worker to start where the client is in order to set realistic expectations with achievable goals. Finally, unawareness of the social worker's personal issues or counter-transference can easily lead to biases and get projected onto clients. As a result, this can cause great damage to the therapeutic relationship.

Coda

The tools used in this analysis were self-reflection, self-examination, and self-awareness, resulting in the cognitive restructuring of my views about and relationship with Colt. The product was that the cuffs of physical and emotional constraints have been replaced with a newly found freedom, allowing me to enjoy him much more. I suspect that Colt also wonders about the whereabouts of the "uptight dad" and hopefully enjoys me more. No doubt my relationship with Colt has a new and different energy; however, the lessons learned from this incident would be wasted if I chose not to examine how my shortcomings may have impacted the people in my life, both personally and professionally. At the time of this writing, the collage remains incomplete but Colt is still a part of my Rockwell.

My Rockwell painting of the "boy and his dog" was unrealistic, an idealistic view of the human-animal bond. My inexperience with puppies was the perfect set-up for quickly dissipating this image. I researched breed characteristics and the possible "fit" with my personality, as any scholar would do. And when I randomly reached for one of those beautiful puppies, it never occurred to me to spend time with the others to see if there was a potential relationship between us. I looked to Colt as an appropriate piece in an emerging collage of a faculty member's life without recognizing that I had constructed a formulaic life into which I had interjected the paradox of spontaneity that only a puppy can bring. Rather than completing the collage, Colt ran amuck doing those things that puppies do. I, on the other hand, played the role of a worried and frustrated parent whenever he did not conform to my expectations or fit neatly into my world. This worry and frustration may have caused me to focus on the instrumentality of the relationship over and above the social-psychological and emotional aspects of human-animal bonding. What a journey these seven months have been!

I once read the quote: *"Life is a journey, not a destination, and the only constant is change."* The journey can at times be treacherous with uncomfortable feelings. But if one is willing to do the hard work of reflection, then perhaps the destination will be worth it in the end.

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Colt. Photograph by Peter V. Nguyen.

Comfort in Times of Crisis

Sandra Millers Younger

This narrative describes the author's experience volunteering with her dog, Terra, for the HOPE Animal Assisted Crisis Response Organization. This crisis response team puts the human/animal bond to good use by comforting victims and aid workers in times of stress.

Another October 26th. This year, it was going to be a good one. The weather was brilliant, just the sort of warm, sunny day San Diego is famous for. I was running errands and feeling happy and grateful, thinking about how far my husband, Bob, and I had come in the three years since October 26, 2003, when the epic Cedar Fire had taken our home and nearly our lives. It was the worst and largest of multiple wildfires burning across Southern California during a two-week siege. Altogether they had destroyed 3,710 homes and taken the lives of 24 people. Twelve of those victims had lived in our community. Bob and I had since rebuilt our house and our lives, and in the process gained a deeper appreciation of life's intangible riches. Yes, I was thinking, we were blessed; life was good again. And then came the news headlines over my car radio – a big, wind-driven wildfire burning out of control 125 miles away near Palm Springs, three firefighters dead, two more in critical condition. My throat tightened, and I felt sick. October 26th, and it was all happening again.

But this time, I wasn't helpless against the flames. This time, I could do something. Since the Cedar Fire, my Newfoundland dog, Terra, and I had become certified through HOPE Animal-Assisted Crisis Response (hopeaacr.org). As a HOPE team, we were trained and ready to offer "comfort in times of crisis" to victims, survivors, first responders, and others affected by traumatic events. Soon we were on our way to the Esperanza Fire base camp, headquarters for firefighters battling the blaze that had overtaken the crew of National Forest Service Engine No. 57. By this time, the fire was almost contained, and units were starting to demobilize. But a fourth firefighter had died, and the fifth man was not expected to survive. (He died a short time later.) Understandably, the mood in camp was grim. It was a perfect time for HOPE dogs to visit.

A fire base camp is a mobile city pieced together overnight near the site of a big wildfire. Convoys of tractor trailers bring in modular units that serve as administrative offices, kitchens, showers, and bunkhouses. Big tents house a dining area, as well as first aid, counseling, snack, and water stations. Smaller two- to four-person camping tents sprout up all around, providing extra sleeping quarters, and row upon row of fire engines and water tankers fill the parking lots. A really big fire takes days, sometimes weeks, to contain and can draw firefighting units from all over the country. It's not unusual for a fire base camp to accommodate up to 2,000 people for the duration of a major fire.

When Terra and I, along with my friend Carol Birch and her big Leonberger, Hoss, arrived at the Esperanza Fire camp, we checked in with our HOPE regional director by phone, snapped the dogs' vests into place, and began working our way down a long line of engines and crews. Most were packed up and waiting for official permission to leave; most looked exhausted and depressed. I almost hated to bother them. After what they'd been through in the past few days – fighting flames in rugged mountain terrain, losing four, possibly five colleagues, grappling with their own vulnerability – how could I walk up and say something as flippant as "Hi guys, how you doin'? Would you like to meet my dog?"

But I did, over and over again, because I knew that if I only broke the ice, Terra would take it from there, and the magic would kick in. Exhausted and depressed firefighters, whether chiefs, administrative staff, or ground "troops," would start to smile, perhaps for the first time in days. Many would squat down to ruffle Terra's fur and tell stories about the dogs waiting at home for them. Some would remember the HOPE dogs from a previous fire and rush over to say hello again, maybe take a photo or two. A few would even well up in a sudden release of emotion. Person by person, crew by crew, the mood of the entire camp would lighten.

Offering Comfort and Encouragement

HOPE volunteers are not mental health professionals, and we are not to assume that role. Rather, our job is simply to offer comfort and encouragement to people affected by traumatic events. Sometimes this simple task seems so natural, especially to the dogs, that it feels almost effortless. On Terra's and my first HOPE callout, also to a fire camp, I worried that despite our training, I was doing something wrong. Walking around, meeting people, and chatting about my dog didn't seem like enough to qualify as "therapy," much less "crisis response." It was all so ordinary, so normal. "But that's just it," a veteran HOPE member reassured me. "Sharing our dogs with people under stress, separated from their families and their own pets, brings them a little bit of normalcy, a little bit of home. And that makes a big difference."

HOPE Animal-Assisted Crisis Response traces its origin to a 1998 school shooting in Springfield, Oregon. Two certified animal-assisted activities/therapy (AAA/T) teams were asked to help comfort students, parents, and staff affected by that horrific event. The positive response to those canine therapy teams revealed two founding principles of animal-assisted crisis response: 1) AAA/T teams could help people cope with crisis situations, offering the same benefits already documented in traditional AAA/T work, and 2) both canines and handlers should be specially trained for maximum effectiveness in crisis-response work. Three years later canine therapy teams volunteering at Ground Zero following the September 11th terrorist attacks discovered a further fundamental fact about animal-assisted crisis-response work: it helps not only victims and survivors of traumatic events, but first responders as well.

In fact, one of the great advantages of animal-assisted crisis response is the socially acceptable comfort and stress relief a friendly dog can provide to emergency workers. The toughest, most stoic firefighters, paramedics, or police officers might never admit, even to critical-incident stress counselors from their own agencies, that they feel traumatized by the sights, sounds, and smells of a disaster. But many of these same individuals will hug a dog without any sense of weakness or shame. And in that exchange, as many have reported, something happens. It's as if the dog wicks away and absorbs the human's pain and negative emotions, offering in exchange unconditional acceptance and a generous dose of that quintessential canine attribute: joy. And that interaction, to most people—especially those in acute emotional need—feels a lot like love. Such is the mystery of the human-animal bond, the foundation of all animal-assisted therapy.

Today, HOPE Animal-Assisted Crisis Response is a national, all-volunteer, 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation with more than 90 trained and certified teams, grouped into five geographical regions covering 23 states. Each year, additional teams are certified via screening and training workshops held in each area. HOPE's goal is to develop a nationwide network of certified teams, allowing us to continually expand our availability. Since we never barge into an incident uninvited, but rather work through the agencies in charge, growing visibility and awareness of animal-assisted crisis response among relief and emergency organizations will also enable HOPE teams to help in more and more crisis situations.

HOPE teams have thus far responded to a wide range of disasters, including Hurricane Katrina, the Virginia Tech shooting, numerous wildfires, and two commuter train derailments in Los Angeles. We've also provided support in emotionally challenging situations, such as

Operation Purple summer camps for children of military families affected by the Iraq war and "Every 15 Minutes" high school programs that simulate the emotional fallout on friends and families of students killed in drunk-driving crashes. Whether visiting with exhausted firefighters, grieving survivors, or worried evacuees sleeping on cots in Red Cross shelters, HOPE dogs have lightened thousands of heavy hearts all across the country. Meanwhile, HOPE handlers enjoy the privilege of watching this transformation occur dozens, even hundreds, of times during a single call-out.

Stamina and Flexibility Required

While making our way down the long line of fire engines at the Esperanza Fire base camp, Carol and I met a crew from Idyllwild, the tiny mountain community where the burned firefighters had been based. They seemed especially appreciative of our visit and invited us to bring the dogs to their home station and to attend the upcoming public memorial service for the lost firefighters. We promised that we would.

Next we visited a few of the office trailers, where one dog-loving fire chief handed out "critical incident command" pins for the dogs' vests. Terra and Hoss had been working for a couple of hours by now; it was time to give them a rest. Finding a spot of grass, we sat down with a few other HOPE teams who'd been working the opposite side of the camp. Within moments, a fire captain who happened also to have a Newfoundland at home spied Terra and came rushing over. He sat there in the grass with her for a long time, rubbing her belly, taking pictures, sharing photos and stories about his own Newf. I got the impression that those few moments with Terra were the highlight of that fire captain's week. He later e-mailed me the photo I'd taken at his request – a wonderful portrait of Terra and her new friend, who was all smiles even after a hellacious week on the firelines.

After our break we headed back to "Main Street," the group of trailers devoted to the administrative business of running a big firefight, where we met the director of California's state firefighting agency. He had heard about the HOPE dogs in a briefing and greeted us and our canine partners warmly. Soon even the "big chief" was sharing stories about his own dog. By now it was dark, and we were all getting tired. We decided to walk over to the chow line for a last quick round of visits and then leave. But we hit the dining area right at shift change, and group after group of exhausted, hungry firefighters kept showing up for dinner. Terra was amazing. I knew she was tired, but she wasn't ready to quit. She just kept wading in, greeting people, melting even the toughest-looking of the inmate firefighters. We must have met hundreds of people, and nearly all were delighted to see the dogs. Seeing the pins on Terra's vest collected during previous callouts, one firefighter dug into his pack, brought out a yellow highlighter, and clipped it on among the other souvenirs. "I just want to give her something," he explained.

Carol and I had planned to spend two days visiting the Esperanza camp, but because of the Idyllwild firefighters' invitation, we decided to drive there the next morning. Walking into the National Forest Service station at Idyllwild—home base of the ill-fated engine crew—was a sobering experience. The lobby counter was crowded with cards and flowers. A pair of firefighters' boots had been set among them to collect donations for the bereaved families. Our HOPE regional director had arranged our visit with a Forest Service supervisor, but the ranger at the reception counter hadn't received that message and didn't know quite what to make of us. A big meeting was under way elsewhere in the building, and members of the Critical Incident Stress Management team assigned to help the families kept popping in and out, intent on their work.

Because crisis situations are unpredictable by nature, crisis-response teams must stay flexible. Sometimes it's best just to back off and stay out of the way. This was one of those times. Wanting to be especially sensitive to the tragedy driving this situation, Carol and I decided to leave. As it happened, the Idyllwild town fire department was right next door, so we walked over. There we found the men we'd met at the fire camp, plus their chief and

a couple more colleagues, and spent a wonderful half hour or so with them. They were thrilled that we'd actually come to their station; each of them kept thanking us. Perhaps this was the real reason we had come to Idyllwild. Regardless, Carol and I counted our trip there well worth the time and effort.

Training for Crisis-Response Work

Like all canine therapy teams interested in becoming certified through HOPE, Terra and I were first active with a nationally recognized therapy organization, in our case, the Delta Society. We had attended a HOPE informational open house, followed a week or so later by a screening, which included health and behavioral checks, plus a role-play scenario mimicking an actual crisis situation. This orientation process makes clear to "HOPEfuls" the differences between AAA/T work and crisis response.

Unlike most therapy venues, crisis situations are unplanned and unpredictable, sometimes chaotic, and often intense. Clients may be distressed and emotional. Further, there likely will be no professional staff available, as in most therapy situations, to provide guidance, so teams must be self-sufficient. Therapy visits usually last only about an hour, but crisis-response callouts typically last several hours and can extend for days. Consequently, it's critical that we take frequent breaks and be on the lookout for signs of stress in ourselves, our dogs, and our fellow teams. Crisis-response work can also be more physically demanding than AAA/T visits. We are usually outside, in various kinds of weather, walking or standing for hours at a time. It's important, too, that we constantly monitor the environment to avoid conditions such as temperature extremes, poor air quality, or fuel spills that might be hazardous to us or our dogs. Finally, because of the additional equipment, training, and travel involved, crisis-response work costs significantly more than AAA/T volunteering. For these reasons, some therapy dog handlers who investigate crisis response choose not to pursue certification.

After passing the screening, Terra and I attended a three-day training workshop. Sessions included the basics of emotional first aid and self-care: what to say and not say, how to recognize symptoms of stress, when to detach from an incident, and how to decompress afterwards. We also covered the basics of canine behavior and learning theory. And we were introduced to the critical incident command system used by firefighters and other emergency responders. The workshop's final day, spent in the field, was the most fun. Handlers and dogs boarded a bus that took us first to a fire station for desensitization training. The dogs met firefighters in full turn-out gear, sniffed their equipment, walked around the fire engines, and experienced the distractions of lights and sirens, all within a safe environment. We next visited an airport to practice passing through security and boarding a plane with our dogs. Finally, we took our canine partners aboard a boat to experience traveling by water.

Only after performing well over this three-day training do dogs and handlers earn their certification as HOPE crisis-response teams. After that, ongoing membership requirements include at least 12 AAA/T visits per year; annual health checks for the dogs; current first aid/CPR and canine first aid training for the handlers; and participation in HOPE meetings, continuing education, and emergency-response drills.

Thank You for Being There

A week after our visits to the Esperanza Fire camp and Idyllwild stations, Terra and I joined eleven other HOPE teams at a public memorial service for the five fallen firefighters. We made a quiet statement of support and respect, walking in together and standing in line on a grassy hill behind an outdoor amphitheatre filled with several thousand mourners. Pinned to each dog's vest was a black ribbon, the same emblem worn by all the firefighters in attendance. The service was long, the sun was bright, and we had no shade, but the dogs did beautifully. Not one barked or became impatient, not even when bagpipers made their noisy entrance or when a squadron of tankers and helicopters flew directly over us in a final aerial salute.

After the service we all walked down to the amphitheatre area and visited with anyone who seemed interested. Even in that most

somber of situations, people could not help smiling when the dogs appeared. The last person Terra and I met before leaving was an information officer with the Bureau of Land Management, who immediately embraced Terra in a big hug. She knew intuitively why the dogs were there and without hesitation unfastened a pin from her uniform and attached it to Terra's vest. "This represents the Wildland Firefighters' Foundation," she explained. "We wear it to remind us of our losses." Indeed, the losses in this incident were heart-breaking. The five firefighters killed in the Esperanza Fire should have had so much more life ahead of them. The oldest was 42; the youngest, a mere 20. Compounding the tragedy, the cause of the fire was determined to be arson. What a sober reminder to us as HOPE volunteers of the dangers firefighters face and why it's so important to provide them with comfort and encouragement when the fires are raging.

No doubt the significance and benefits of canine crisis response are best expressed by those who have experienced the healing power of a cold, wet nose. "What you have done to help us may never be known to you or your partners," a California state battalion chief wrote me after the Esperanza incident. "But we appreciate the break away from the incident, the opportunity to focus on something else and to talk to a neutral person who is open to listen. As with our job, you rarely are rewarded for what you do, but I can tell you that your visits are well received... For me and my partners, thanks for being patient with us and there for us."

Personal Crisis Response

As much as I admire sweet Terra's unflagging willingness to greet every stranger she encounters with total acceptance and unbridled affection, sometimes I've questioned her motive. Is she really all that giving or is she just looking for attention? "People think she's a great therapy dog," my husband and I often joked, "but we know she's really just pathologically needy." A year after the Esperanza incident, Terra finally quashed our rude questions and comments once and for all.

We were coming up on yet another October 26th, the fourth anniversary of the Cedar Fire. Suddenly, the entire San Diego region was again hit with massive wildfires. Again, whole communities were under siege and hundreds of homes were burning. Half a million people were evacuated. Unbelievably to us, Bob and I were among them. Our own home was again in jeopardy. We moved in with friends and watched nonstop news reports as the fires edged repeatedly toward and away from our area. It was surreal. How could this be happening again, only four years after the Cedar Fire? At one point, before a shift in the wind turned the fire front away from our area, I reached full-blown panic mode. I felt nauseated from the stress and anxiety, yet I couldn't break away from the television or the computer. After a couple of hours of this, Terra got up, came over and started pestering me. I tried to shoo her away, but she wouldn't go. Instead, she kept nudging my hands with her muzzle, literally knocking my fingers off the computer keys. What could she want? She'd been out recently. It wasn't dinner time. Slowly, it occurred to me that perhaps Terra had sensed my anxiety and was trying her best to calm me down. Yes, I realized, that must be it. She was being my own personal crisis-response dog! I gave in then and set my laptop aside. Terra and I went outside, sat down on the ground, and cuddled up together. For the next 20 minutes or so, I let her deal with my stress in her own magical way. And that brief break was enough to help me regain a healthier perspective.

Fortunately for our family, this time our home was waiting for us when the evacuation orders were lifted. But thousands of others across the county were now setting out on the long road Bob and I had so recently traveled. On October 26, 2007, we'd planned to host a few friends for dinner, hoping to make that infamous day a good one for a change. Instead, Bob was manning an emergency center for new fire survivors, while Terra and I were out with another HOPE team, visiting fire base camps and Red Cross shelters. Some friends wondered how I could do such a thing, considering our previous fire experience, and after being evacuated most of the week myself.

"Don't you get it?" I wanted to say. "It feels good to help, to be able to do something." And now I knew, more than ever, how much help – and hope – a furry friend can bring in times of crisis.

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Terra and Cpt. Britten Miles at Esperanza Fire camp. Photograph by Sandra Younger.

Horses and People Healing Each Other: The Impact of Participation in a Therapeutic Riding Program

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Interviews with participants in a therapeutic riding program yielded interesting stories about the important relationships that riders form with the horses they ride in the program. In addition to these relationships, several other factors are identified that help to tell the story of how these programs allow horses and people to heal each other.

As a developmental psychologist, I (PW) have always been interested in mental health. Only within the past 10 years, however, have I been given the opportunity to observe closely the role that animals play in the mental health of the people with whom they have relationships. I began working as a volunteer in 1998 with a wonderful new local nonprofit organization called Great and Small. The mission of this program is to bring together horses and humans to allow them to help each other. Every horse who works in the program is an animal whose life has taken a turn of some type. In most cases, the horse led a "productive" life as an athlete and competitor or a as school horse, only to outlive his or her perceived usefulness in that role. In each case, however, the horse proves to be very capable of offering a great deal to our riders, whose needs involve primarily unconditional love and patience.

The horses in our program also receive immeasurable benefits from their participation. Whether rescued from unfortunate situations or retired by loving, nurturing owners, our horses find renewed energy and pride while contributing to the rehabilitation of the riders. People who know horses are aware that most horses thrive when given a combination of loving care and a true purpose. The sense of dignity and self-respect that our horses demonstrate is testament to the fact that their involvement produces positive consequences for them as well as the riders whom they help.

Our riders are persons with a variety of special needs: some of them have been victims of physical and sexual abuse, some have medical issues such as autism or cerebral palsy, some have mental retardation, some have behavioral issues, and many have a combination of these conditions. Our program brings caring, noble horses together with brave, determined people, and allows the horses and people to heal each other in a number of profound ways.

Jenna and Goldie

One story that I have found especially compelling involves Jenna. Jenna is a competent, bright, generous woman in her fifties who has multiple sclerosis (MS). The horse with whom she has a special relationship is "Goldie," a very large draft horse whom Jenna describes as a "goddess."

Jenna was diagnosed with relapsing remitting MS 20 years ago at the age of 38. Prior to this diagnosis, she was an extremely active woman who enjoyed many outdoor activities, such as skiing, hiking, biking, camping, backpacking, and cross-country skiing. In fact, at the time of her diagnosis, Jenna owned and operated an outdoor adventure business that involved taking clients on backpacking and hiking trips that covered many miles per day. Jenna describes a typical day in this business as follows: "I would comfortably hike about 10 miles with my clients, with a pack on my back. We would

set up camp and then I would go out later and walk after dinner because I had so much energy left even after working all day." Several months after being diagnosed with MS, Jenna noted: "I could walk only about six miles in the time that I used to be able to hike 10 miles."

Jenna's physical capabilities have gradually diminished such that she began using canes periodically to help her walk, beginning 13 years ago. Now she uses an electric wheelchair when she is outside of her house. Her current diagnosis is "secondary progressive MS," for which she says there is no prescribed medical therapy that has been especially helpful to her.

Jenna describes MS as "a disease of loss." She says, "I lost the ability to ride a bike. I lost the ability to ski. These were two activities that I loved. I lost the ability to drive a car without adaptive equipment. I always loved riding horses, but I was afraid that I lost that ability, too." It was a medical doctor who offered her some profound words. Jenna describes the advice this way: "I remember a neurologist at NIH [National Institutes of Health] in the early 90s saying [when asked what Jenna could do about her loss of balance and inability to walk] that I should 'use somebody else's feet.' I thought, 'How am I gonna do that?'"

Then, in 2007, Jenna watched a television program on therapeutic riding. She was especially interested in a story about a couple with a young daughter who could not walk. The workers at the riding program put the three-year-old girl on a horse and, after a short while, she began walking. After seeing this show, Jenna said to herself, "I wonder if that could help me."

Jenna started calling therapeutic riding programs in our area, but they were all "overbooked, with long waiting lists." Jenna explained that she was now significantly overweight, due to her lack of mobility. She needed a large horse that could carry her comfortably and safely. A staff person of another therapeutic riding program referred Jenna to an organization called Great and Small. Jenna said, "The people at Great and Small heard my story and said, 'Come on out and let's see what we can do.'"

Jenna's first lesson was with Huck, a beautiful paint horse with one blue eye and one brown eye. Jenna describes her first lesson as illustrative of the strengths of the program and of the beautiful collaboration that can take place between a person and a horse. Jenna drove to the program in her adaptive van and was very excited to see the "gorgeous" horse she was to ride. She also saw a group of volunteers who had assembled to help her. As Jenna "drives" her wheelchair up the mounting ramp, she cries. She is overcome with emotion about this first encounter with therapeutic riding. She goes on to explain part of what made her cry. She says that, as she prepared to mount Huck, the instructor and the other volunteers, who have "done this a million times," asked her how she would like to mount the horse. The instructor described three or four possibilities, but left the decision up to Jenna. She believes that this was done in order to include her and to allow her to have an empowering role in her therapy. Jenna decided how she wanted to mount, and the six volunteers helped her up on the horse. Jenna then says to me, "Sitting on this horse, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven."

She goes on to describe how the lesson progressed: "There's one person leading the horse, two side-walkers, one person behind, one on the ramp overseeing everything, and one teaching. They pulled together all these people just to get one person on a horse. Huck was so patient, just letting me do this. We went around the ring only once or twice because I had so little strength in my legs." When it came time to dismount, Jenna wondered how she would get off the horse. She says, "They did it. It took three people to help me just to get off. I couldn't believe it."

Jenna went on to ride Huck one more time, and then he "...went to live somewhere else." Jenna then rode Murphy a few times. Murphy is a half draft, "a real sweetheart, older and slower than Huck. It was hard to get him to go forward – his favorite gear was stop." Still, Jenna was making good progress in her riding. "I started mounting from the ramp from a standing position," instead of from her wheelchair.

Eventually, Jenna started riding Goldie. Jenna knows that Goldie is the best of all the horses in the program. Goldie is described by Jenna as a very large, unflappable, businesslike horse "...who knows she's a goddess." Jenna says, "I'm on her back by her good graces. It's very clear that she lets me ride her and I'm very grateful." Jenna adds that, in return for Goldie's generosity, "...when she's had enough, she's had enough, and I thank her and get off." After her lesson Jenna always gives Goldie an apple. Jenna describes how Goldie "...slobbers all over me, and I like it. She's a sweetheart."

When asked what Goldie has given Jenna, she answers in this way: "What she's given me is that I can move through space. I'm not in a wheelchair. I have the experience of moving forward, not in a mechanical way. She gives me the ability to 'walk,' to go places where I couldn't go without her. I used to hike in a national park because it allowed me to go places I couldn't go in a car. Goldie allows me to go places I couldn't go without her. On my first trail ride with Goldie, we just went around the barn, but we were outside, we were in the air. I couldn't ride by myself – I didn't have enough strength – so two volunteers had to go with me." But Jenna describes this as a very freeing experience. MS had taken away all of the outdoor activities that Jenna loved, but Goldie brought back one of the activities for Jenna. "Now I'm riding again. And I love doing this. I get to do something I love two or three times a week."

Jenna also describes some improvements that she has noticed in her physical abilities. She says, "MS colors absolutely everything in my life. It is chronic, capricious, and incurable." Yet, after riding for only six months, Jenna noticed "...great improvement – I have better ankle flexibility. My feet feel better. I can keep my heels down and my toes up. I have better posture. I have enough strength in my legs to get Goldie to weave in and out of poles using only my legs. I have more core stability. In my last lesson I was able to stand up in the stirrups all the way around the indoor ring twice. These may seem like little things, but they're huge."

Jenna explains that it is not just the relationship with the horse that has helped her, but also the caring of the people who work in the program. Jenna explains that now she needs only two people to help her instead of the six she needed when she first started, but they are always completely devoted to her and to Goldie. She describes the volunteers and teachers as very emotionally supportive. Jenna says, "Every lesson I take is a positive lesson. The instructor always says, 'This is what you've accomplished today.' And we're always looking forward. Once I asked whether I'd ever be able to trot again. My teacher said, 'Of course. That's why I have you standing in your stirrups. We'll definitely trot.'"

What is fascinating is Jenna's reflectiveness about the intangible things that the interactions with the horses seem to bring the riders in this program. She says, "I see children with autism with so little control over their environment. The world is just huge for them. And they get on a horse and they get this really big animal to respond to them. They can control it. It's the same with me and MS. I can't control it. But the riding is empowering. And it's a two-way street. I am empowered because the horse responds to me. But I also respond to the horse, listening to her, to what she needs from me. The relationship is important. Goldie lets me ride her but I'm very clear that when she's done, I respect her and I stop riding. She's good to me. She has all the spirit and ego that a goddess has."

Jenna also describes the sense of community at the barn. She tells a story about a day when another rider was just finishing his lesson as she arrived for hers. The teacher told her about the "amazing" things that the previous rider had done. "They want to celebrate everyone's success and they want us to know about each other's improvements."

According to Jenna, everyone in the program also cares very much about the horses. "The kids love them. The workers love them. I love just going out there and watching the horses because they have such different personalities and they have really different relationships with each other, too." Jenna describes the horses as very well cared for by the staff at the barn. And she says that the horses seem to inspire in the volunteers and riders a sense of generosity and nobility. Jenna

was so inspired by Goldie and the people who work with her in the program that she held a fundraiser at the barn for her birthday this year. She invited some of her friends to meet Goldie and get to know the horse that has made such a difference in her life. Jenna describes the day this way: "We were like a bunch of little kids, just so happy to pet Goldie and give her treats. It was a very special day." Jenna's friends donated a significant amount of money to the program that day, inspired by Goldie's role in the amazing progress of their friend.

Finally, Jenna describes her belief that, instead of forcing or coercing the horses to let the riders ride them in the program, "...the horses let us do this." She believes that it is great that the emphasis is to try to "...understand the horse, the mechanics, what makes the horse go." In doing so, "...we do better by the horse and the relationship." She concludes, in thinking about her involvement with Goldie and with Great and Small: "It's been absolutely everything to me."

Katrice and Bear

Another inspiring story about the impact of a relationship with a special horse involves Katrice. Through interviews with Katrice, as well as her instructor and her "mother," I was able to learn of the broad and deep effects that a relationship with a horse and a number of caring people can have on a person.

Katrice is a 17-year-old girl who has developmental delays and learning issues. Her disabilities stem from an abnormality on chromosome 18Q, resulting in cognitive deficiencies as well as motor coordination problems. Still, according to her mother, "She can ride a horse with no problem." She goes to a "special" school year round. She has been Erin's foster child since Katrice was four, but Erin calls Katrice her "daughter."

Erin reports that Katrice grooms and rides "her" horse, Bear, once a week. She has been riding for several years, but riding Bear and working at Great and Small as a volunteer over the last year have played a strong role in her emotional maturation. She volunteers as a leader and side-walker every Saturday. She is so devoted to Bear and to her work that she "...didn't want to go to Florida on our family vacation because she didn't want to miss out; she wanted to ride Bear every Saturday as usual." Katrice has been riding at Great and Small for several years, but she only started riding Bear a year ago, when he arrived, and Katrice "...loved him right away." According to Erin, Katrice "...loves that horse. He's her best friend, her buddy." Katrice has "...tons of pictures of him." There is an amazing level of trust between them.

In addition to the emotional support that Katrice feels from Bear, Erin reports that Katrice's participation in the program has really improved her physical coordination, her academic achievement, and her maturity level. Katrice used to exhibit "...inappropriate social behaviors, but no more." She has matured in how she speaks "...to adults; her poise, her manners, shaking hands, making eye contact, all these things have improved." The responsibilities of caring for Bear and working in the program have contributed to a dramatic increase in her "initiative." Katrice is also reportedly "very unselfish now. She takes pictures of other riders and their horses and she can't wait for me to develop them so she can give them to the kids the next week."

Erin reports that she has seen major improvements in Katrice's academic ability as well. "Her reading level has improved two grade levels in one year; her math ability has improved several grade levels in one year." Erin thinks that this is because Katrice has found something she loves (Bear) and a place where she doesn't feel different. Erin tells me that Katrice says, "I'm just one of the volunteers." When asked why Katrice has shown such progress over the past year, Erin says that Katrice goes to a school that is "...really good for her, but the majority of her improvement is from Great and Small." Erin believes that this is due to a number of factors, including the "...very positive feedback from teachers" and volunteers as well as the encouragement that the riders give each other. She also has noticed that "...the riders and teachers and volunteers show respect for the horses and for the riders," and she believes that this is a very important element of the program. Erin says, in closing, that Katrice loves Bear and she loves Laurie, her instructor.

Finally, I have the opportunity to talk to Katrice about her relationship with Bear and her work at Great and Small. When she calls me, I am amazed at how articulate and mature she sounds. She immediately begins to describe for me the work she does as a mentor for new volunteers. She exhibits a sense of pride in her ability to teach others what she knows about horses and riders. "Some of the volunteers don't know how to hold the rope. They'll wrap it around their hands. So I'll explain what to do and why." When asked how she feels when she is mentoring and assisting in the riding lessons, Katrice says, "I feel proud that I teach the kids who don't know how to ride how to sit in the saddle straight. I help them if they're off balance. It's a great feeling to do that because I'm helping someone who's never had that experience." She explains further, "Some of the riders have autism but they're very able to ride, and I know they can. But sometimes they don't want to try."

When asked why, Katrice says, "I think they don't want to try because they're having a bad day or they're sad about something. But I'll tell them, 'Come on, you can do it.' I'll put a happy face on and tell them what to do." When asked for an example, Katrice reports, "One day, one little girl didn't want to mount. I was on the other side of the horse and we were on the ramp. I kept saying, 'Come on, you can do it;' but she wouldn't get on. The trainers got her on the horse and she started crying. I think she was a little bit afraid. But then when she was on the horse, she stopped crying and smiled." When I ask Katrice how she responded when the little girl cried, she says, "I put on a happy face because she's gonna see it and feel stronger." I ask Katrice how she felt when the little girl, then, smiled. Katrice says, "I just felt happy when I saw her smile. I felt proud of her and of me. I thought, 'You did it. Good job.'"

I want to know how Katrice knows how to respond to the riders whom she assists. Katrice says, "It just comes to me." She goes on to describe her work with a child who has autism: "Sometimes, I'll use sign language – I know 'thank you' and 'yes' and 'no.' I'll just try different things. Some of the time, I'll say, 'Here, look at my face,' just to get her attention. Sometimes, I'll say, 'Here, brush the horse,' and I'll brush with her, hand over hand."

Next, our discussion turns to Katrice's relationship with Bear. She says, "I love him so much." I ask Katrice to describe the first time she met Bear. She says, "I got on him and I was nervous. I thought he was so big, but he was also calm and that made me feel calm and happy. He was just there for me, just listening to me. It was a click right away." I ask how Katrice feels about Bear now, after riding him and caring for him for a year. She describes their relationship this way: "I trust Bear so much. I talk to him about my feelings. When I'm mad I'll just whisper to him and he doesn't talk back. I tell him secrets. He makes me so happy because he's my own horse and I love him so much and I just love being with him. I love him." When I ask what Bear "gives" her, Katrice says, "He gives me a friend, my best buddy. We depend on each other."

Bear, too, has been helped through his involvement at Great and Small. When he first arrived, he was cranky and unhappy, trying to bite the volunteers as they tacked him up for lessons. He had been donated to the program by very nurturing owners who attended to all of his needs, yet he did not demonstrate affection for people, as some horses do. Shortly thereafter, however, Bear began to receive consistent, loving care from several volunteers as well as from Katrice. Bear blossomed in the care of these gentle people, who wanted only to make his days joyful. Katrice started grooming and riding Bear every Saturday and their relationship led to a sense of trust between them that has benefited both of them considerably.

Conclusions

Through 10 years of involvement in this program and through the interviews I conducted for this article, I have observed a number of interesting factors that seem to contribute to the well-being of the riders who participate in the program. What has been astonishing is the fact that everyone with whom I spoke agrees that participation in the Great

and Small program provides therapy for the riders, the volunteers, the teachers, and the family members. Several volunteers explain that the patience and nobility of the horses inspire the volunteers' and teachers' nurturing of the riders and their families. Laurie, the instructor who was interviewed above, stated, "The reason I got involved was I wanted to be around horses. But within two weeks, it was all about the kids *and* the horses." And the riders and the horses have an amazing impact on each other as well as on the teachers and volunteers. The program seems to be a system of interactions among the people and the horses, all of whom seem to have some sort of understanding that they are healing each other through their work in the program.

In attempting to analyze how this healing takes place, I thought back to the start of the program. Our plan was to employ Bandura's self-efficacy model (Bandura, 1977) in our teaching. Self-efficacy refers to the confidence that one has in one's ability to achieve a task. The model asserts that one can help people to develop self-efficacy through the combination of specific strategies, including mastery experiences, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion.

The mastery experience component of the model refers to placing people in situations in which they cannot fail. This component is implemented by asking riders to make very small, incremental steps in their riding, rather than asking them to attempt huge leaps of progress from one lesson to the next. The vicarious experience aspect of the model is implemented by offering, when needed, a model of the new behavior that the instructors ask the riders to perform. The verbal persuasion component refers to offering only positive feedback to the riders at all times. Every attempt that the rider makes is responded to in a positive manner by the instructor and the volunteers. Even when making corrections to the rider's form, the volunteer is careful to point out something positive that the rider is doing.

We train our volunteers to implement the concepts of this model and the volunteers, including very new volunteers with significant disabilities, employ the methods consistently. We believe that this takes place because the teachers and long-term volunteers use the methods in the presence of the newer volunteers, so there is constant observation and imitation of the strategies that we aim to employ. In the case of Katrice, who was a rider in the program for several years before beginning her work as a volunteer, it appears that the use of the methods of positive feedback and emotional support for the riders is second nature to her, thus her comment that knowing how to interact with the riders "just comes to me."

In addition to the theoretical model that underlies the training and teaching that occur in this program, the relationships that the people and horses forge effortlessly through their mutual participation are very powerful. The horses, without any overt knowledge of doing so, provide positive feedback simply by sensing what the riders need and giving it to them. The riders, therefore, experience the feeling of trusting the horses because the horses make the riders feel safe and nurtured.

Interestingly, many of the riders, instructors, and volunteers report that they are initially drawn to Great and Small because they want to be with horses. What they find once they arrive is that they benefit greatly from the interactions they have with the other people as well. The ability to build relationships based upon trust, dependability, empathy, and empowerment is a beautiful product of a number of people and horses being brought together under extraordinary conditions in order to heal each other.

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Note: Names of the riders have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Patricia Westerman is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Bowie State University in Bowie, Maryland. Delores Westerman is a retired Associate Professor of Psychology at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia. Patricia and Delores Westerman have been involved at Great and Small for 10 years. Holly Hargreaves, who earned two Master's degrees at Marymount University, works as a counselor. Melissa Verge is a recent graduate in psychology at Marymount University. Holly and Melissa worked for two years as research assistants assessing the improvement of riders in the Great and Small program. This research team of four professionals has presented several papers about the improvements exhibited by Great and Small riders at national conferences. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: martytrish@aol.com.

Bear. Photograph by Patricia Westerman.

A Girl and Three Dogs: Finding the Magic in Animal-Assisted Therapy

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The following narrative is a modified excerpt from *Afternoons with Puppy: Inspirations from a Therapist and His Animals (2008).*

Introduction

Surrounded by my dogs, birds, lizards, and fish, I feel like a modern-day Dr. Doolittle, although in my case, I don't talk to the animals. I talk with them. For close to 30 years, I have worked in the company of animals, with children who have special needs.

Since becoming a therapist, I have tried numerous approaches and alternatives, some more conventional than others, to reach the hidden inner selves of my clients. About 20 years ago, I even worked with a renowned magician to learn sleight of hand to enhance rapport with my clients. Although magic was popular and worked well to relax and transition my patients into a session, I continued my search for other options to make me a better clinician. At the same time, I also wanted people to feel at home and as relaxed as possible. That is when I discovered the power that animals could have on people.

My nonhuman colleagues have the ability to bond with and support my young charges. These animals have been influential in opening doors that appeared shut and providing clients with a blanket of emotional warmth that promotes a strong therapeutic relationship. When I opened my private practice in 1987, I began systematically to incorporate animal-assisted interventions with my clients. In a chapter that I prepared in the *Handbook of Animal Assisted Therapy* and a chapter that I prepared with Pam Beiler, I identified several reasons why therapists incorporate animals into therapy (Fine, 2006; Fine & Beiler, 2007). The following briefly reviews some of my findings.

One of the primary reasons that many therapists incorporate animals into their therapy is because the animals act as a social lubricant. The therapy animal may ease tension and act as an icebreaker when greeting clients with warmth and enthusiasm.

It is apparent that calm and friendly animals can effectively ease the stress of the initial phase of therapy and promote interactions and conversations between a therapist and client. My position is that a therapist may appear less threatening, and therefore the client may be more willing to reveal him/herself.

The presence of a trusted animal in therapy may also lend comfort and stability to the environment, especially when a therapist must become more confrontational with a client. The animal can act as a "blanket" to help comfort the client in times of stress and anxiety. Additionally, Fine (2006) suggests that a therapist may use the life history of the therapy animal as a catalyst for discussion, especially when clients share commonalities with animals. Some patients may see similarities between their own life histories and emotions and the perceived life outcomes and emotions expressed by an animal (being shy or fearful). For example, children who have been abused or neglected may feel comfortable relating to animals that have had similar life events, such as being abused or abandoned. This may lead to sharing their own life experiences in the presence of the animal.

Finally, it has been noted in the literature that animals can be a valuable contribution to the therapeutic environment. The therapy animals can help create a setting that is perceived as friendly and comfortable to clients. For instance, there are now numerous medical offices which showcase fish tanks or coral reefs primarily to develop an atmosphere that is extremely calming. Research reported by Fine (2006) demonstrates how observing

Magic. Photograph by Tom Zasadzinski.

fish in a calm tank can have an impact on reduction of stress.

The Role of Animal-Assisted Therapy in the Life of Sally

Excerpt from Ellen's dairy: "On the way to the first visit with Dr. Fine, I think we were all nervous. Sally was silent in the back seat of the car, clutching her baby doll. Her assistant and I were discussing ways to facilitate the visit and priming Sally as to what to expect. I had brought a camera along because Sally always liked to have pictures taken. These could be used as a reward for her. I have always known about her keen interest in animals. She isn't able to have a large animal in the group home. Recently, she overturned her bird's cage during a tantrum, luckily not hurting the animal. There was potential for problems."

Ellen had called me knowing of my use of animal-assisted therapy, but was upfront in declaring that Sally was a tough case and, because of her open hostility and physical aggression, most traditional modes of treatment had been ruled out, leaving them with limited options. Knowing this and feeling a bit anxious myself, we set up an appointment.

In the months prior to meeting Sally, I'd been training a young puppy, Magic, to work with clients. She'd shown signs of promise, but the training sessions were short because little Magic periodically needed to be a juvenile and could still lapse into puppy behavior. It wasn't uncommon to find her, in her downtime, scavenging through the trash to find a tasty wrapper or dismantling one of her play toys to get the squeaker out. However, her playfulness, along with her gentle manner, is what made her a lovable hit with my clients. She often appeared mature beyond her years. Nevertheless, my gang of dogs still considered her the puppy in the house and let her know that she was to pay her dues.

One of my clients suggested her name because he knew of my love for prestidigitation. He also felt that the name was apt, especially if she could "magically" support children in therapy. I liked the name because I still use magic in my practice. It's a great icebreaker and an easy way to connect with clients. For a few moments, their minds are open to possibilities. This is what draws us all to the art of magic. It is a way to teach children lessons of dexterity (physical and mental) while also impressing upon them the need for persistence in achieving a goal.

Thus, naming our newest canine member Magic was just perfect, for the word represents two important dimensions in my life – a love of magic and a love of animals. The more I got to know this little one, the more amazing she seemed. Even today she continues to dazzle me with her sense of judgment and gentleness. At one moment, she is a calming cornerstone of compassion. At other times, she can be exhilarating to watch as she plays with an earnest zest for life. Being with Magic has convinced me that magic can be real, especially if we allow it to happen.

This brings us back to Sally, a child who needed to suspend her belief and be open to other possibilities. At our first meeting, she was sandwiched between Ellen and another staff member. I could feel the tension emanating from the three of them. Sally sat stone-faced; her body was so rigid that I thought it might break with the smallest movement. Because I wanted to gauge her behavior, I met her without an animal companion. I sat down in a chair several feet away from them. Sally didn't speak much, but she mumbled the word "dogs." I spoke with her for a few moments, but Sally wasn't responsive. After another few minutes, I told her that I would go back and bring out PJ. She smiled. When I returned with PJ on a leash, her response wasn't what I expected. She immediately curled up into a ball and tried to cover herself. Her face grew pale and her left hand went out as if to ward off an attack. She screeched, "NO! NO! NO!" and spat at me. I had been cautioned that this might happen, but it still surprised me, and I backed off quickly, leading PJ a few steps away.

Reassuring her that PJ was gentle and on a leash did not decrease Sally's anxiety, so I cued PJ to back further away and lie down on the floor. That appeased Sally. After a few

moments, she relaxed and asked to see PJ. By the end of the morning, she had allowed PJ to come just within petting distance and had tapped the dog's head once or twice. Whenever I approached, however, she spat. Not exactly a perfect visit, but it was a beginning. Later, Ellen called to say that all three of them were exhausted, but she thought that additional sessions might be helpful. She then spent time giving me more critical background information on Sally. She was uprooted and immigrated to the United States at age eight (about six years ago). She and her mother initially came to the United States only to visit, but during the visit her mother went into labor with Sally's brother and she then applied for political asylum. Sally hasn't seen her father since. Sally's mom was reluctant to acknowledge her daughter's communication and behavioral problems until these behaviors escalated to biting children and spitting at any adult approaching her in the midst of her angry reactions. Finally, her mother looked for help and eventually placed her in the group home. But as Sally's aggression increased, she started to bite other children randomly and continued to spit at approaching adults when she was upset. Her limited language skills made matters worse. In addition, Ellen disclosed her suspicions that Sally had experienced a traumatic event, possibly abuse.

After deciding to continue incorporating the animals in her therapy, we started our treatment plan a few weeks later. Because of Sally's aggressive behavior and status in the group home, two staff members—one of them usually Ellen—always accompanied Sally. She entered the waiting room wearing a blue skirt and a white blouse, her curly hair pulled back with a cheerful barrette. She was more talkative that morning and remembered PJ's name. After talking for a few minutes and showing her my bearded dragon, named Spikey, I told her that I would bring out PJ once again. Sally had a similar reaction as during our first visit and moved away from the waiting PJ. Then, once again, she asked to pet PJ, but I wanted her to approach the dog this time. However, it wasn't going to be easy to get her to make the first move. As PJ sat patiently, Sally inched closer to her by moving to the end of the couch. I sat next to the leashed PJ, trying to coax Sally to get closer and to place her hand gently on PJ's head. "Sally, come over here," I urged. "PJ wants you to pet her." The staff also encouraged Sally to move closer. Eventually, Sally moved to the edge of the couch, bravely stretched out her hand, and gently petted PJ. I cued PJ to lie quite motionless so that she wouldn't startle Sally. We even coaxed Sally to brush PJ's coat. Sally was leaning over the edge of the couch, just barely brushing PJ's fur. It was the first time I saw her smile. She appeared not only content but also proud of herself. After a short while, we decided that we were ready for our first walk. PJ was harnessed with two leashes, one for Sally and the other for me. The two staffers stayed very close to the three of us. We decided to take a short walk to increase the likelihood of a positive outcome.

PJ. Photograph by Tom Zasadzinski.

Sally didn't speak too much during the walk, but her smiles told me she was happy. If PJ strayed even a little off Sally's planned course, however, she would get agitated. "NO! NO!" she said, as she almost dropped the leash. I quickly cued PJ to walk straight and Sally calmed. Once we arrived back at the office, Sally fed PJ treats, all which of she gladly gobbled. A connection was brewing, but it was in a slow cooker.

Sally and I began to correspond with one another between our planned visits. She loved mail and she enjoyed receiving notes from PJ. Ellen told me that Sally saved all the letters we sent her. Plastered on her walls were pictures of the dogs and the notes that she received. Sally also talked about our visits with anyone who would listen. The staff conveyed that she loved her office visits, although she didn't proclaim this to me in either word or action.

As the weeks passed, Sally's self-imposed barriers dropped, but that isn't to say that things were much easier. Since Sally did well with PJ, I introduced her to Hart, to whom she took

a strong liking. We also began to incorporate a few other activities. One afternoon we spent a portion of the time drawing pictures of the dogs and putting stickers on them. I made a photocopy for my file, which enthralled Sally. "Make copy," she insisted. Then, "I do it" followed as she requested to press the start button. She was insistent that we make several copies of all her drawings. If she'd had her wish, we would have used a ream of paper to copy that one picture. Eventually, with the help of her staff, we were able to disengage her focus and end the session.

Although we were making progress, she still needed a lot of encouragement to get closer to the dogs. Once she was next to them, however, she seemed to relax. The same held true for our walks. She loved going on them, but periodically some of her resistant behaviors reappeared.

Unfortunately, my early visits with Sally were often interrupted by scheduling difficulties at the group home. When she wasn't seen consistently, we had to start all over because her anxiety about the animals would return. Ellen and I agreed that a more consistent schedule would help Sally become more comfortable. We wanted not only to help Sally overcome these fears, but also to enable her use of words rather than acting out aggressively in frustration. For example, when Sally felt anxious, her first response was either to spit or to step back and cover herself with her arms.

Reflecting on my initial work with Sally, I thought that it would be a good idea to incorporate Magic because she was a little smaller than PJ. Although PJ is very gentle, Magic can be a bit more timid. I had been working with Magic quite hard over the past several months and believed that she was ready to work with Sally.

I called to Magic. As we listened for her approach from down the hall, Sally leaned forward for a glimpse. On a typical visit, it usually took a few minutes for Sally to work up her courage to approach the dogs. Today was different. When Magic entered the foyer, I cued her to lie down. She looked baffled but complied. I then turned toward Sally and reminded her that Magic was new to this and needed Sally to be gentle and kind. Because of my previous experience with Sally, I was surprised when she followed my instructions and sat on the floor next to Magic and began to pet her.

Although there was some distance between them, Sally looked more at ease. She asked for a brush and began to brush Magic's fur. She was so engrossed in taking care of Magic that her comfort level increased. She wasn't guarded with Magic and was even playful. She put her hand next to Magic's paw and said, "Slap me five, Magic." Then she giggled when I helped Magic comply. I was impressed with both of them. Next, and without hesitation, Sally rested her head on Magic's tummy. This was the last thing I expected. After a few minutes, Sally gently kissed Magic's face. This was another first. Finally, I thought, she was opening up. Magic reciprocated by turning slowly toward Sally and licking her face. Then, we went for a walk around the block.

As we left the building, Sally told me about school and some of her classmates. She also started to sing a song. After a few minutes, Sally asked about the other dogs. "How is Hart? Where is PJ? When I see them, can I give them a treat?" While it was clear that Sally was becoming more responsive, I wanted to keep her focused on Magic. So when her focus wandered, I reminded her to let Magic know that she was doing a good job. The prompt was all Sally needed to refocus.

At one such prompt, Sally stopped walking and gazed into Magic's eyes. "Good job. Good job, Magic!" she said. She then looked at me and said, "Give her treat," as she held out her hand. Just hearing those words were magic to my ears, not to mention the puppy's. Sally took a few morsels of a biscuit and fed them to a waiting Magic. Both seemed very pleased with the outcome (Sally also got her snack). As we walked, Sally stopped several times and told Magic either to sit or to stop, speaking calmly and clearly, showing none of her earlier discomfort.

I was impressed with both of them that early Friday morning. Sally was taking to heart her new role as a teacher and Magic was a star student. Perhaps, for the first time in her

life, Sally was put in a role where others expected her to act responsibly. At least on this day, taking on the extra duties seemed to be a good idea. Sally worked hard that morning. Her comfort level with Magic was much higher than with the other dogs, although she constantly talked about PJ and Hart. Even when frustrated, she was learning to communicate verbally and appropriately. She was more confident and allowed herself to make mistakes.

The sessions with Magic continued and the bond between the two of them strengthened with each visit. She often reminded me of this at the start of our sessions when she'd say, "I'm 'eacher" (teacher) as she gazed into the on-looking eyes of Magic.

Sally's new confidence was also evident at the group home. Ellen said that the dogs were Sally's favorite topic. Whenever she returned home, she told anyone who'd listen about "the girls" at Dr. Fine's office. The staff used this new interest to defuse potential conflicts, reminding Sally that she was Magic's role model. Additionally, Sally showed an interest in art and enjoyed adding her drawings of the dogs to her wall of letters and photos.

Most importantly, Sally started focusing her concern on the dogs rather than herself. On a recent visit, Sally saw that PJ's paw was bandaged. I explained that she had a broken nail and that the bandage helped prevent infection. Throughout our session Sally kept asking, "Will she be okay?" I was later told that when she returned home, she drew several pictures of PJ illustrating her bandaged paw. When Sally returned to the office, before I could say a word, she asked, "How is PJ doing?" She was reluctant to start our session until she saw for herself that PJ was better. Looking right into PJ's eyes, she asked in a serious tone, "You okay PJ? Where's your bandage?" Sally then took out a picture she'd made of the dog's injured paw. Before PJ left the room, Sally gave her a big hug.

At the time of this writing, Magic and Sally have been working together for seven months. PJ and Hart still get a chance to visit with Sally, but her co-pilot in therapy is Magic. Pairing the two of them has been powerful. In retrospect, placing Sally in the role of Magic's teacher was a great idea.

During theses last three months, one of her jobs has been to help Magic ignore distractions. Although this training is helpful for Magic, indirectly I am more interested in helping Sally with this same problem. One of Sally's greatest challenges has been her strong curiosity about babies being pushed in strollers. Whenever she sees babies in strollers, she gets unusually distracted and at times agitated. Our first few training sessions went well, but they didn't include a direct challenge for Sally. So prior to a visit, I placed a baby stroller and doll in the parking lot. After greeting Magic and the ritual brushing, we headed out for our walk.

Once we entered the parking lot, she noticed the stroller. There was an immediate change in her behavior. She was agitated and distracted. I walked close to her and said, "Sally, walk away from the stroller. Remember, you're the teacher and Magic needs help with this distraction." This simple redirection was all it took to focus Sally back into her task. She lowered her voice and said to Magic, "No Magic. Walk away. Walk away." Magic complied, walking around the baby carriage. Sally's look of pride told me she was happy that Magic had listened and that she, too, had done well. "Good dog, Magic!" she exclaimed as she gave the dog a treat. By the end of the walk, both Sally and Magic were full of pride and were awaiting their earned special treats. Magic gobbled up her jerky, while Sally held onto her bag of trail mix.

By the end of October, I felt that Sally deserved a larger reward for her progress and promised that on her next visit she'd receive a surprise. Just before the session, I picked up a pizza and some drinks. When Sally arrived, she was very excited. She had brought along a stack of pictures of her family to show me. She introduced me to all the people in the photos, as if she wanted me to know more about her life outside my office and the group home.

The highlight of the morning, however, was when Magic paraded out wearing her Halloween clown costume, which was bright yellow with blue and red dots. Sally shrieked

and giggled when she saw her. She immediately told Magic that she was going out as a go-go dancer. "I show you next time I come. I bring pictures," she told Magic. In the middle of a sentence, Sally flopped onto the floor next to Magic and began to brush and pet her. I told Sally that after we took our walk, we had a few more surprises. Sally seemed excited but was glad it was time for our walk. She was extremely talkative and even showed a sense of humor. She giggled and gave Magic lots of praise and loving. But what was most memorable was the return to the office.

Sally went to the van with the staff members while Magic and I went into the office to gather gifts. I returned to the van with a small bundle of candy while Magic followed along, cradling in her mouth a masked and hooded Halloween teddy bear. Sally beamed with joy. I was pleased to see that Magic was willing to relinquish the toy to Sally. She was surprised and it took her a moment to comprehend that the gifts were just for her. After she said "thank you" to us, we turned to walk back to the office. But Sally called us back. She needed to come out and give us a hug. She left knowing that she was accepted for who she was. She knew that we cared for her. Was that day a new beginning? Had there been a little magic in the air? All I know is that after a short visit that morning, Sally left feeling like a new person. Magic had done her job. But what would all of Sally's tomorrows bring?

Ellen has continued to keep an ongoing diary of Sally's progress after each of our visits. Let's take a quick glimpse at what she has written.

"Each visit her autonomic reaction has decreased – initially, her hand was ice cold and pulse rapid through the walk until returning to the parking lot. Her eyes would dart around, glassy and huge. She looked petrified. She had limited eye contact with both Dr. Fine and any of the dogs she walked. She looked hyper-vigilant and easily distracted by all the sights and sounds of the environment, looking past the dogs instead of at them. Now she is so much more relaxed with everything! There has been a steady increase in her language abilities. I have been impressed with her ability to identify some emotions and state them to us as she walks. No longer does she spit or lose attention immediately upon encountering a new adult. Now she relates to adults much better. Sally seems to have more self-awareness. She seems more content when she leaves. She does not fall asleep after visits, (i.e., they do not seem so emotionally exhausting anymore; they are more therapeutic).

"She seems to want to talk about the visits, Dr. Fine, and the dogs when she is at home. She doesn't seem to want to disappoint the dogs. She recognizes all the dogs in pictures. Recently, I gave her a beanie toy dog that was a golden retriever and she immediately called it PJ. We no longer have to take pictures during visits because she is more interested in what we are doing. She is excited and anticipates coming. She knows the route and when I am not driving, she tells the other driver where to turn. She is making progress and that is all that counts.

"The last visit took the cake. Instead of interacting with the dogs right away, Sally wrote a letter to Magic with the help of Dr. Fine. It was remarkable! I have never heard Sally talk so much. She was so excited to do this. One statement in the letter put into words why her relationship with the dogs, and especially Magic, is so meaningful to her. She wrote: 'Thank you, Magic. You make me feel like a good girl. I love you.' I guess magic can be real, especially if you believe in it. I am a believer now!"

Conclusions

With thought and planning, animals can make a major contribution to a therapist's arsenal in treating clients. Animals can enhance the therapeutic environment by making the milieu more emotionally and physically accessible to clients and making them more relaxed. Some clinicians may still be skeptical of the therapeutic value of the animal-human bond. After reading this article, the writers hope that a skilled and well-informed clinician will recognize the multitude of benefits that animals can fulfill. Martin Buber once said, "An animal's eyes have the power to speak a great language." He was accurate in so many ways. The communication of animals to humans is conducted in silence and touch, two

variables that can have a tremendous impact on a therapeutic outcome.

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Note: Sally's and Ellen's names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Psychologist Dr. Aubrey Fine has been in the field of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) for over 25 years. Dr. Fine has also been an active faculty member at California State Polytechnic University for 27 years. His leadership among faculty and teaching excellence earned him the prestigious Wang Award in 2001, given to a distinguished professor within the California State University system, in this instance for exceptional commitment, dedication, and exemplary contributions within the areas of education and applied sciences. He is the editor of the most widely accepted books on the subject, *The Handbook on Animal Assisted Therapy*, which is now in its second edition (Elsevier/ Academic Press, 2006). He recently co-authored a new book *Afternoons with Puppy* (published by Purdue University Press, 2008) with Cynthia Eisen. The book is a heartwarming account about the evolving relationships and outcomes among a therapist, his therapy animals, and his patients over the course of over two decades.

Cynthia J. Eisen holds a M.A. in English literature and is presently teaching at Nazareth College of Rochester in New York, where she teaches writing and literature courses that include The Art of the Short Story along with a course on Fairy Tales. Along with teaching writing and literature, she participates in the college's First-Year Experience Program, mentoring and teaching college freshmen as they enter academic and college life. Along with teaching and research, she has also been a member of several editorial boards and edits professional texts for colleagues. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: ahfine@csupomona.edu.

Snowflake. Photograph by Tom Zasadzinski.

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Relationships with Other Animals: A Very Personal Journey

Christina Risley-Curtiss, Ph.D., Arizona State University

This narrative summarizes the author's evolving journey in developing her sense of personal and professional self by discovering the importance of other animals in her own life and in the lives of others, such as our clients. Understanding how other animals have helped her survive and thrive has enabled her to recognize the powerful potential and importance that relationships with animals can have for people, especially those in distress.

Popular and research literature increasingly report that affectionate relationships with animal companions can enhance the health and enrich the quality of life of people (e.g., Lago, Delaney, Miller, & Grill, 1989; Sable, 1995). It is also suggested that while keeping companion animals may be universal (Brown, 2002), these relationships are complex and vary depending on characteristics of the study population (Risley-Curtiss, Holley, & Wolf (2006). Relationships with animals can also range from the most negative, such as animal cruelty, to the most positive, whereby one believes in the equality of all living creatures.

Sixty-two percent of U.S. households report having companion animals (American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, 2003). This means that helping professionals are likely to encounter individuals and families with companion animals. Furthermore, anywhere from 68 to 97 percent of Americans consider their companion animals as family (Brookman, 1999; Risley-Curtiss et al., 2006). Thus, including animals in both our practice and study of people is a natural extension of our work with humans. With appropriate knowledge and training, helping professionals who recognize the impact of animals on people's lives will be in a position to enhance the lives of both people and animals.

Making inquiries into the presence and meaning of animals in clients' lives is essential. In addition, many interventions can be enhanced by the inclusion of animals as adjuncts. While much of our awareness of the roles that animals play in our lives is fairly new, many of us have lived lives surrounded by them. I am such a person.

My Journey

I am a passionate social worker and have been for years – in the old AFDC program; in child protective services; in public health; and now as a social work educator, researcher, and animal abuse treatment program developer. My business is people. Yet some would say I was born connected to animals. "They are in my blood."

Both my father and his father were veterinarians, and from the time I was six months old I lived on a beautiful farm in a small town in Connecticut, surrounded by all kinds of animals, domestic and wild. Despite this wonderful natural environment, and the fact that I had an affinity for rescuing animals early on, it has taken me nearly 60 years to really appreciate their presence in my life, to see them for themselves, to understand how much of who I am is defined by my relationships with them, and to recognize fully the importance animals may have in our ability to help others.

My vision of my relationships with animals is my own and not one necessarily shared by significant others in my life, or by clients. Nonetheless, to understand me you need to understand it. This journey I ask you to take with me is one we should ask our clients to take us on, if appropriate. While my story is mine, it is not totally unique. Many others fortunately share similar and/or different connections with their animals. Because of this, it behooves helping professionals who work with individuals and families to ask about

other animals and their meaning for their clients, and to consider including other animals in treatment when appropriate. In my own therapeutic journeys, I have always been the one to mention that I am single, have no children by choice, and live a long way from my human family members. But I am not alone as I live with a large other animal family. If my therapist were to in any way dismiss or devalue this family, he or she would lose me as a client. If I were another client—one not so verbal and forthcoming—and my helping professional did not ask about my whole other family, he or she would not know me because they, and my relationships with them, bring me great joy, peace, and awe, as well as much pain and sadness. As I have recently come to realize, my animal friends *are* my lifeblood.

Like many people, I have my own demons when it comes to my early relationships with my animal companions. There was Misty the beautiful long-haired black cat whom I begged for but never brushed enough and who became so matted and then sick that we never really were able to get the mats off her. And Billy, the horse I was ashamed of because he was big footed (like me) and chunky. I used to lose my temper with him and hit him around the head with a wood switch. And Haden, the kitten I adopted and then took to the shelter because he hissed and bit too much. I didn't appreciate or understand my companions then. They were there for me—to meet my needs—not for me to meet theirs in mutuality.

Fortunately, I have awakened from my sleep. But it has been a slow, awesome, and yet painful awakening. Now I am so grateful for Billy's patience with me despite my abuse of him, so aware and remorseful of Misty's suffering, so sorry I didn't try harder with Haden. But another thing I have learned along the way through the deaths of my parents, brother, stepmother, and many companion animals is that if we do the best we can at the time, we must forgive ourselves for failing those who loved us and move on; being sure not to repeat our mistakes. So I have spent the last 35 years doing over! Or at least learning about and cherishing the amazing creatures who have trusted me with their well-being and with whom I have been honored to share my life.

I currently share my home with seven indoor cats: Balinor, Goblin, Xena, Snow, Slush, Smudge, and Electra. Four feral cats in an outside cattery specially built for them: Fire, Neon, Grey, and Rainman. Seven outdoor feral/strays who showed up, got spayed or neutered, and then decided to hang around: Turtle, Tuffy, Tucker, Tale, Mighty, T-Shirt, and Junior. In addition to the cats, I also have a greyhound named Roxy, a rooster called Sonny, a horse named Cisco, and a goat named Ralph. All are rescued and all have their own stories. I have a trust set up to care for them in case of my death. One of my greatest fears is that I will get hurt or killed and no one will know to come and lovingly care for them. Despite having suicidal ideation in the past, I would not consider it now because I will not leave them alone. I am their guardian, and if a disaster strikes and I cannot evacuate them all, I will stay with them so they will not die without me. I have shared this with my sister: "Just as I would not abandon you, neither will I abandon them to save myself." Not surprisingly, Hurricane Katrina has led many of the people I know to talk about this and many of us have concluded that we will stay with our animal families if need be.

All my other animal friends mean so much to me, and I believe that, by their behavior and body language, I mean much to them too. Our relationships are mutual. I love and care for them and they do the same for me. They help me survive not only life's traumas, but also the ordinary days. The other animals and experiences that have shown this to me are many, but I will share just a few. I got Punkin when I was about 33 years old. She was one of several cats I had while living in rented houses and apartments. She and Emma, another rescued cat, helped me get through many moves as well as through doctoral school (1998-1993) in my 40s. Punkin did not like to be held but whenever I was upset and crying, she allowed me to hold on to her tight until I had let it out – like when I had to get ready for a statistics test and my boyfriend of nine years had just broken up with me the day before. I took the test and got an A!

One of my most vivid memories of Punkin was during my "year from hell" in 1999-2000,

My then live-in partner of six years suddenly moved out, and three months later my older brother and stepmother were killed in a sightseeing plane crash in Hawaii. One night I was awakened by a nightmare about my brother and my own vicious sobbing. I was lying on my side, tears pouring from my eyes, when I felt this warm soft breathing cat stretch her body full length and meld herself into my back. Within seconds I stopped crying, a sense of peace came over me, and I fell quickly back into a deep restful sleep. I knew in my soul that Punkin was taking care of me; she was helping me to weather the pain and heal.

Shortly thereafter, Punkin was diagnosed with cancer and one day in January, 2000, I had to make the extremely painful decision to end her suffering. Within a month I discovered that another cat friend, Ralph, whom I had taken in when a friend was moving, was deteriorating. He seemed to have suddenly lost a lot of weight and looked awful. He was diagnosed with feline leukemia and he died within two months of Punkin's death. I believe that Ralph was sick for longer than I knew and that he purposefully hid his illness from me because he knew I could not deal with so much loss all at once. He stayed to help me through the loss of Punkin.

Another experience has to do with that same boyfriend of six years but earlier in our relationship when he also had suddenly moved out (yes, there is a pattern there!). This time I was awake, sitting on the living room floor crying hard, but not for long. My 100-pound sedate rescued greyhound, Warrior, who did not really know how to play, came into the living room and began literally to dance in circles in front of me and perform other antics that I had never seen him do. I was so surprised and amazed at what I truly believed: that my crying upset him and he was trying to stop me from crying. Not only did I stop, but I started laughing – and hugging him and playing with him. Warrior was taking care of me.

Most recently, I spent two weeks away from my home and my animal friends. The last week I was in South Carolina at a home on two and a half acres that I have purchased for retirement. It is one that can accommodate all my animal friends but none are there now. I love being there alone in the quiet, surrounded by green and trees and birds. But this time I began to get very agitated during my last three days. At first I could not figure out what was going on. Then I had a revelation – I needed my animal friends, I wanted to go home to them. What I love is not being totally alone. I love being alone with my animal friends. Their quiet loving and accepting presence and our interactions help me manage my stress and angst. Every morning when I get up and sit on the sofa in the living room to have my coffee, I am joined by four cats who lie or sit around me wanting to be petted and loved, but are also washing my face and hands and reaching out to me with their paws.

The realization that my animal companions understand and care about me, that they read me, makes me feel profoundly cherished and responsible. They do not have to do that; they choose to and I am honored. I laugh when I read that this is what some people say is attributing human characteristics to nonhuman animals. All I have to do is watch a mother chicken protect and cuddle her young, or my horse and goat sleep together touching each others' backs, or my cats wash each other and sleep entwined. What they do for me is what they do naturally for each other, what they do without me. The fact that they choose to do it for and with me is awe inspiring and a very powerful gift, one that enriches my life and has helped restore my spirituality.

Other Animals and Helping

Research supports the idea that human relationships with other animals can be beneficial in many ways. They obviously help me. But they also help people I have worked with, such as the elderly widow who lived with her old dog in a trailer park. When I talked to her on the phone soon after her dog had died, she expressed great loss and was very depressed, saying that she had no reason anymore to get up in the morning. I talked to her for about an hour and all she talked about was that dog, how much she had loved it, and how much she missed it. I told her about my rescued greyhounds and with her consent I linked her up with the local greyhound rescue program that matches older greyhounds and

older people. Within a week she had adopted a greyhound. I talked to her soon after and the difference was amazing. Now she had a reason to get up – to take the dog for a walk. She expressed having a purpose since her dog was a rescue and she was madly in love with her new companion. She had not forgotten her old friend but she now had a new reason for life. While finding a new animal friend this soon may not be right for everyone, it was for her.

Companion animals can assist both professional helpers themselves (self-care) and our clients in many ways. They make us laugh and smile; they give us continuity, responsibility, protection, and friendship; and they let us feel accepted and loved. For example, in a study of women of color and their companion animals, one woman shared about her dog:

> "She was...very much so a member of the family, and it was so wonderful. Like when you come home from being tired and so stressed out from work and there would be Sparkles greeting you at the door, smiling and so happy to see you..."(Risley-Curtiss et al., 2006, p. 439)

These things are especially important when we and clients are living in and through difficult circumstances. In the same study, Marie described her relationship with a cat when she was five years old:

> "[I]t was kind of like my only little friend that I could talk to...I didn't have good communication in the family...so it was kind of like my friend – my cat was my buddy that I talked to and stuff." (Risley-Curtiss et al., 2006, p. 438)

Margaret A. related receiving comfort and constancy from her cat:

> "[W]hen I was by myself, he always knew when to come and sit on my lap – just sit there while I was watching TV...[W]hen I was [feeling sad], he always knew just when to jump up and be by me...When things were good, he was there too." (Risley-Curtiss et al., 2006, p. 438)

It is important to note that while I have dwelled on the positive impact of animals, there are stresses too. My long-term guilt over my early treatment of my animal companions is an example. Another is the stress of having a beloved animal become sick. While I was in graduate school, I often prayed that my cats would not get sick because I had no extra money. If they had I would have taken care of them, but I would have gone without food to do it. This is coupled with the logistics of working, going to school, or both, and caring for a sick companion animal. I was also treated for symptoms of PTSD upon the violent death of one of my stray cats. He was mauled by a neighbor's dog and I had to decide whether to euthanize him or try to save him even though the veterinarian said that he would probably "die on the table." I experienced tremendous guilt over not operating on him and also for not having been able to protect him, as I felt I should have. Having to decide whether or not to euthanize a sick and/or dying animal friend is one of the most difficult decisions many people will ever make (Horn, 2000). All of these issues and more are ones that we must be willing to address, if needed, with clients who have companion animals.

Helping professionals do not need to like or appreciate other animals the way I and others do (although I wish they would!). But for us to look at our clients in a truly ecological and holistic perspective, we must ask about the presence of, and relationship with, other animals in their lives. When relationships with other animals are there, we need to consider ways to support those healthy relationships and draw on them for client support. If there are unhealthy relationships, we need to figure out how to intervene for the benefit of both human and other animals. As helping professionals, if we do not include other animals in our work, we are not maximizing our ability to help!

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Christina Risley-Curtiss and Xena (a rescue from Best Friends Animal Society). Photograph by Pam Moody.

Compassion Fatigue: An Agent of Change, and a Changed Agent

Tracy L. Zaparanick, Ph.D.

The narrative that follows chronicles the interplay between the author's professional and personal experiences. The journey as a clinician and researcher investigating compassion fatigue in non-human animal care providers has exposed the author's vulnerabilities, but has been a potent catalyst for the evolution of her professional skills and personal maturation. The relationships among human animals and non-human animals are not always favorable and sacred; there is a dark side. Observations and insights into the uninvited, macabre work of non-human animal care providers are shared. Ultimately, the author shares how during the course of being an agent of change, she has also become a changed agent.

I am the sum of my experiences. This maxim, of course, includes my professional practices. I am not the same person I was when I accepted the call to social work. For better and for worse, I view myself, people, and the world differently as the result of my professional caregiving work. Compassion fatigue, the cost of caring (Figley, 1995), is an inherent occupational hazard for me and many caregivers. Compassion fatigue, paradoxically, has been a potent catalyst for the evolution of my professional skills and my personal maturation. The accrual of pain I experience provides me with the energy and empathy that are essential in providing effective services. My suffering suggests that I evaluate and re-evaluate my own self-care regimen, my purpose, and the factors that inhibit my resiliency. What follows is my journey...thus far.

An Agent of Change

In 1999, I filled the newly established position of human health care professional at the Center for the Study of Human Animal Interdependent Relationships, within the School of Veterinary Medicine at Tuskegee University. I agreed to pick up a speaker at the Montgomery airport on Thursday, April 13, 2000. I did not know my passenger, Kathy Mitchener, D.V.M. She was to facilitate a presentation on cancer care in the nonhuman-animal care population to the veterinary medical students – not a lecture I planned to attend. Dr. Mitchener is an expert in veterinary oncology. She has dedicated many years of her professional experience to this important area, in both direct clinical practice and through facilitating professional and academic instruction. From the moment I met her at the airport, rapport was immediate, engendering a lasting bond. The conversation flowed effortlessly and made for a quick 45-minute drive. Like most social workers, one of my first questions was, "How you doing?" Her enigmatic answer to this question confirmed my fears, crystallized my hunches, and provided me with my "moment of clarity."

My Experience

With over a decade of experience as a social worker in a variety of settings (i.e., inpatient, outpatient, intensive outpatient, acute care, and long-term care facilities), I was intimately familiar with the occupational hazards of caregiving. By this time I had served a continuum of age groups, from adolescents to elders. I had witnessed first hand the multitude of ways people are traumatized; irrespective of the generation, equal exposures to pain and suffering were present. I was vulnerable as I listened intently to the disclosures of children about their exploitations and to the elders' regrets for irreparable decisions made long ago. In those early years, I did not know that what I saw and heard from my colleagues and felt myself were the deleterious effects of caregiving, now known as compassion fatigue.

What I knew instinctively, but was unable to put into language, was that the effects of the work had a direct impact on my ability to

be fully present, to be undividedly therapeutic with my clients. What I have since learned is that I, and others like me, can be both consciously and unconsciously threatened by certain aspects of our professional helping. It is because of these perceived threats that many of the symptoms of compassion fatigue manifest themselves. Would I intentionally "silence" (Baranowsky, 2002) my clients, thus preventing them from creating the narrative component necessary to heal from their traumatic stress? Would I consciously ignore, allow my attention to drift, or minimize the suffering of my clients? Would I, with good conscience, author interventions designed to lessen my own anxiety instead of selecting the "best" treatment? The answer is an emphatic "NO." However, I was guilty of each of these transgressions before I learned effective skills for recognizing, managing, and resolving the effects of compassion fatigue. Listening to the horrors of ritualistic abuse; neglect; incest; violence; end of life regrets; and the devastation of grief, disasters, and a person's shattered worldview can take a toll. Yet traumas are not the only psychological peril with clients. These threats often manifest in the choices people make. These choices may include investing in destructive relationships, chemical abuse/dependency, and other forms of self-destruction.

Years before my move to Alabama, I decided to pursue work in the anthrozoological field. I personally knew the restorative power of interacting with my dogs, Ripley and Rachèt, after a day's work. I suspected that my clients would also find such interactions pleasurable, calming, and remedial. As I investigated "animal-assisted interventions" (Kruger & Serpell, 2006), I was surprised to learn that social workers could not receive reimbursement from third-party payors for these co-facilitators. I began to prepare myself so that I might contribute toward changing this speciesist policy. At this time my human health care knowledge outmatched that of my nonhuman-animal health care. Obviously, I needed additional experiences to appreciate the other half of the human-animal and nonhuman-animal dyad. For over a year and half, I worked as a part-time veterinary assistant in a small nonhuman-animal hospital in Charlotte, NC. As expected, my veterinary experience was both educational and informative, but also devastating. Not only did I learn about health care concerns and the relationships among human-animals and nonhuman-animals, but this was also the beginning of my bearing witness to the painful effects of this work.

Kathy's Experience

Kathy began to share the week's events – seven deaths within the span of three days. When compared to a general veterinary medical hospital, she admitted that oncology brings an inordinate number of deaths versus survivals and that witnessing the loss and ensuing bereavement never gets easier. These seven non-human animals were treated by her and her staff for the past year and a half, or more. Relationships among the human-animals and non-human animals over this period of time had naturally developed well beyond the customary clinical interactions. The tipping point for her in these three days occurred when a fateful decision had to be made for a wonderful golden retriever named Scarlett. She spoke fondly and wistfully of the gorgeous Scarlett. The inoperable breast tumor did not respond to previous drug treatments. Dr. Mitchener offered a last resort in treatment options: a dangerous and costly drug ($11,000 per dose). The weight of trying to save Scarlett's life doubled when the family's son, grasping to all threads of hope, said to her, "I trust you with her life and I know you love her." Sadly, even administering this drug did not delay Scarlett's journey over the rainbow bridge.

She discussed the exhaustion she experienced from providing support to her clients before, during, and especially now, after the death of their beloved nonhuman-animal companion. Her energy drain was accelerated by the current medical care she provided her other patients (in veterinary medicine *patients* are the non-human animals, while *clients* are the human animals). She described the demands of having to attend to her veterinary team's pain, suffering, and melancholy. She also mentioned, as a side note, that during this

tumultuous time of death, grief, and continued care of others, she felt incredible distress herself. With uncommon candor she acquiesced to her accompanying thoughts of self-doubt. She recognized that her symptoms of intrusive thoughts, exhaustion, irritation, anxiety, and rumination did not stay within the neat confines of her work environment. They followed her home.

As I listened to her story, feeling both overwhelmed and validated, I began checking off a mental list of compassion fatigue criteria. I tried to be empathetic and pondered aloud if she were experiencing compassion fatigue. Her response of "no kidding" was nuanced with satire and irony. I quickly began to describe what I knew about compassion fatigue. I watched her countenance brighten, her posture relax, and her self-confidence flourish – she got it! She understood that her competency and compassion were not in question; instead, it was her self-care.

Subsequently, she has since shared with me that this fortuitous meeting was an important learning experience for her. It was a catalyst for her learning and growth. Perhaps more importantly, it restored her desire to provide compassionate care within her practice setting. It also helped her to realize that the fatigue she experienced could be conquered and that she could use this newly found appreciation to improve her clinical skills. Dr. Mitchener has since brought attention to the critical topic of compassion fatigue to veterinary audiences nationwide in the form of lectures and publications (Mitchener & Ogilvie, 2002; Mitchener & Zaparanick, 2001).

Compassion Fatigue in the NonHuman-Animal Care Provider

In addition to being a clinician, I am also a researcher. I have co-led two compassion fatigue projects within the non-human animal care provider (NACP) environments (Rank, Zaparanick, & Gentry, in press). The hypothesis in our initial investigative project was supported: compassion fatigue did exist in this environment. The subsequent goal was to identify the unique characteristics of compassion fatigue among NACPs. The second research grant took our first project a step further and investigated the impact of a manualized Nonhuman-Animal Care Compassion Fatigue training module on compassion fatigue symptoms (Zaparanick, Gentry, & Baranowski, 2002). We proposed that the criteria for compassion fatigue within the nonhuman-animal care environment consisted of the synergistic effects of primary and secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and unresolved grief. A distinctive characteristic of compassion fatigue for NACPs was captured in the last criterion, unresolved grief (Rank, Zaparanick, & Gentry, in press).

Incidentally, the phrase "non-human animal care provider" (NACP) refers to human-animals who work in non-human animal related environments, such as veterinary medicine, lab animal medicine, animal control, animal rescue, and humane society/shelter as employees or volunteers. I use this phrase to assert inclusive language designed to honor and elevate non-human animal care professionals/providers and the sentient beings with whom they work.

When given a choice and all things being equal, most of us elect to work with populations that we care about. Imagine now for a moment that the job required you, directly or indirectly, to stop the beating heart of individuals of that population you value. Envision euthanizing over 160 sentient beings in a week or 640 within a month's time. These staggering figures were derived from data collected in June 1999 at a metropolitan nonhuman-animal shelter in Alabama where 1,329 euthanasias took place (J. Meyer, personal communication, July 5, 2002). The euthanasia rates for the two full-time technicians were conservative estimates, since part-time euthanasia technicians also worked. The reason for death is not because the cat's/dog's condition is deemed incurable and/or the quality of life has dissipated or even that the cat/dog has chosen to die. Rather, death is a mandate by a community because of the actions, or inactions, of an amorphous and apathetic society. You or I do not have to pick those who die. That dubious responsibility is left to those who care deeply and who profoundly value the life of those they euthanize.

During the course of our initial exploratory study, we were abruptly, but appropriately, confronted with the heinous reality of non-human animal shelter work when a participant said, "You don't have to kill your patients!" Can you imagine if we did have to kill those we serve? How would you be affected? Would you be able to be present with others...with yourself? I also learned that the veterinary medical environment is rife with its own treacherous stressors. Veterinarians take an oath to use their "scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering..." (AVMA, 2002). People who present their four-legged family members for medical care have consistently reported themselves as having strong attachment to their nonhuman-animals. However, the financial resources necessary to provide medical care for them are not always available. So rather than deciding which course of treatment to pursue, the gut wrenching discussion of palliative care or, worse yet, end of life decisions becomes necessary. The venomous dissonance between a veterinary medical team's ability to heal and an individual's inability/unwillingness to fund this healing can have a devastating effect on the nonhuman-animals, their human companions, the NACPs, and the community at large.

A Changed Agent

Appreciating this work reality of NACPs has made an indelible mark on my professional and personal perspectives. I can still vividly remember the shock of learning the rates at which euthanasia occurred. Staring outside the window of my office, I cried as I tried to articulate this experience on the phone and found that words inadequately expressed my disbelief, horror, grief, anger, and the tidal wave of hopelessness. What kind of a person, who loves non-human animals, will voluntarily place themselves in a situation where they are asked to euthanize the very beings they are the stewards of, while keeping their integrity intact? Visualize the skill and level of maturity necessary to work with a non-anxious presence and with equal doses of compassion for self and others. These caregivers have practiced, matured, and mastered resiliency skills of self-regulation, intentionality, self-validation, connection, and self-care (Gentry, 2002).

Learning Not To Be Reduced

A few years after receiving my Master of Science in Social Work, a proliferation of publishing efforts began to document the impact of compassion fatigue, burnout, secondary traumatic stress, counter-transference, and vicarious traumatization. Like many graduate programs, mine emphasized proficiencies in techniques and interventions while eclipsing an equally critical professional skill, development of self-regulation or a non-anxious presence. Non-anxious presence in this context refers to the extent to which a person is able to remain parasympathetic dominant (relaxed) when presented with a real or imagined perceived threat (resisting sympathetic dominance). In other words, perceived threats, which fuel anxiety, are disarmed and give way to a state of relaxation. Lacking adequate attention to the latter, I was launched ill-prepared for what lie ahead.

What follows is what I have since learned. A prerequisite to a non-anxious presence is a commitment to self-care. Self-care usually conjures up a list of things like restful and adequate sleep, consuming nutritious meals, participating in regular aerobic exercise, enjoyable activities, prayer/meditation, maintaining consistent contact with a trusted professional mentor, and meaningful time with friends/family. While these areas are important and without a doubt contribute to a positive well-being, a non-anxious presence is what will make the difference between being fully present with a client or not. When I relinquish control of the outcomes of my work, not only is my mind free of fear, but my physical body is also relaxed. Physiologically speaking, a non-anxious presence allows me full access to my prefrontal cortex where my analytical, planning, and speech functions occur. With recent research illustrating the importance of the relational aspects of therapy (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999), along with the necessary mental agility to support and assist

others, it is easy to see how a non-anxious presence is a precious commodity.

Pain is a natural result of life experiences, growth, and the innate result of compassionate caregiving. Suffering, on the other hand, is the outgrowth of stifled and unresolved pain. Caregiving can bring with it this uninvited consequence. The phenomenon of musical sympathetic resonance helps to illustrate theoretically the sequential impact on the caregiver and the one being cared for. Sympathetic resonance occurs when a musical instrument emits sounds which then vibrate a formerly passive and solid resonating instrument that has similar harmonic frequencies, without the benefit of any physical contact. Our clients communicate the pain, the verbal and nonverbal vibration, which is received by us – the empathetic caregivers. A non-anxious presence empowers the receiver to tolerate these vibrations for an appropriate empathetic connection and then dissipates the residual vibrations after the interaction.

Maya Angelo (2001) succinctly captures at once the impact of our work and the resiliency required of the matured caregiver. "*I can be changed by what happens to me, but I refuse to be reduced by it.*" Managing anxiety requires intentional and vigilant efforts to minimize its diminishing effects of our work.

I have not always been successful in managing my anxiety. My efforts are not always met with immediate results. I consider the development and maintenance of a non-anxious presence not as an event, but rather a process. While I don't always feel like I volunteered to be a caregiver, in truth I have. My responsibility is to take care of myself so that I, in turn, can effectively assist others. Habitual overextending of myself, the "*more* is better" dogma, often results in less accomplished and more stress. I have been challenged to consider that the *more* is not about serving the client, but rather narcissist self-serving. I have come to see that this *more* is about my own desire for others to perceive me as successful – to be accepted – but ultimately it has been about garnering the validation of others. Needing validation from clients, colleagues, or supervisors is choosing to work in a context of perpetual threat.

As I immersed myself in the evocative world of NACPs, I simultaneously began to discover that non-human animals not have only have biologies, but also have biographies (Kowalski, 1991). Physiologically speaking, they have the capacity to experience pain, along with their own indigenous emotions (Bekoff, 2002; Panksepp, 1998). This sentience has intensified the angst I feel in knowing that millions of dogs and cats are euthanized annually, through no fault of their own. Some are simply born the "wrong" color (black dogs/cats are ubiquitous) and/or into a community already overwhelmed with homeless nonhuman-animals. Some are evaluated to be two years or older and/or unadoptable because of temperament or costly rehabilitation needs. Surrenderers of non-human animals will admit that the dog/cat no longer matches the color of their home's décor, or they have grown out of their desired neotenic appearance, or their new residence forbids them. I believe that any of these or the other myriad of convenient euthanasia excuses are inexcusable. It is with deep empathy and abiding respect that I honor NACPs for their continued love and empathy even as they are forced to euthanize their "Scarletts" for illegitimate reasons.

Recognizing My Contributions

"I hate people!" This is a reoccurring theme I often hear when I give presentations to NACPs. Their anger is often directed toward the public. For instance, shelter employees/volunteers are approached by the same people every year, even after multiple attempts to educate and offer spay/neuter surgery, as they walk through the door carrying a box full of puppies and kittens and ask, "You're not going to kill them, are you?" Much frustration, anger, and hopelessness are often expressed over the lack of self-awareness people have for their contribution to the problem.

I believe in the interconnectedness of all living things. This principle insisted that I reflect on how I too contribute to the deprived quality of life and demise of nonhuman-animals near and far from my home. From the moment I began investigating compassion fatigue in

NACPs, I knew that I had a mission. This mission has been to provide my services to this group of extraordinary people, share what I know about compassion fatigue, and even more importantly provide the necessary support toward improved resiliency. But this has not been enough.

As I listened to these folks, I began to take inventory of my lifestyle. In what ways to do I contribute to the pain, suffering, and/or oppression of human-animals and nonhuman-animals locally, nationally, globally? I do not contribute to the problem of overpopulation, as Bailey (my current canine companion) was spayed before I adopted her from a shelter. Additionally, I began to read more about the living and dying conditions for non-human animals consumed/used for human animal benefit. And began to ask myself, will I continue to contribute financially to a system that considers non-human animals expendable for the sake of a profit? Fortunately, I live in a community and country where alternatives are available. I decided to monitor my diet for a month for consumption of all nonhuman-animal products and by-products. This allowed me to take note of where I would need to make changes in my vegetarian diet and standard of living in order to follow a vegan lifestyle.

After that month passed, I decided that my only option, in order to be consistent with my interconnectedness credo, was to live as a vegan. I also consider this way of life as a contributory ingredient to my professional resiliency.

Kathy and I could have never anticipated the serendipitous outcome of our meeting that April day and how we and our work would be transformed. Mine has been an arduous personal and professional journey, but one that breaths harmony, peace, and self-validation into most of my days. I trust that by allowing my adversity to orchestrate my resiliency regimen, rather than being lulled into the seductiveness of bitterness, I will continue to evolve as a human animal. I expect that this growth will promote success in my mission, contributing in some small part to the healing and healthy endurance of NACPs and their important work.

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Tracy Zaparanick, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., C.F.S., has worked as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Compassion Fatigue Specialist for 13 and 7 years, respectively. Since completing her Ph.D.at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, she works full-time as an Employee Assistance Program counselor in Knoxville. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: tzap@bellsouth.net

Bailey. Photograph by Tracy L. Zaparanick.

Narratives by Max and Fred

These two pieces were "written" by Fred and Max with help from their human typists, Lauren Singer and Mardy Sitzer, respectively. Fred wrote his narrative as a way of helping Lauren deal with the death of her father, Dr. Bernie Singer. Max wrote his narrative to describe how he helped Mardy recover from a home invasion.

Lauren's Introduction: I have multiple sclerosis and am unable to walk now. I have come back to live at home. My father was my security and steadied me when I wobbled. My mother was totally bereft and I knew that I had to separate my grieving from hers. I had to find my space to grieve. I have a wonderful service dog. His name is Fred and I have used him as a device when writing. I have written a book through Fred's eyes, looking at my life with multiple sclerosis. I wanted to introduce disability to children in the least threatening way. Fred is a lovable dog and he "writes" with humor and lightness. He has written a book which has been published and has sold very well. He is in the middle of writing his second book. I find writing tremendously healing. I can, sort of, move out of myself. Whatever I write is real and true. The manner in which my father passed away was remarkable. In his death lay healing and love, but it needed to be acknowledged. There was no fear, there was no anger. Fred has been my device before. He is love without trappings. What you will read is true. I observed Fred and tried to understand what I saw. In the end, what I wrote was how I felt too. But Fred can express it better than I.

Fred. Photograph by Lauren Singer.

Fred's Story

It is with a heavy heart that I come to tell you the saddest of my stories. Life at home has changed and Lauren has changed and my work has had to change. Change. I can eat my Hills food twice a day and I don't get bored. My heart still thrills when I hear the clink of the chain on my lead. I love the regularity of my life but something has happened to shake the very foundation of the home I live in.

It all started very slowly. I remember sitting next to Lauren in the lounge as she spoke to Dad. They were both very serious. "I love you, Dad," she said in a very sad voice and Dad stood up and gave her a kiss on her head. I could sense their sorrow and I moved closer to Lauren. I could feel the change, the slight shimmer of fear and uncertainty. But before I go on, let me tell you more about Dad.

When I came to live with the Singers, I quickly came to know Lauren and Ma. But

Dad was inscrutable. Beyond manipulation. "Good boy," he would say as he patted me on my head or my chest. If I barked too long or too loud, Dad would shout, "What does he want? Lauren, control him."

Control me? Good heavens. Surely he had noticed the wonderful game Lauren and I play.

He did recognize the fundamental role I played in Lauren's life. "You can't believe the change in Lauren since she got Fred," he was fond of telling people. His voice would change when he said that. He had a strong voice. He would brook no insolence and would waste no words. I am fond of barking and have acute hearing. If anyone walks down the road or if a dog barks a block away, I will hear and will want to go outside to find out more. I cannot unlock the door, let alone open the door. So it is obvious that I rely on the people in the house I live in to let me in and out at my command and whim.

Dad would shout with a voice like thunder, "I'll let him out, but I'm not letting him in."

"Whenever he's out, he wants in, and whenever he's in, he wants out," Ma would nod sagely, agreeing.

I never let that upset me. I never stayed out in the rain. And anyway, Lauren, "The Fusspot," always saw to it that my wants were catered to.

But Dad could be fun too. I love hearing Lauren laugh and she and Dad often sat together and giggled. Wonderful. And I would join in. "Quiet!" would come the order. What? I just wanted to be part of the group.

Dad could be my co-conspirator as well. My love of serviettes and tissues has become legendary. He knew that I craved them and just sometimes his hand would drop by his side and he would urgently whisper, "Fred, Fred, come here." And I would run to his side and grab the proffered serviette. I would grab it quickly, hearing Lauren's admonishment float uselessly over my head.

Dad was strong. Once he saved me from two angry Rottweilers when I was barely out of puppyhood. They attacked me in our garden but Dad yelled at them and they ran away. He would come in after a day at work full of energy.

"Hello," he would call when he opened the front door and then said, "Hello, Fred," and gave me a pat when I bounded up to great him. He would come home after climbing the mountain on a Saturday afternoon, smelling of fynbos and soil and sweat. Often, his legs were scratched and bloody because he was a keen climber and would scramble over rocks and through any bush that got in his way. I tried to lick him clean but he always pushed me away. Then, slowly things began to change.

He didn't climb the mountain anymore. He and Ma would go for a walk together, arm in arm. He became thinner and his legs weren't so powerful anymore. He needed a stick to walk with. Then, one day he walked in from outside and I heard Lauren cry, "Daddy, Daddy, are you alright?" Dad had fallen and needed to be helped into Lauren's wheelchair.

This was strange. Dad's voice no longer boomed. I was very used to Dad's smell, but there was something new. It was a smell I had never encountered before. I know that Lauren is not well, but I know what multiple sclerosis smells like.

This was different.

I must help him, I thought. Something is happening. Dad needs my help, but what can I do? Perhaps if I loved him even more, perhaps if I focused my love on him, he would get better. That's what I will do. So when he sat in the dining room or in the TV room, I would sit close by and stare at him. I looked at him and tried and tried to send him my love, which surely would heal him.

"Stop looking at me," Dad would say. He knew. Deep inside he knew why I needed to look at him and what I was smelling and feeling. He was not well, but with every fiber of his being he was fighting the bravest fight. He could save me from the angry Rottweilers with his booming voice but that was nothing compared to the fight he was waging.

Then, one Friday he said the afternoon and evening prayers and then the Kiddush (blessing) over the wine. He called Lauren over to give her the traditional blessing a father gives to his child. He kissed her on her head and then he and Lauren spoke together. No one paid me any attention. And I didn't push

for attention. This was a precious time not meant for me.

Then, Sunday morning came. Dad was lying in his bed. Ma was in the room and so was Lauren. We're here, Daddy," Lauren said, stroking Dad gently. The doctor came in with a Siddur (prayer book) and began reading a prayer. Ma sat by Dad's side and held his hand and kissed him.

"Say the Shema," Gary the doctor said and Lauren quietly whispered the prayer and a psalm and then the doctor said that Dad had gone. Ma still held onto him. She and Lauren cried and I stood silently by Lauren's side. I sniffed and my nose twitched. This was different. I walked to where Ma was sitting by Dad and I sniffed again. I stood for a moment and saw a tissue that had fallen on the floor.

"Thanks, Dad." I picked up the tissue and quickly ran out of the room.

Yes, things are forever changed.

Lauren Singer's service dog, Fred, was trained by the South African Guide Dogs Association. He has written a book that is a best seller in South African terms, titled *Fred at Your Service, Ma'am: Reminiscences of a Service Dog*. Lauren, Fred, and her new dog Pepper have numerous speaking engagements to teach preprimary through high school students about living with chronic illness. All comments regarding this article can be sent to: renski@iafrica.com

Mardy's Introduction: I was brutally attacked in a home invasion, leaving me mentally devastated, with my life in shambles, and scars that ran deeper than any flesh wound. The overwhelming emotions led me to acquire a large dog in hopes that he would keep me safe. Little did I know that this dog would transform my life. Because of the challenges of recovering and the devastation from his passing, I was only able to share this story by telling it from my dog's point of view. Odd as that may seem to others, it was healing for me to pay him the respect and give him thanks he deserved for a life well lived and a job well done. Sharing my story in this manner also allows others to experience the opportunities for personal growth and healing when you have a relationship with one of these amazing animals, even if for a moment. The story of this rescued German Shepherd that I renamed from Blood to Max is titled "Things I Taught My Master" because even though I was the "master" of the dog, he became my masterful teacher of life, not only helping me to get back in it, but to be better because of it.

Max. Photograph by Mardy Sitzer

Max's Story:
Things I Taught My Master

When I first met Mardy in 1993, she was as much of a mess as I was. A college professor on his way to school one day found me. He brought me back to his home and ran an ad to find me a place to live. It seems that when he called the ASPCA to tell them I had been found, there was something on my collar that informed them that I was a runaway from an abusive home and they thought I might do better elsewhere.

As I said, Mardy was a mess. I didn't know her story, but I could tell that she needed me. Once I got back to her place, making myself comfortable was easy. She seemed so willing to go with the flow of my ever-increasing demands. I realized how easy it would be to train her and so I calmed down, settled in, and focused on my master's lessons.

First, I needed to make her feel safe. That was relatively easy. After all, a 125-pound German Shepherd with a bark that creates sheer terror should do the job. I used to hear her say that she had trouble sleeping – that must have been before I got here. She slept as if she were in a coma, which made waking her up a challenge. Sometimes "harrumphing" would do it and sometimes I would have to bark. There were times that nothing less than pulling off the covers or a good whack upside the head with my nearly three-inch paw would be the only way to get her to move. After all, my 4:30 AM exercise session of "ball toss and fetch" was critical to her training.

I remained a loyal companion so that she would feel safe. I worked to give her a sense of stability through ritual and regular tasks. We had other tasks such as bathing and brushing, which were more like Zen-yoga exercises, but it built up her muscles and did wonders for my coat.

My next big task was to level out her behavior. She needed to remain calm and less erratic, so I decided that this lesson would be best taught through an ancient method of mirroring. My behavior was "pari passu" to hers. I responded to her every mood and energy level as if I were a mirror she could look into. In this manner, I was able to show her when she was stressed out. When she was depressed, I would enroll her to get busy with my caretaking so that she didn't have time to stew. I made her go out for regular walks, which prevented her from hiding from the world as she seemed inclined to do in those days.

The next big lesson was building confidence. That turned out to be more complex than this old dog would have thought. It got confusing because I was trying to protect her, but that often caused anxious worrying that I might cause trouble. So I curtailed my aggressive behavior and slowly she became more confident that we were okay out there together. I also needed to give her confidence about talking to people. I don't think she was shy but she seemed worried about talking to people. I was a great magnet as most everyone looked at me twice. Soon enough, she knew everyone and every dog in the neighborhood and had to talk to each one of them. Getting anywhere when I was with her became a real problem.

I calmed Mardy, trained her to regain trust and confidence, and so my next big lesson was to teach her to strike out on her own. I had a plan for this all along so that she would stay at home with me all day. I really didn't enjoy long hours at home alone and having her start a business at home would work great for both of us. Getting her started was not easy. It was that confidence thing again and something about money. So I gave her the idea to do a newsletter for a pet store so that she could barter for food and treats for me. At least I would be fed and we would worry about the rent and her food later. Well, her business took off, and the rest is history.

The last lessons were to teach her to open up and to let go. First, I worked on the open up part. We met Rob and after checking him out, I decided that he was a good catch for her so I did not maim, maul, or threaten him. I even tried to be friendly so he would come over more often. Jeez, I even shared part of the bed with him from time to time and let me tell you that this is not easy for an old dog – giving up his side of the bed!

Mardy opened up and let Rob in. As a matter of fact, he moved in last winter. Once I was certain that things would work, I was able to begin the last phase of training – letting go.

Walking and climbing the stairs was getting to be too much for me, so we decided that I would spend some time in Baltimore with her folks, my loving grandparents. They have a nice big back yard with bushes to pee in and lots of grass and leaves to lie in. Their neighborhood has parks to walk to and life there is good. So I spent the better part of six months there relaxing and having a great time with the family. By the way, the food there was far more plentiful and my grandmother would even serve me my meals outside if I so desired.

Grandpop Saul and I really bonded. It was a guy thing. We shared war stories, compared battle wounds, and every day we'd go out for walks – strutting our stuff, checking out the

babes and pups in the neighborhood. Like I said, it was kind of a guy thing.

On Mardy's last visit to Baltimore, I realized that it was time to begin the final phase of the final lesson. Sunday, December 5, 1999, was my last day on earth. Dog heaven is the front yard to the heaven all of you speak about. We pets hang out there waiting for you guys to show up. No rush. We have no concept of time. We don't forget you anymore than you forget us. I was handsomely rewarded for my loyalty and companionship and I hope that the lessons I taught my master remain learned in my absence.

Mardy Sitzer is currently a member of a pet partner team with Pilot, her standard poodle. Together, they visit hospitals, nursing homes, and psychiatric lock down units in New York City. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: mardy@bumblebeellc.com

Book Review: *Animal-Assisted Interventions for Individuals with Autism*

Gilda Martinez, Ed.D., Towson University, Maryland

With the significant rise of children diagnosed with autism, becoming informed about promising interventions for such individuals seems of essence. This book provides information about different types of animal-assisted therapies: when, where, why, how to access them, and what to expect. The information is explained clearly in a manner that can be understood by all, regardless of prior background knowledge or experience in this area. Several profiles of individuals who received animal-assisted interventions are provided, along with quotes from parents and anecdotal information that demonstrate to the reader how each method can make a difference in the lives of individuals with autism and for their families. It is "essential reading for families, teachers, and anyone interested in using service animals to help individuals on the autism spectrum" (from the foreword by Temple Grandin).

The author, Merope Pavlides, begins her book with an introduction chapter that provides her personal history, which involves her son who was diagnosed with autism, followed by an explanation of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). She then leads the reader into an overview of animal-assisted interventions.

Chapter 2 provides the definition of a service dog and differentiates service dogs from therapy dogs. One difference noted is how service dogs are allowed in public places, whereas therapy dogs are not. The author then discusses the roles of autism service dogs, which include keeping children from eloping, alerting parents of injurious behaviors, and search and rescue of children who have eloped, to name a few. Despite the various pros described, she unveils reasons for not getting a service dog as well. However, the families she interviewed that received service dogs were pleased with their decisions. She then guides families in how to gain access to a service dog: where to find them, questions to ask service dog providers, costs involved, how service dogs are placed, follow-up training requirements, what happens once they retire, and public access concerns. Several profiles of families who received service dogs are provided, along with quotes from parents and anecdotal information that demonstrate to the reader how service dogs can make a difference. A similar structure is seen in the following chapters as well, which makes comprehending the subject matter easy.

In Chapter 3 Pavlides reviews the history and value of animal-assisted therapy. A few of the benefits listed are an increase in participation in therapy sessions, providing social support, and the encouragement of attachment. Furthermore, an increase in schools partnering with animal-assisted therapy organizations is noted. Nevertheless, a need for parents to advocate and ensure that their child can bring the service dog to school is still necessary in many schools.

Chapter 4 begins with a personal account about how the author first acquired dogs as companions. She bullets several reasons to get a dog, such as to assist individuals with autism in socializing or to provide a companions for their siblings. She discusses some of the negative aspects of getting a dog, such as dog bite injuries, allergies, and time involved in caring for a pet. She notes the importance of finding out about different breeds and their dispositions before going to look at them and includes information about finding a trainer,

questions to ask a potential trainer, and how to help trainers work with individuals with autism.

The next chapter begins with the definition and history of therapeutic riding, then delves into the procedures and values of therapeutic riding. Professional standards by the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association are outlined. Ideally, instructors are also special educators, social workers, or behavior analysts. In addition, how to access services is discussed and in-depth profiles of two centers are provided. Through interviews and observations of these centers and their practices, it is noted how sometimes individuals need breaks from riding when the instructor or others notice that this type of therapy is no longer working. She also emphasizes that evaluating individuals' outcomes or progress can be very beneficial. To end the chapter, she interviews Sarah Griffith, a person who came into therapeutic riding centers as a volunteer and has now visited centers all over the world. The series of questions and answers provide the reader with interesting information about how these types of centers are conducted in other areas of the world and how they compare to ones in the United States.

This is followed by a chapter dedicated to dolphin therapy. The author notes how more scientific data need to be collected, provides the reader with background information about dolphins, and provides a brief history of dolphin therapy (which began in the early 1970's). The purpose of dolphin therapy varies greatly, from physical therapy to language development. Stories about individuals' experiences are provided and make the methods come to life.

A key feature about this author's dialogue throughout the chapters is how one size does not fit all. She points out how each individual's needs should be assessed and how therapy should match his or her specific needs. This is the case for any type of therapy attempted for individuals with autism. This is a very important component to highlight because many people seek a simple solution. They yearn to purchase one method that will work. As the author states, it is not that simple. Many factors can influence the outcomes of different types of interventions. Within each type of intervention, variations should be used based on the individual with autism's needs.

The author presents facts using research-based information, for example, about the pros and cons of each intervention. She also includes her opinions based on her own experiences. This allows the reader to understand how theory leads to practice and how it has or has not worked for her. Various profiles of individuals with autism throughout the text also allow the reader to understand precisely how these interventions can or cannot work. Pavlides explains that animal-assisted therapy is a potential intervention that, if nothing else, may provide an individual with happiness. Happiness and quality of life, in particular, are areas of research that interest her most. She states, "We must learn to be truly creative in providing opportunities for individuals with autism to build lives based on supported independence and options for meaningful activity and personal fulfillment" (p. 186).

This discourse helps to raise awareness about the important role that animals play in assisting children and adults with autism to succeed in school and beyond. More research is needed and additional funding is required to accomplish this task.

The appendix includes references to organizations, journals, support groups, etc., making this text a useful resource. In conclusion, this book is well-organized and practical. It truly provides families, educators, and community members with essential information about "animal-assisted therapy for individuals with autism," just as the title states.

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Gilda Martinez received her Ed.D. from the Johns Hopkins University. Shortly after graduating, she accepted a position as an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at Towson University in Maryland. She has now been Towson University for two and half years. Comments regarding this article can be sent to: gmartinez@townson.edu

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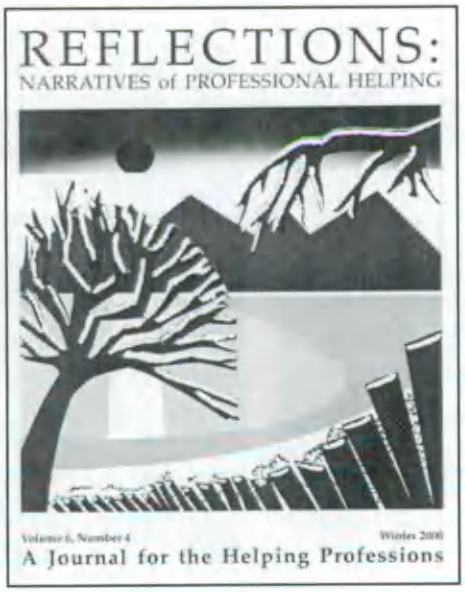

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The purpose of *Reflections* is to publish narratives, personal accounts that describe and explain the process of helping others and shaping social change over time. The journal seeks to build a literary tradition for critical study. It encourages stories that convey a sense of immediacy, portray practice across diverse populations and capture the range and variety of strategies and systems within the helping professions. The journal publishes stories of professional helpers such as ethicists, psychotherapists, community organizers, case and group workers, policy makers, family and child practitioners, health and mental healthcare providers; educators, researchers, and administrators in the helping professions. Historical and contemporary narratives are encouraged.

Narratives should give readers a fresh perspective about the practice of change. Narratives explain and describe events, results, conflicts, complicating actions, and how, why, and what was done. In narratives, the writer evaluates the experience, whether or not there is a resolution, and explores the meaning of the experience. Some narratives end with a coda; a perspective on what occurred.

Writing Instructions and Submission: Manuscripts are peer reviewed. Articles appropriate to the journal's purpose are reviewed anonymously by members of the Executive and Editorial Boards. Publication decisions require about two to four months. All articles are copyedited before publication.

1. Authors are expected to use APA format.
2. The manuscript length depends upon the temporal sequence of the event.
3. Include, on a separate page, a brief abstract (no more than five lines) written in the same style as the narrative.
4. Place identifying information such as name, affiliation(s), title(s), address, and phone/fax numbers **only on cover page.**
5. Send three (3) printed, double spaced hard copies of the manuscript, **set in 12 point Times New Roman** to the editor.

Upon Acceptance of the article for publication, please supply your manuscript in rich text format (RTF) on a 3.5"Windows or MS-DOS floppy disk along with one additional hard copy.

Names of persons and organizations mentioned in the articles published in Reflections have been changed to protect their privacy. *Reflections* disclaims responsibility for statements, either fact or opinion, made by contributors.

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