



*Golden Mom Rochelle with her Darcy.  
Photo by Stuart Haman.*



*The Land of PureGold's Mistfield Oliver CGC, "Ollie," with model on his photo shoot for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America's pamphlet publication, "Mental Illnesses are as Treatable as Physical Illnesses" which was enclosed in the September 1996 issues of Newsweek, Time, and Reader's Digest.*

# Following the Golden Brick Road

*"The lessons these furry angels teach us are never ending – inspiring a new respect, appreciation and celebration of life."*

*Rochelle Lesser  
Owings Mills, Maryland*

I was hooked that afternoon. Hopelessly and forever hooked. I had walked down a flight of stairs into a Golden heaven of sorts – a litter of soft little fluff balls all scurrying about, this way and that. Could there really ever be anything as drop-dead gorgeous as these eight-week-old Golden puppies? I doubt it.

Nothing could compare to the vision that greeted me that day. And, once seated and cuddling wildly amidst a chaos of fur and licking tongues – with adoration flowing in from far too many Golden retrievers to count – I instinctively knew life would never again be the same.

I was never warned about the Golden obsession that can take over once exposed to such unconditional love. Intoxicating for sure, but addicting just the same. So, now with Golden pawprints forever stamped on my heart, there was understandably no turning back.

I had been a small-dog, Poodle person, growing up. And, was no doubt comfortable with that given my diminished 4'11" stature. But my husband, Gary, having grown up during the Lassie era, had a beautiful and most cherished sable-colored Collie named Laddie. It was Gary's idea that we add a more substantial dog to the family. Maybe not as large as a Collie, but certainly bigger than a miniature Poodle. So, guided by his wisdom, I was led down the Golden Brick Road, my eyes wide open to the existence of these exquisite furry Retriever angels.

I cannot imagine that my life would have been as rich or as ful-



*"She taught me that I must look past the surface to understand what lies below."*

filling or as filled with laughter as it is without such a discovery. But, my spiritual side has also led me to believe that this Golden gift was sent from a mother, watching out from above for her baby girl. For, at the time, I was still deeply grieving the loss of a much-loved mother who had been the heartlight of my existence.

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Now thoroughly inebriated with Golden puppy lust, and fixed on the belief that a Golden must become part of the family, our search for breeders began. We soon learned that Jane Silverman, of Mistfield Golden fame, was located a mere twenty minutes from our home.

Quite excited about the meeting, we were also somewhat nervous as we had been told that Jane was awfully particular about the families she chose for her puppies. In hindsight, that first meeting with Jane was an amusing one. But, only in hindsight, mind you. Only in hindsight.

I was still intimidated by size, my apprehension building whenever I envisioned my pup-to-be as a grownup sizable adult. But hubby Gary boosted my confidence with his assurances that this trepidation would easily be overcome once I trained in obedience with the puppy. We would both be growing up together, but as a team. And, of course, though I hate to admit it, he

came to be right once again.

So, here we were finally, at Jane's home, a sprawling farm of several acres with its own pond, kennel, and stables, able to handle the breeding of both thoroughbred horses and Golden Retrievers. After all speaking together for a bit, Jane called out to her clan of about five Retrievers to come up to meet us. Up close and personal, as they say.

The group had been off at a distance frolicking in her pond, where they seemed so gentle and small. But, now, at the sound of their mom's voice, they immediately perked their ears and with eager faces that seemed to bellow, "Whoa! Company's here!" came bounding toward us at breakneck speed. Be still my heart, my racing, frightened heart.

Thank goodness Jane failed to sense my escalating fear as her pack grew closer and closer. Because before I knew what was happening, one rather large beauty jumped up onto my back, comfortably resting huge, wet, muddy paws on my shoulders. Gary managed to bolster me so that I did not completely topple over, managing to hide his surprise. Of course, soon after I found out how



*A proud dad with puppy Ollie.*

absolutely floored he'd been by my feigned calm.

And, later, discovering the two perfectly formed paw prints on the back of my shirt, I seriously wondered how I was ever going to carry this thing off.

Thankfully, with that vision of Golden puppy love still imprinted on



*Ollie having a refreshing drink, his way!*

my heart – and the encouragement of a very smart husband – I came to understand all that I had been missing confining myself to living in a small dog's world. Now, as my Golden children have come to lean against me, both seeking and providing love, and my hand is able to rest on those luscious fur-covered heads, I have come to realize that there is no more perfect a size.

### **In the Beginning**

How could I know that Oliver North would next enter the Golden picture? But, as I was anxiously awaiting my first furbaby's birth – consumed by finding the perfect name for him – the news was filled by the Contra Hearings and its main subject, Ollie North. The more I heard the name and worked it over in my head the more I knew how perfect it was. Though, at the time, I had no idea that our Ollie would be following in his namesake's paper-shredding legacy.

Sadly, the litter we had puppy reservations for turned into a false pregnancy, and disappointed couldn't even come close to expressing how we felt at that point. But, just when we had about given up on getting a puppy, Jane offered us a puppy from an upcoming show litter. However, there would be no choice as to the pup to be received.

And, indeed, we came to find out that the runt of the litter would become our own Ollie. But that was something that I knew all about! So, I was even more excited about the opportunity for Ollie and me to grow tall together.

That day in 1987 when we brought Ollie home was one of the most anticipated and happiest in our lives. The memory of driving up the hill within Jane's Mistfield Farms and seeing a kennel filled with white fluff balls clawing at the fencing of their confines was more glorious than could ever be expressed in words.

Within this bevy of oh-so-lovely puppies, we had no idea who our Ollie was to be. But, we both noticed that a little cutie wearing the red rickrack necklace was struggling much more than his siblings to get our attention. And, that he did. For this baby, so described as the little

lover of the bunch, was to be our special guy.

I don't know whether it was the fact that he was our first and special entry into this new world of Gold, but Mistfield Oliver served as the glue that melded us together into a family. He renewed my sense of purpose and was woven into the very texture of both my emotional well-being and my life's work as a school psychologist and private clinician.

Yet, it was rough going for us new sporting dog parents as we came to learn just how busy these puppies can be. How were we to know that walls were so wonderful for teething? Barely surviving the terrible twos phase of doggie adolescence, we were so relieved when Ollie proved to be an incredible and independent thinker. And as much as we taught him the ropes, he taught us what his desires were.

Ollie was the kind of guy who was always watching and listening. He would hear me utter the phrase, "Do you want?" and immediately stop and pivot his head to see what words were coming next, and whether this was indeed something important.

The first time Ollie displayed his special intelligence occurred at about two o'clock in the morning when we had been awakened by a loud tapping sound in the hall bathroom. Rather groggily investigating this, there we found Ollie standing up at the sink – one paw hitting the moving part of the faucet. He obviously had watched on many occasions, but was having difficulty figuring out that the faucet needed to be lifted up for the water to flow.

Then asking if he wanted some water, we lifted the faucet and Ollie beamed (probably thinking, "It's about time they figured out what I wanted. Why else would I be up here tapping?").

Just in case you think we may have been negligent parents, there was plenty of water downstairs in his water bowl. But, was it fresh and cool and could it run blessedly over his face as he drank? I think not. Certainly, Ollie knew the difference and from then on always let us know when he wanted the good stuff.

Ollie grew to be an exemplary therapist's helper. Often working with youngsters in my home or within the setting of my private practice,



*Ollie with girlfriend, Suzanne.*

it was always a struggle to keep boys, in particular, engaged in the therapeutic process as they struggled over having to spend their free time inside working with me. Yet, with Ollie added to the picture, these sessions became must-attend events!

He easily calmed my anxious patients, bolstered the insecure, and lifted the spirits of the depressed. And, while it's tough to admit – on more than one occasion, it was this four-footed therapist rather than his mom who in fact scored the victory. And, this was all done at a time when animal-assisted therapy had yet to make the splash that is currently noted.

Ollie was always the entertainer, loving to show off his ability to hold multiple tennis balls in his mouth, for example. And, I will never forget how quickly he learned to master the Yuppy Puppy Treat Machine. There we were, so proud of our boy and his ability to catch on to how to retrieve the treat, when we left to go upstairs. Returning only a short time later, we found that Ollie had cleaned us out of over fifteen dollars in treats, so emptying the machine in the process.

Yet, more importantly, Ollie was the consummate teacher – helping so many learn just how valuable his presence could be. My kindergarten demonstration work with him, although exhausting, not only helped youngsters who were fearful of dogs, but allowed children to learn some valuable dog safety lessons within a comfortable and fun atmosphere.

Ollie was very much the show-off, and loved to be applauded



*A serious pose showing off Ollie's majestic headpiece.*

for his actions. He simply loved our "Go Search" game that involved him smelling a glove and then being taken out of the room. I then hid the glove, the kids all knowing the hiding place, before having him return and telling him to "Go Search." Of course, he always found his precious glove!

Ollie was the most cherished of teachers, so gallantly fine-tuning my awareness of the substantial role that canines play in our lives. Yet, always a kid at heart, I made sure that the obedience work that I did with him would allow him entry into the world that he so coveted.

While Ollie's sit and down/stays grew to be quite impeccable, it was his ability to combine these with retrieves – and retrieves that reliably would be relinquished – that allowed him to become a favorite visitor throughout several neighborhoods. It was so heartwarming to be able to teach even two-year-olds how to play independently with him, for both benefited so greatly from the sense of mastery that they ultimately experienced.

With only canine children to speak of, it is embarrassing to admit that much of the door-ringing at my house was for Ollie. Simply known as Ollie's mother, I was forever being asked by the little ones in our neighborhood, "Can Ollie come out to play?" And, always looking forward to his daily walks with Dad, this special guy was known throughout neighborhood after neighborhood. Honestly, streets of kids would break out in a frenzy when Ollie would be sighted coming their way.

If a school bus happened to pass as my two guys were on one of their jaunts, you could hear the entire bus seem to roar as Ollie was spotted. Screams of "Ollie, Ollie, it's Ollie. Hi, Ollie!" filled the air, the kids eager to leave the bus to be with him. They knew that this was really a special canine – and one that was really just a kid at heart.

Children could easily feel Ollie's love as his face would beam and his tail would swing nonstop. And wanting desperately to be accepted, he listened and followed their lead without pause. But, his most endearing relationship developed when at

age two, an adorable four-year-old named Suzanne moved in across the way. Ollie lived to see his girl, able to look to the window of her bedroom when asked to seek her out.

This photo of the beaming couple is hanging proudly in Suzanne's bedroom, a now adult Suzanne firm in her stance that a Golden could never grace her home – because there could be only one Ollie.

Ollie touched another youngster just as profoundly, a young man named Greg who I had met when I had consulted with his family. Always a part of everything I did, Ollie was invited to clients' homes, their so relishing playing ball with Miss Rochelle's furry kid.

When Ollie was no longer at my side, it was heartbreaking when I had to repeatedly give explanation for this absence to his many child admirers. I remain so touched by Greg's moving note, amazed at the level of insight this teenager possessed.

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"Ollie has touched so many, including myself. I never thought of Ollie as just a dog; he was and still is my sun that will be shining over me and all of us for the rest of our lives. I

don't think I could even try to imagine what you are going through, but I am always here for you as a listening ear. Ollie is a free-spirited, loving, and full-of-forgiveness person and that is how I will ALWAYS remember him. He made a watermark in my life and will never be forgotten. I am sorry for the world's loss and yours."

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I wish that I could say that Ollie's existence was all cheerful and bright, but, sadly, he suffered throughout his life due to auto-immune system difficulties. The fact that Ollie managed to live to almost eleven years was definitely a testament to a pharmacist Dad who seemed to have a physiological connection to him. You see, Ollie would have horrific allergy attacks in which his eyes and ears would turn beet red – his breathing then becoming labored. Often occurring while he slept, Gary always seemed to urgently wake up when Ollie was having an attack, then was able to quickly administer steroids to halt the progression of symptoms.

Despite this suffering, Ollie remained remarkably easygoing and caring. Never aggressive or cruel. I will never forget when he found an



*A gorgeous puppy-faced Darcy.*

injured bird and softly carried it to his Dad to show him that help was needed.

### **Becoming a Golden Family**

Although blessed to have had Ollie make us a true family, it had seemed unfair for him not to have a companion. But, it took many years before agreement was finally reached on our becoming a two-Golden family.

Named for my beloved mother Doris, our first Golden gal, Friendship Darcy Makena, came into this world on May 5, 1996. What a beautiful princess! And, truly a girl to the core, Darcy relishes in finding any surface which holds her reflection.

As a twelve-week-old, she almost caused a riot when Daddy took her to a neighborhood grocery to introduce her to a friend. Dozens of folks took one look through the front plate glass window before streaming out to meet her.

Although clearly biased, as we moms tend to be, I have never found a Golden image cuter than this one. And, the fact that I captured this treasured pose makes it that much more special.

Darcy's parents had been beauties as well. Her mom, Ch. Friendship Raspberry Jazz WC, was bred by Tricia and Neill Robson of Friendship Golden Retrievers. Darcy's dad, Am/Can. Ch Pebwin Excel, Am/Can. CD, OS, came from Berna Welch's Pebwin line. Lovely and talented champions both, they each shared thirteen wonderful years with their loving families.

Darcy had a major crush on Ollie, who she so very much adored. As dominant females tend to do, she showed her love by annoying the guy at every turn.

Darcy has managed to follow in Ollie's huge paw-prints, doing animal-assisted therapy, therapy pet visitations, and classroom demonstrations. She simply lives to be loved, and seeks affection from all. A true Velcro Golden, she communicates great comfort as she gently leans against your side.

An irreplaceable episode in my Golden journey occurred on April 27, 2000; Darcy televised on Baltimore's WJZ Channel 13 during the Williams Scotsman's Take Your



*Darcy encircled by admirers on Take Your Daughters and Sons to Work Day.*

Daughters and Sons to Work Day. Darcy's presence noticeably heightened the reception of stories that I read about animal communication.

Television broadcaster Ron Matz did a beautiful story, easily falling in love with our girl. He was touched by the children's love for her and the petting power that she had. And, Ron was amazed by her agility skills as we worked a tunnel, weave poles, and a series of jumps. Darcy also showed off her flyball ability, utilizing a Doga-polt to perfection.

Darcy was further featured in the May 11, 2000 Sunpapers news article, "To Woman, Dogs are Worth their Weight in Gold." Written by Joni Guhne, this wonderful article detailed Darcy's accomplishments and provided information about Golden rescue.

On Mother's Day, May 14, 2000, Darcy did a grand job with a large group of intermediate-aged students at a local temple's Sunday school. She was helping to demonstrate the concept of Mitzvahs (good deeds) and Tikkun Olain (fixing the world using our own talents and resources). After the presentation and demonstration were completed, a remark-

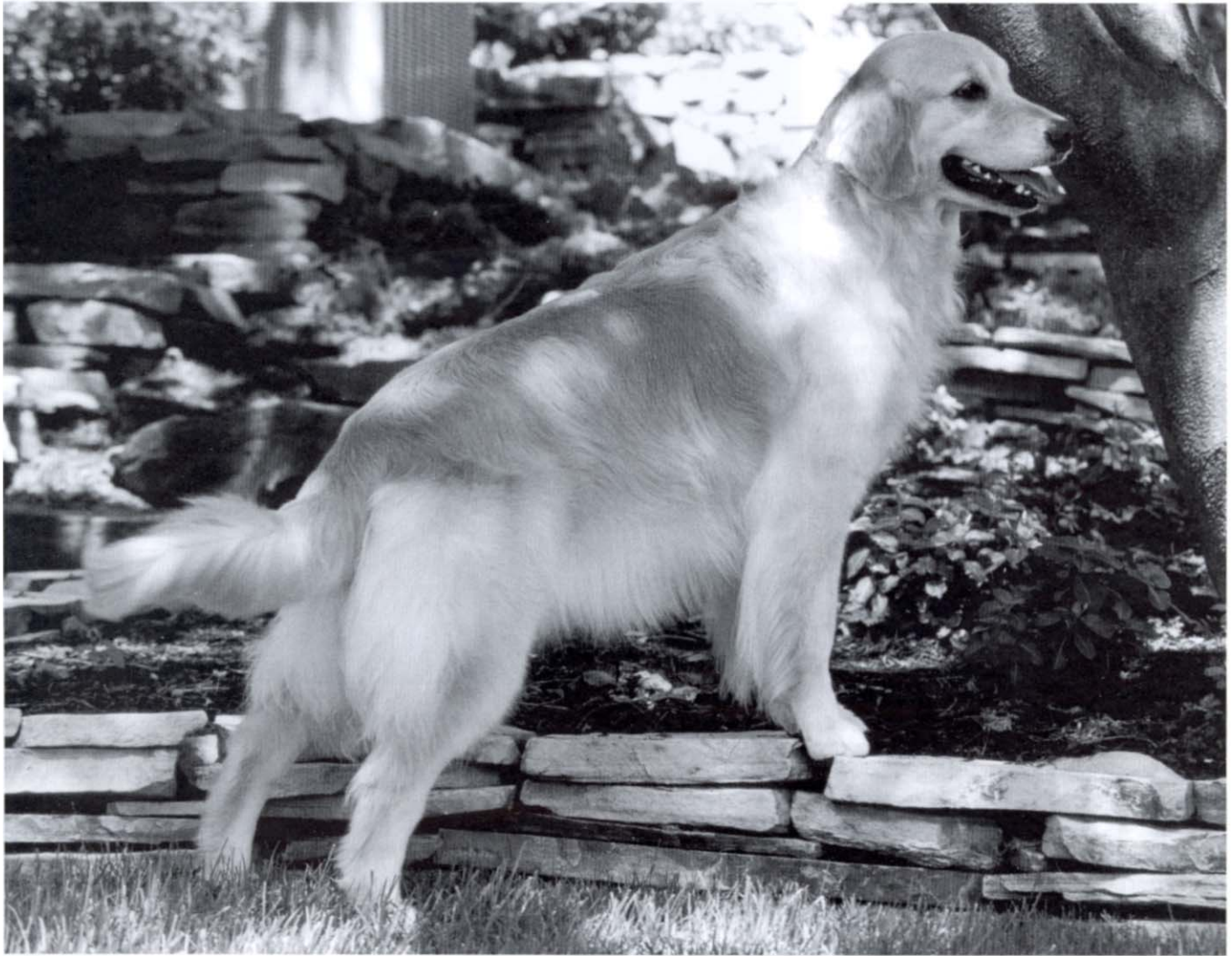
able thing occurred.

An eleven-year-old youngster came up and told me about being interested in the animal-assisted therapy work that I had just detailed in my talk. He related his having been unmotivated when working with therapists in the past. While I only met a couple of times with this young man, I was intrigued by his forming such a strong belief that by working with Darcy by his side a difference could be made.

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Although my Ollie was easygoing to a fault, I have to admit that this beautiful girl has really been a handful, as she definitely has a mind of her own when it comes to what SHE wants to do.

Our early experiences in the Breed ring were downright comical, but I was surely not laughing at the time. Despite going to show classes to practice, Darcy never showed any enjoyment for running by my side on lead. Instead, she would pull on her lead, seeming to beg for permission to get out of the ring. With ears unattractively slicked back and stress written all over her face, we quickly exited that aspect of the show dog



*A senior seven-year-old Friendship Darcy Makena OA, AXJ, CGC still looking lovely. Photo by Stuart Haman.*



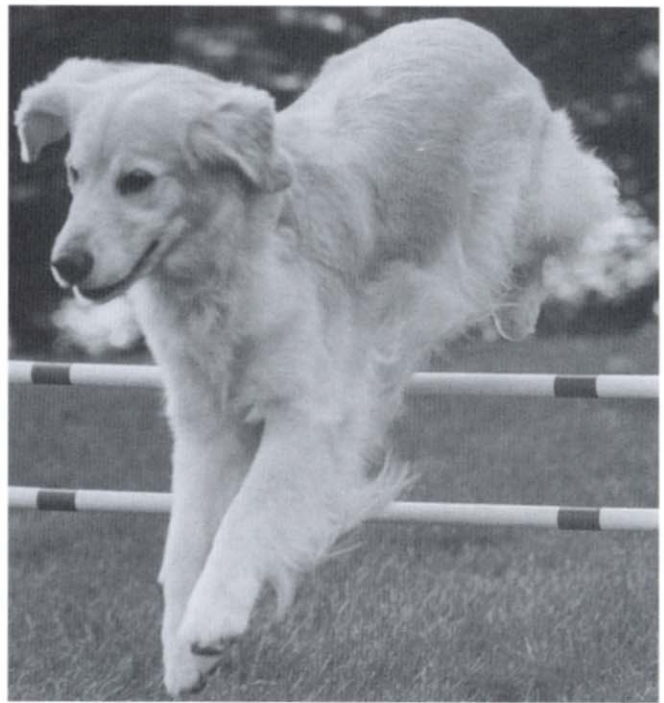
*Puppy Alfie comforting Mrs. Haner on an assisted-living home visit.*

world.

Sadly, we fared no better in the obedience arena. It seemed that I had a very soft dog who needed time to build up her confidence. So, I began to more closely observe Darcy, attempting to determine just when she did appear confident in both mind and spirit. Her body language spoke volumes and I was finally able to recognize what turned this headstrong, yet athletic, girl on.

It appeared that Darcy relished flight, truly beaming as she moves and leaps in freedom. She even runs and leaps over our front steps, literally flying – rather than walking – into the house. So, you can imagine my excitement when I learned about the sport of dog agility.

When we began five years ago, my only goal was for Darcy to enjoy



*Left, Darcy whipping through her weaves and also taking an agility jump (right).  
August 2003 photos by Stuary Haman.*

herself and for us to finally be able to have fun working together. It was lucky for me that Darcy was a natural, easily learning the various moves and equipment. And, her adaptable, slim body never failed her.

But, alas, it was somewhat different for her mom who possesses a lack of instinctive ability to know which way to turn. And, being able to lead and keep up with my speedy Golden bullet, well, that's another story! Training with very seasoned exhibitors whose dogs are Breed, obedience and agility champions, it's a good thing that I have been able to laugh at myself. But, thankfully, my Agility After Dark ([agilityafterdark.com](http://agilityafterdark.com)) training pals have been sup-

portive, knowing that a medical condition often keeps me from practice or attending more than one or two trials a year. Darcy finished her first AKC title at only her second agility trial, gaining first and third place rankings as well and beating 25 dogs in the process! We're still at it, even though those senior moments seem to be beckoning more and more.

We did manage to come away with a third place ribbon in Excellent Jumpers, earning our Agility Excellent Jumpers title this past June. And, it was nice to hear folks say that Darcy was truly flying and looking wonderful working one of the courses. With such a talented girl and on one leg to go, I can't deny that it

would be nice to achieve our standard Agility Excellent title. But, honestly, it is simply Darcy's smiling face and true joy for the sport that keeps me desperately trying to follow her lead.

#### **The Cycle Continues**

Our most current family member, Mystic Lord Alfred Tennyson, entered this world on May 31, 1999. He was named for this English poet due to his famous words: "Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all."

Alfie came from Kim Cain's Mystic Golden Retrievers, following Marge Trowbridge's Trowsnest line. His English good looks come from dad, Can. Ch. Kyon's Hot To Trot, grandson of the famous Eng. Ch.



*A nine-week-old Alfie on the job.*





Paudell Easter Plantagenet at Kerrien.

Alfie's disposition is so very different from that of Darcy. Consider this: when our Golden girls interact with us, they seem to say, "Love me. Love me. Love me." Yet, when our Golden guys communicate, they seem to shout out, "I love you. I love you. I love you."

Alfie truly is that little lover, actually living to see our eyes open each morning. He always seems happy, wagging his tail in delight whenever anyone makes eye contact with him. And, he must have pretty nice dreams as he even wags his tail in his sleep.

A real little talker, who is verbal about everything he does, Alfie works hard to communicate just what he wants by the various vocalizations that he makes. And, while he just adores his Darcy, constantly talking to her with his little silly growls as he teasingly nuzzles her face or pushes toys into her in his attempts to elicit play, she's definitely got her hard-to-get role down pat.

Our Little Lord Alfie's puppy love has helped to lick loneliness through Pets on Wheels, a program which uses cold noses to warm hearts. We became involved with Howard County, Maryland's Pets on



*A four-year-old Alfie showing off his gorgeous English headpiece.  
Photo by Stuart Haman.*

Wheels program through its coordinator, Tricia Robson, our Darcy's breeder.

Alfie's first assisted-living center visit took place on August 4, 1999 at

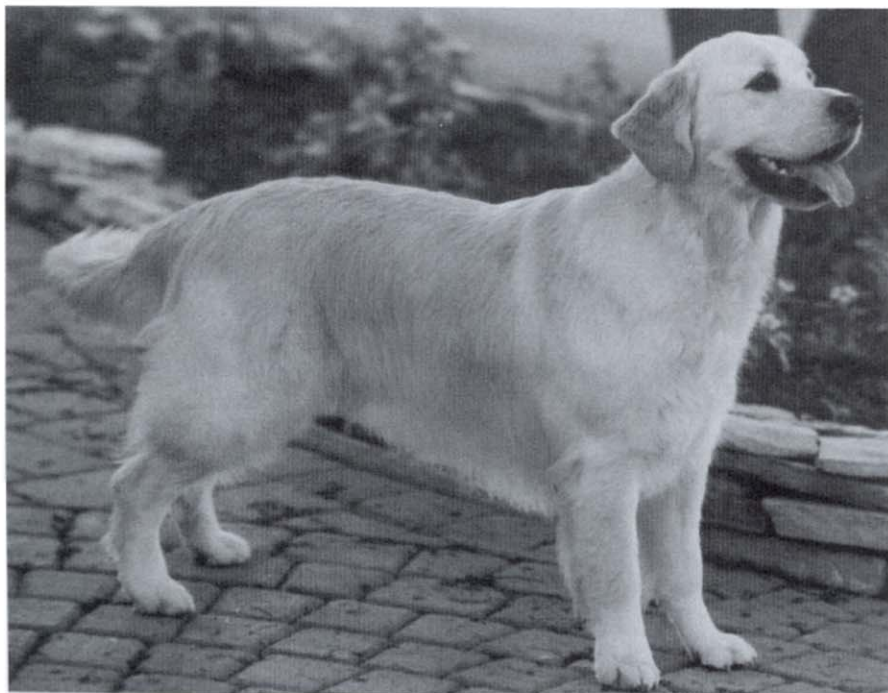
the Chancellor Gardens. As puppies always hold a special appeal, it was nice for Alfie to provide cheer at merely nine weeks of age.

And, he certainly did manage to charm everyone, in addition to even demonstrating good toileting manners. But, I wasn't worried as the personnel were prepared for him to be a puppy.

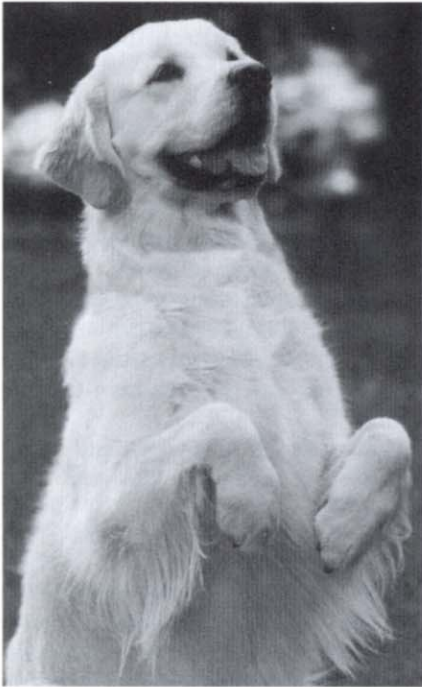
The woman pictured cuddling our little guy was head-over-heels in love. Very much the dog lover, Mrs. Haner has many folks who share their canine companions with her. She loves seeing both Darcy and Alfie, even though our guy still needs to work on being gentle when she invites him up onto her bed.

On the day of Alfie's first puppy visit, we did come to a room of a resident who appeared to be very ill. She was lying down and seemed somewhat withdrawn. The personnel, however, believed that it would be beneficial for us to visit. Initially, Alfie got on the bed and tried to elicit a response. He kept staring, as you can see here, but to no avail.

Yet, we decided to remain for some time, and amazingly, she sat up



*Alfie striking a pose on our patio. Photo by Stuart Haman.*



dependent on her for his care.

The tone in the room took on a timeless quality as we all silently watched these two companions functioning as one. And, what a lovely facility filled with people and activities could not do, a little guy who had barely arrived in this world achieved with ease.

Alfie has remained a cuddle bug since puppyhood. And, I believe I know where this behavior was shaped. Deciding to take our Golden kids with us on a trip to Rhode Island for the Golden Retriever Club of America's 1999 National Specialty, we stayed at a quaint Bed & Breakfast in downtown Providence.

Even though there was a crate for our puppy boy to sleep in, he had a different idea about where he wanted to be. So, my husband, Gary, and I took a big chance and let Alfie lie

cemented at this Bed & Breakfast was Alfie's fascination with light. While there was a fenced yard outside our room, limited lighting resulted in our need to keep a flashlight on as Darcy and Alfie ran and explored. Now, Alfie follows any light he sees, whether from shadows, laser pens, flashlight, or even lightning bugs.

Folks do find it comical as Alfie happily runs back and forth or in circles, attempting to catch the light. I have come to use Alfie's attraction to light to actually shape some desired behaviors, as he is every bit the ham when engaged in showing off his moves.

Clicker-trained since eight weeks of age, Alfie loves to work and also show off. He loves freestyle, performing set moves to music. We have taken both Darcy and Alfie on the road to strut their stuff, the seniors just tickled and beaming in appreciation.

Our goofy guy Alfie had his freestyle debut in December 2002. He was so happy to be the feature attraction, and actually got a big round of applause. Folks loved to see his prancing and spinning skills and delighted in his sitting up behavior, as he then is able to use his paws to touch my outstretched palms.



*The Franz family's adorable puppy Zoey.*

and began stroking and holding him. And, she began to recount some of her earlier dog-related memories.

Alfie became so relaxed that he fell asleep, cuddled within her hand. How touching to see our guy conveying such unconditional love and trust. And, it was so rewarding to see this resident's self-efficacy increase as she recognized that – at least for this brief time – Alfie was

right between us, his head resting on a portion of each of our pillows. It was just so endearing, but a touch noisy due to his being squeezed tightly between us – blankets and all. Even now, we can't keep from smiling as we recall these few nights in Rhode Island, then imitating the adorable Pshhh ... Pshhh ... Pshhh breathing sounds that he had made.

The other behavior that we





*Janeen Bluemel's Golden Memphis with sister Madelynn.  
Photo courtesy of Janet Blucher (proud grandmother).*

First Alfie gives me five with one paw, then on request gives me five with the other paw, and finally, he gives me ten with both paws together. This has come to be his trademark behavior, and kids especially go wild when I show them how they, too, can get Alfie to give them five and ten.

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Alfie has never met a person who he did not want to take home with him. In fact, I need to warn folks that should they make eye contact with him, to be prepared to have him then laying his head on their lap. It was this very behavior which helped to clinch the deal in a new friend finally deciding to go Golden.

Molly Franz had emailed me to get my help in talking her mom into letting her get her first dog. It turned out that she lived only minutes from my home, and once Linda, her mom, was introduced to Alfie, she was smitten.

I was thrilled that the family followed my advice to contact the puppy referral person from my own Potomac Golden Retriever Club, resulting in the sweet, adorable girl pictured becoming the newest member of their family.

#### **Passion and Purpose**

Even though it has been nearly five years since Ollie left my side, tears continue to flow when I recall his unsuccessful battle against lymphoma. These Golden saints are masters at hiding their pain, as if to protect us. And when we finally do notice the problem, it's often too late to reverse the tide.

Ollie's beautiful soul, which radiated through his vividly dark-rimmed eyes, created quite a legacy during his lifetime. And, while that spirit will always brighten the hearts of many, his physical departure in



*A true Golden home with Darcy  
adorning my home's mailbox.*

1998 is a painful reminder of the treasure that has been lost. For, there could be no finer goodwill ambassador for our breed than this noble gentleman.

It only seems fitting that Ollie continues to inspire many through a website that I created in his Golden memory. And, wouldn't he be proud to know that it has become the most comprehensive internet presence in the world on Golden Retrievers and The Human-Golden Bond.

In order to live, love and laugh with Golden Retrievers one only need follow the Golden Brick Road to my Landofpuregold.com! And greeting you there will be Ollie, beaming proudly alongside an attractive model who joined him in a photo shoot for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America. How magical my boy was that day, capturing the adoration of his paired companion within minutes.

The site's live, love and laugh naming, though, pays homage to my mom, a very much-loved lady, who at age sixty was certainly not ready to bid farewell. I remember my mom's joy when I gave her a present of a gold necklace embellished with an enlarged letter L – the words LIVE, LOVE & LAUGH all adjoined to it. She adored this necklace so very much, as it so perfectly embodied our similar views on life. The most cherished of all her pieces, this necklace has been worn over my heart for the last twenty years.

"Rochelle, I needed to write and tell you how Ollie and your website have affected me and my husband so positively. I first wanted to let you know how sorry I am to hear about Ollie. I am writing this through tears right now, but I will try to pull my thoughts together.

"I just got a puppy two months ago. I did so much research on the internet before making the decision. I found your website and it was one of the few that I read and enjoyed end to end, bookmarked, and referenced. I always went back to it, not only for information, but to look at

those beautiful Golden faces. Of ALL the MANY sites I visited, I ALWAYS remembered who Ollie and Darcy were.

“The fact is, your beautiful dog drew us into your webpage and made us decide that we needed to join this beautiful Golden world. Thank you, Mistfield Oliver. We now have Topper thanks to you and he is wonderful. If we ever have another, I swear we will name him Ollie.” – Kris Salmon

To understand the defining force behind my website, one needs to appreciate those goals that I have strived to achieve throughout my life. Trained first as a special educator and then school psychologist, my last eighteen years have been involved in evaluating and treating youngsters in distress. However, conveying their stories effectively – detailing just what a particular child’s world looks like from his or her eyes – is truly an art.

Many of us find it easiest to communicate about ourselves and our world through the use of metaphor, particularly in the form of stories. It is a critical therapeutic strategy as stories develop within a dynamic person-environment interaction, and play a role not only in shaping how we grasp information, but also in prescribing the actions we take.

Undoubtedly, within my work, I am only as good as the stories I tell. While some colleagues believe I wear my heart on my sleeve, it is only through such genuine interaction that we in fact make a difference. In revealing my findings to parents and teachers, I’ve come to understand the real power of my storytelling; for it is only then that I witness the confirming nods and oftentimes tears of understanding.

Noted author Susan Chernak McElroy implores us to honor our own stories and truths about animals, listening to the stories animals have to tell us. For it is within this sphere of listening and sharing and affection for animals that we can restore our spirits.

Celebrated veterinarian Allen M. Schoen has a vision for a society in

which we cease to be owner and pet or human and animal, but are simply respected companions connected by a special bond – that of kindred spirits.

Adorning my website, as well as all of my electronic communications, is Allen’s insightful musing, that “God made dogs and then when he perfected them ... he created Golden.” And, it is comforting that so many share this faith in the Golden Good as Milan Kundera so reminds us that “dogs are our link to paradise.”

Certainly, those who have discovered the force of The Human-Golden Bond have increased the quality of their lives immeasurably – Golden playing a pivotal role in improving one’s health, independence, and quality of life. In fact, the breed continues to dominate the service field industry, many abandoned Golden going on to become trusted assistance, detection and search and rescue dogs.

Yet, for me, it is their timeless spirit and capacity to mimic our human qualities that makes the breed so endearing – our definition of family surely incomplete without a Golden’s inclusion. For the lessons these furry angels teach us are never-ending, inspiring a new respect, appreciation and celebration of life.

#### Stories from the Heart

Stories sustain us in times of trouble and serve to encourage us towards ends we would not otherwise envision. And, it is my site’s wealth of moving stories that has endeared it to legions of dog lovers all over the world.

“This is just such a fab website! I have just discovered it and life will never be the same again. Just seeing and hearing so many different tales and stories about other Golden Retrievers is so warming to the heart. My fourteen-year-old Golden Toby and I need never feel alone again. We have found so many interesting stories and will share them with other Golden owners in Scotland.” – Tracey, Glasgow.

I rely on storytelling and therapeutic reading (bibliotherapy) to further

coping skills and promote emotional healing. Inviting folks to share their stories of Gold, they are so allowed to form a dialogue with one another. Able to interpret what they’ve read in light of their own experiences, they ultimately become a part of the story, growing in their insight of human behavior and motivations. Often relieving emotional pressure, one realizes that he or she is not the first or only person to encounter such a dilemma.

These Golden stories often illustrate that one problem may be approached and solved in multiple ways. And, they help encourage people to discuss problems more freely, so that they can plan a more constructive course of action to handle a crisis.

A reflection of my cognitive philosophy of living, my Land of Pure-Gold strives to teach others that if you think better, you will feel better. And, modeling some of our reactions after our dogs may not be as far-fetched as it may sound. For these Golden children intelligently lead us to see the beauty of the morning – of merely seeing their loved ones’ eyes open.

“Rochelle, I look forward to reading all you have to say. I have been emotionally touched and a lot of times teary with the true love of the Golden. Two years ago, I became disabled and unable to work any



*My Golden statue door greeting.*

longer. I had just come through two very long neck and back surgeries and was very down. Eighteen months ago my husband David bought me the best present I have ever received, a Golden named Murphy. He is our best friend and did more for my recuperating than any medicine could do. Since I began receiving your e-mails I have grown to understand what a wonderful breed they are. I love your stories, pictures and personal experiences; it makes me feel like you are talking to us, Murphy and me. Keep doing what you do. So many people are blessed because of it." – Patsy, Clarence, New York.

I was flattered by Gloria Hansen's including my site in her April 2001 book, *Free Stuff for Pet Lovers on the Internet*. And, it was nice to be recognized by *Southern Illinoisan* Outdoors Writer, Les Winkeler, in his February 12, 2003 article "Wonderful Web Site Devoted Entirely to Golden Retrievers." Les wrote the following: "The e-mail from Rochelle Lesser came out of the blue. Lesser, who created a website devoted to Golden Retrievers, stumbled onto last week's column about my dogs playing in the snow. My intimate experience with Golden Retrievers only goes back three and a half years, but I'm hopelessly hooked. I couldn't wait to check out the webpage. Frankly, it exceeded all expectations.

"'God made dogs and then when he perfected them ... he created Goldens,' Allen Schoen, veterinarian. That quote, found at the bottom of one of the dozens of pages I visited, succinctly summarizes the website. I spent hours there. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. So, I did both.

"The strength of the website is the personal stories about living and deceased Golden Retrievers. Reading these stories one really appreciates the bond that forms between these wonderful dogs and their humans. Check out the website. If you love Goldens, you'll be enthralled."

#### **A Greater Understanding**

Those who follow my Golden Brick Road are rewarded with thou-

sands of Golden faces and over 600 text pages, as the website has been evolving over a period of six years. However, it has only been in the last three that I've devoted most of my time to it. This has come about due to health problems that have now limited me to conducting only sporadic private consultant work.

Previously, for a period of fifteen years, I had concurrently worked full-time as a school psychologist, taught nightly and summer school graduate courses, and worked in private practice.

Sadly, my health began to dramatically decline while working in the Harford County Public School System. My last eight years there were spent in a book closet that had been converted into office space. It was consumed by relentless ceiling leaks and rampant mold. But, despite continual complaints, nothing was done to correct the problems.

My secretary and fellow psychologists in this office space suffered from continual respiratory problems.



*Carol Marangoni's Golden Brunzi.  
Photo by Joanne Giganti, New York*

What's more, my secretary and I both suffered from unexplained, spontaneous nosebleeds. Unfortunately, my health deteriorated to the point that I was unable to drive to work without falling asleep at the wheel. And, once at work, I sustained severe reactions to the poor air



*Carol Marangoni's Golden (left to right) Chaos, Redboy, and BarnesBerry.  
Photo by Akin-Fowler Photographers, Cornwall, New York.*

quality in my office and various schools that I covered.

After I went out on disability, I learned that the problems in the school system increased as related to mold



*Beau looking majestic in his rustic Canada setting. Photo provided by Rose Ouellette.*

and the resultant air quality. Parental complaints prompted air quality testing and the results were quite telling. The school building in which my office was contained was subsequently closed for major abatement.

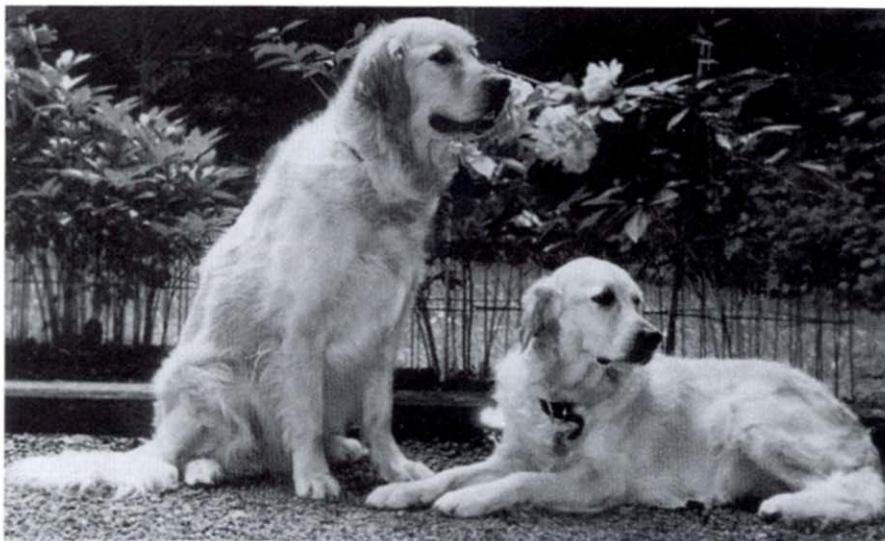
Not surprisingly, the presence of

black *Stachybotrys* mold, among others, was found – the highest concentrations found in my tiny office space. And, while those cleaning up the contamination were shielded from the contaminants by special containment suits, I was never so protected those many years on the job.

Now suffering from a connective tissue disease, fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue syndrome, I often remain at home. Yet, with my Golden kids beside me – their also accompanying me when I conduct therapy sessions or make senior home visits – my spirit remains high.

And, such comfort has been gained in the creation of my website. Only able to reach one youngster at a time in a therapeutic relationship, my Land of PureGold has instead afforded me the opportunity to actually touch thousands a day.

“Our Golden retrievers bring us ongoing moments of happiness in just about everything they do which is why losing them is so hard on us. Thank goodness there are folks like you, Rochelle, who are not afraid to express love and sadness and all the other emotions that most people work very hard at running from. It is you and your website, and the love and support of family and friends that have helped us get through our pain.” – Janis and Ray Musante,



*A beautiful and healthier Beau with Meghan, his own canine partner in crime. Photo provided by Rose Ouellette.*

Burlingame, California.

How wonderful to have newly gained Golden web friends inviting me to their homes in The Netherlands, Australia, Italy, France, Belgium, Wales, Scotland, England, Ireland, Switzerland, and Canada. I



*Elizabethan collar time for a hurting but accepting Beau. Photo provided by Rose Ouellette.*

even have spare rooms waiting for me in California! And, it has been so touching when a few folks – as faraway as Australia – have visited my home in Maryland.

I have been on a unique Golden odyssey to be sure – several pivotal events, persons, and charming canines shaping this enduring journey over the rainbow. So, sit back and enjoy the ride as I recount some of these beautiful Golden stories, wonders and learning experiences.

#### **A Holistic Awakening**

Although Ollie has been gone for five years now, he continues to shape my desire to be a worthy human partner. His death from lymphoma prodded me to reexamine my knowledge on healthy dog rearing. I began reading and investigating, and luckily found Carol Marangoni.

Even though we were strangers, as soon as I recounted Ollie's story, Carol became totally invested in my plight. She, too, had made a major life change following the death of her beloved Brunzi, actually forming Brunzi's Best, a healthy organic treat business. Brunzi's story is detailed in Dr. Marty Goldstein's seminal book,

*The Nature of Animal Healing*, a book that Carol recommended to me.

What a difference this book made. I learned about purified water, titering, supplements, alternative medicine, and more. And, I have endeavored to share these insights with my site's many visitors. Carol continues to keep me on my toes, recently opening my eyes to Dr. Plechner's book, *Pets at Risk: From Allergies to Cancer, Remedies for an Unsuspected Epidemic*. But, was she impressed when I opened her eyes to FORCE, a dehydrated, human-grade, grain-free diet that is setting a new standard in canine nutrition. I guess I've been a good student after all. And, it sure comes in handy because my email box is forever filled with posts related to health concerns.

On June 17, 2003 I received an email from Rose Oulette. I easily remembered this special lady as she had sent me in an adorable Canine Comedian story. Picture this: although never having had puppies before, Rose and her husband brought two pups, only days apart, into their home.

In constant motion one day, Rose remembers bending over, chasing Meghan, trying to get something that she had taken. Well, while she was bent over, Beau grabbed the back of her elastic-waisted shorts from the back, trying to keep Rose away from Meghan. Lo and behold, there was Rose with her shorts pulled down around her knees. She stopped, sat on the floor, and just laughed as her babies jumped all over her, nowadays her Golden kids making her laugh by just walking in a room.

You can well imagine that it would be hard for me to forget Rose, so I was concerned when she wrote with troubling news.

Rose recalled seeing on my site that people wrote in for suggestions or help with problems they were having. And, she really did have a serious problem with her Beau. There were significant allergies, pussy and bleeding hot spots, bloody diarrhea, lethargy, and sadly a massive application of various medications to no avail. The letter, which was written in great and lurid detail, was just so

disheartening. And, to top it off, sweet Rose was apologizing in the letter for her need to recount the whole sordid picture.

I immediately placed her post on several Golden email internet group lists, as well as sending it to my own group of 1,500 website supporters. And, they did not let me down. But, then, they never have when I have sent out a plea for assistance. I heard back from Rose within a few days with the following message: "Rochelle, we have received so many emails with suggestions and places to look for help. I am in the process of reading, printing and replying to them all. I hope to let everyone know soon that Beau is doing well. The last two days he has really perked and being very goofy with his sister Meghan. Thanks again."

But, my real joy came in August when I received the following letter from Rose: "Rochelle, it has been about two months since I asked for help from your readers, to help Beau with his hot spots. I had never seen him so bad as he was this spring with about three months of just terrible hot spots. His face looked like he had been dragged behind a car on gravel. It was so pitiful and nothing we did seemed to help.

"After receiving about 50 letters from your readers with many good suggestions, we were able to start getting Beau under control. We

slowly took him off all medications, including allergy shots, bought some Nupro, a vitamin-mineral supplement, and put him on an all-natural dog food (Solid Gold) that had no preservatives. At lunch time, we give him a bowl of fruit with yogurt. We keep him away from freshly cut grass and his trips outside when it is wet are kept to a minimum.

"He has a few spots on the top of his tail and his back right now, but they are not weeping and do not seem to bother him too much. This is compared to what he was like, when both sides of his face were bleeding to the point where the blood would fly all over the walls when he would shake his head. Three years ago when Beau was tested, he did not seem to be allergic to foods, but I think things may have changed.

"Now both of our dogs, Beau and Meghan are on the same diet and the amount of energy that they have is unbelievable. Also, their fur is the nicest it has ever been. So, I want to thank everyone who wrote to us, sending us help, and to let them all know that their time was well spent, as Beau is doing so well and Meghan is also benefiting. It is such a relief to know that there are a lot of wonderful dog owners out there who care enough to respond when we think there is no where else to go."

#### **Golden Love Down Under**

In 1998 I realized my Golden site was getting out to the masses when Lillian Robinson wrote from Perth, Western Australia. She told me about her Trooper's having starred in the movie, *Napoleon*, an MGM movie that details the adventures of a Golden pup who takes off in the wilds of the Australian Outback.

Lillian then told me about how Trooper had helped a family friend named Andy. After developing a brain tumor, his speech and balance were permanently affected. Unable to cope, Andy retreated to his room where he remained for six months.

It was then that Lillian decided to allow Trooper to live with Andy's family. Andy was able to then regain his self-confidence, no longer needing to hide behind the safety of his room.





*Lillian Robinson doing some Golden grooming with Trooper as Alan looks on. Photo provided by Lillian Robinson.*

Trooper's presence then later saved his life in January 1999 when he was able to quickly alert the family to Andy's having suffered a stroke. But, much hospitalization was required, so keeping Andy and Trooper apart. I relayed this situation to Golden lovers all over the world through my many Golden email groups.

As a result, many heartwarming letters and touching gifts were sent to Andy. But, more amazingly, were the letters of support for Trooper to be granted visiting privileges. After letters about the bond that these two shared finally reached the rehabilitation hospital administrators, Andy was reunited with Trooper.

And, it was wonderful to learn that others were also benefiting from Trooper's healing powers, Lillian now bringing him to visit many of the patients. They were taken to the connecting gardens – in wheelchairs and even hospital beds – to interact with Trooper.

Here, he was able to also help Clinton, a nineteen-year-old who was terminally ill. Scared of dogs before meeting this Golden wonder, Trooper wisely took his time letting him know he was just a perfect dog, and surely okay to stroke. And, by the end of the visit, Clinton was merrily stroking Trooper and laughing at him.

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Lillian next shared her Golden Thunder and his Norwegian adven-

ture with my site's visitors giving me an opportunity to detail the development and training of a search and rescue dog. Puppy Thunder's harrowing journey to Norway was relayed through my continuous email updates. But, no worry. He came through like a champ, now doing important work in his new home

country.

Lillian relays her thoughts on our Golden thread of friendship that has formed across oceans in the following: "When I came across Rochelle's Land of PureGold, the size of the site alone kept me busy for hours on end, as stories unfolded almost daily. Her site was growing



*Lillian's Crystal with her new find. Photo provided by Lillian Robinson.*





*Thunder at his new home in Norway. Photo provided by Lillian Robinson.*

rapidly and as different sections were added there was always something new and exciting. The Golden Pledge of Allegiance page was one of the places that I added stories about my dogs. It is so heartwarming to read the many stories there of both love and sadness.

"I felt I could trust Rochelle and I asked her questions about the articles and issues that she had at her site. She seemed to be working like a slave as her site grew to be huge in such a short period of time.

"In the '90s I exported a Golden from Australia to America. Loved dearly, he was named Bentley by his new family. Receiving photos of him on a regular basis, my heart sank when instead of a photo I received an email from his owner saying she had to move within the next 24 hours and could not take him with her. I did not want this sweet, beautiful dog to end up in a dog shelter so I emailed Rochelle and asked if she had any ideas.

"It did not take this gal long to email thousands of Golden folks alerting them to Bentley's plight. He quickly found a loving home where he continues to happily reside. I couldn't thank Rochelle enough for making this ending a happy one.

"I sent a Golden named Thunder to Norway to be trained in search and

rescue. Rochelle detailed the entire journey and then kept a diary at her site of his training progress. I was so proud when Thunder went on to become Norway's first water rescue dog.

"I could not believe it when I won Art Vanderbilt's photo competition, an event she had advertised at her site to get the Golden community involved. What a thrilling experience it was when the photo of my Pumpkin and her baby pup garnered first place. And, I was also delighted that Rochelle's Darcy received the second place prize.

"A few years ago I finally came back to the States to visit the family that I had not seen for years. I stayed with Bentley and his new family and they helped me to arrange a visit to meet Rochelle. I would never in my wildest dreams have thought I would finally meet Rochelle in real life, yet I did. The moment we pulled in and Rochelle opened the car door we ran and hugged one another. It was like we were long-lost sisters. This was to be a very happy day in my life as Rochelle is very bubbly and has such a happy sense of humour.

"We headed out to a local dog show. Neither of us have the best of health but sure did have a great day at the show. At the end of the day we followed Rochelle back to her

house where her husband was waiting with the most scrumptious barbeque. But, more importantly, I got to finally meet Rochelle's Darcy and Alfie. They were the sweetest dogs that one could ever know. Alfie was a big softy and just loved to be snuggled up close. And, I got to watch Darcy going through the paces with Rochelle as she showed me some doggy dancing. It was fascinating and I loved it.

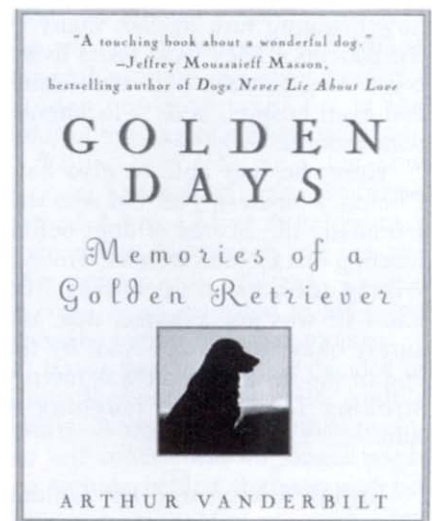
"Rochelle's house is like mine. Golden goods were everywhere you looked and it was nice seeing all of her treasures. As the day drew to a close, there was such a tearful farewell. Sadly, I had found my friend and lost her again in the same day. An inspiration to us all, though, I do feel honoured to be able to call Rochelle my friend."

#### **Art's Golden Days**

I can't begin to express how flattered I was when noted author Arthur Vanderbilt contacted me about my site – so moved by the spirit at the Land of PureGold. He has since become an adored mentor, his witty posts always a welcome sight.

Of course, flattery will get you everywhere and how could I resist when Art wrote that my website was "really spectacular – the nicest I've seen. I am amazed at how it flows together so beautifully and is so artistically and professionally presented."

Writing further that he was so glad to have found me, he related the following: "I always wonder whether the nice people of the world





*Lillian's prize-winning photo of Pumpkin and Clancy.*

gravitate toward Golden Retrievers, or whether by having a Golden at home they turn into nice people!"

An award-winning author, Art has been writing books for over 25 years. I discovered his unique talent when I came across his 1998 publication, *Golden Days: Memories of a Golden Retriever*. In this book, Art tells the love story of a devoted Retriever named Amy that illuminates what a Golden can teach us about ourselves and the world we share together.

Fellow Golden lover Betty White

had this to say about this special book: "Once someone has had the good fortune to share a true love affair with a Golden Retriever, one's life and one's outlook is never quite the same again. A warm afterglow remains that lasts a lifetime. This author is fluent in that language."

I felt a genuine bond with Art, as both my Ollie and his Amy resembled one another in appearance, displayed similar silliness, and regrettably had both lost their life battles to lymphoma. On October 26, 1999,

Art honored his Amy's memory, as well as our developing friendship, by providing me this touching insight:

"What greater grief is there than losing a loved one? None to my mind. A sad reality of this life is the inevitability of loss. I believe, as the love between a human and his or her dog is incredibly special, that losing a pet is equal to almost any loss we endure in our lifetimes.

"My family is a fortunate one, sharing a close and special bond, and an important component of that bond was a beautiful Golden Retriever named Amy.

"Life with a Golden Retriever on Cape Cod is something akin to a storybook – walking the beaches with her, watching her swim and play in the surf – the way she embraced and loved life each and every day was an inspiration.

"As much as we worked hard to give her the best life imaginable, she, without even trying, enriched our lives immeasurably in ways people who never own dogs cannot conceive of. That's part of the reason I wrote *Golden Days* after Amy passed on – because I knew there was a world full of people who might read it and understand.

"As a writer, I realized that I had a duty to memorialize and share the joyous experience of Amy with others in the hope that in some small way my readers could not only share the pleasures but also be comforted by the knowledge that the loss is eventually overshadowed by beautiful memories."

Wanting to become part of the Golden community, Art initiated a series of Beautiful Golden contests. And, I did my best to spread the word throughout the Golden community.

How exciting it was when a November 1999 congratulations letter indicated that my photo entry of a six-month-old Darcy had taken the second prize distinction in Vanderbilt Books' premier Beautiful Dog Contest.

When Art wrote me and said, "Darcy melted our hearts!" I was in pure Golden heaven. I happily contributed the \$100 prize to one of my local rescue organizations, the Gold-Heart Golden Retriever Rescue, as



*Prize-winning photo of Friendship Darcy Makena OA, AXJ, CGC.*

Art was personally doubling all those awards that were so donated.

Not surprisingly, Art told me that every contest winner had donated their winnings to Golden Rescue.

Art is a big supporter of rescue, providing me with copies of his *Golden Days* for various raffles. He even sent me his latest book, *Gardening in Eden*, when I relayed a shared love for developing a nurturing home landscape. No longer having a Golden as a family member, Art took such joy in photos I provided to him of my Darcy and Alfie lounging by our pond.

For those who have yet to experience this special memoir, here is one of my favorite passages.

**Golden Days Excerpt**

The first summer, when she was just a pup, when she had first checked on me in the night, I assumed she had to go outside.

"Amy want to go out?" She looked at me, quizzically. What the heck is his problem?

"Amy? Okay, Amy go out?" Well, okay, if he has to, but this is really weird. It's pitch black and scary out there and morning has got to be a long way off and I've got to make my rounds and get back to bed.

We'd creep through the house with a flashlight, out the side door, crossing the patio and the wet grass to the top of the bluff.

The Bay was making its liquid

sounds. Far off, we could hear the surf breaking up and down the outer-beach and sometimes the hollow crash of an immense breaker. Starlight that had started toward us a million years before reached us at last that night. Looking out from the bluff at the Milky Way extending horizon to horizon, filling the vast night sky, it felt as if we were alone together in interplanetary space, as if the earth were moving in space and time, an island adrift in a sea of stars, and that if we didn't hold on, we would fall off.

"Here. Amy go here," I'd say, pointing the flashlight's beam on a nice spot in the poverty grass on the crest of the bluff.

What the ... ? "Okay, here. Amy. Amy go here." No dice. She stares at



*Art Vanderbilt's Golden girl Amy.*

me. "Okay, but I'm telling you, this is your last chance, okay? I'm not coming out here again, okay? You understand that, right? This is it."

No.

"No?"

No.

"Okay. Last chance. Here, okay?" I say, flashing the light around the grass. "Amy go here."

No.

"No?"

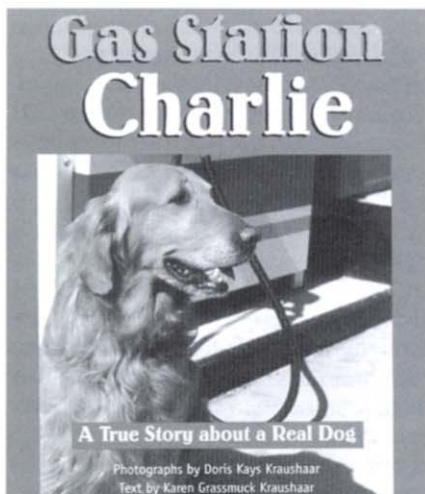
No.

By then, we had both scared ourselves with thoughts of what might be lurking at that time of night out in the dark behind the bayberry thickets: coyotes? bears? drug runners? kidnappers? I scooped Amy up onto my shoulder and hurried back to the house, locking the door behind us.

We both go back to bed. Several hours later I again feel the presence, the swish of a tail, the eager eyes. "See, Amy? I told you. You have to go out. And this time, you're going to do something, okay?" And out we'd go and back we'd come, no farther ahead.

After several nights of this, a glimmer of slow-witted human comprehension: Amy didn't want to go outside. In fact, she has extraordinary bladder control. Rather, she was making her nightly bed checks.

Several times a night, from bedroom to bedroom she goes on her rounds to make sure everyone is all right. As long as we say hello or give her a pat, off she goes, satisfied that all is well. But if we're sleeping soundly, out like a log, she'll make her soft whining noises or bat her tail against the bed or rest her head on the mattress, staring at us until we awaken. If, perchance, a bedroom door is closed and her little noises fail to draw a response, she'll stand next to the door and wag her tail so that on each sweep it slams against the door. And if we're really out cold and that too fails to do the trick, she'll lie down outside the door, stretched right against it; and just like Atticus Finch watching over Jim at the end of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, she'll be there all night, and she'll be there when we open our doors in the morning, thumping her tail and making her morning sounds of greeting.



Up from her bed in my parents' bedroom, out into the hall, through the dark living room and kitchen she makes her way each night for her nightly head counts, down the back hall to my sister's bedroom. A quick check. Into my room. All is well. Everyone is in. All present and accounted for. Everything is as it should be. And so, back to her bed and to sleep.

Like a card counter in a casino, she always, constantly, in the back of her mind is counting who is there and who is missing; and if the numbers don't add up to four, she senses that something is wrong and worries. She's like Nana, the nursery watchdog in Peter Pan who tended the Darling children, Wendy, John, and Michael. Watching over us is pretty much a full-time job for Amy, what with the vigils at the front door, the bed checks, the worrying.

#### **Gas Station Charlie**

One day in 1999 I received a post from a fellow Golden-obsessed person. Lots of people are always on the lookout for me, letting me know when they have discovered a special Golden Find.

Whether it's Golden decorated paper towels, a new Golden trinket, a Golden inspired movie or book, or the discovery of a celebrity who is owned by a Golden, I am always thrilled to get the scoop and then share it with my vast circle of Golden web friends. I even formed an email-group or e-group on Yahoo entitled *Golden Finds* just so that I could always keep folks abreast of

the latest Golden inspired fun.

Well, now, let me get back to this post. It was from a young man who had found this new book, *Gas Station Charlie*, while shopping at a Michigan-based bookstore. I dropped everything and searched the internet, but the book was nowhere to be found.

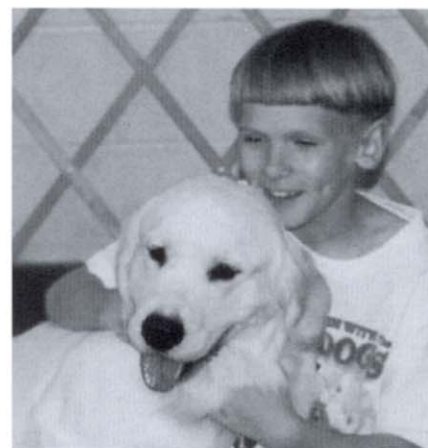
But, that didn't stop me. I called the Michigan bookstore and ordered the book, then asking for information about reaching the authors. It turned out that the photographer, Doris Kays Kraushaar, was quite well known in the area. In fact, her photos have appeared in several publications, including that of *Vibrant Ann Arbor – A Color Portrait*.

The book's charming text comes from Doris's daughter-in-law, Karen Grassmuck Kraushaar. Creating a lasting notion of hometown warmth, the first words of the book tell about Charlie's career choice: "It was before my fourth birthday. I felt sad because I had nothing to do. I decided I had to do something to make myself useful." Sadly, Charlie died from complications of lymphoma in 1999.

As Doris makes yearly journeys to Maryland to visit her son and



*"Sometimes, the money gets a little soggy, but nobody seems to mind."*



*Pam Thiess' son Sean with Alfie.*

daughter-in-law, I thought it a grand idea to have a special book signing party, a portion of the revenues benefiting GoldHeart Golden Retriever Rescue ([goldheart.org](http://goldheart.org)), a newly formed group in my area. Doris has always been such a great Golden supporter, donating several books for use in various auctions and contests.

Sending several letters to many animal-friendly folks in the media in my attempts to publicize the event, I was thrilled when a positive response came back from Baltimore's WJZ Channel 13. I suspect that was due to their weatherman, Bob Turk, who has had several Golden family members. He even had a hand in Oprah Winfrey's going Golden as she had been taken by Bob's kids when she was a fellow WJZ personality (in the '80s).

The book signing took place on May 15, 2000, with the help of GoldHeart officers, Shaaron and Cy Plate. It was a huge success and a fun time for all. However, the time I had to share with Doris and Karen was just too short as I was kept busy keeping an eye on my goodwill ambassadors, Darcy and Alfie, who were living it up with all the kids in attendance.

#### **Expressions from Young and Old**

Sadly, although I have made so many terrific friends through my site, I have lost many as well. Often found in tears, sitting in front of my computer monitor, it can become quite overwhelming when one tragic notice after another is received.



*A proud Russ T. Photo provided by Kathy Blue.*

Here is a post that I received on April 11, 2003 from eleven-year-old Kelly. Kelly had sent in an entry to my Best Friends Contest. Here, I ask kids what makes their four-footed furry friend special. Titled *What My Dog Means to Me*, here is Kelly's entry: "My Dog Willie is a truly wonderful dog. I have had Willie for seven great years and I have cherished every moment I spend with him! Willie is my best friend and is a very funny and mischievous dog. When I come home from school every day he is sitting on the porch waiting for me and attacks me with doggie kisses! It is like he is a real person, he knows when I am sad and when I am happy. Once when I was upset when I came home from school he came over and cheered me up by playing with me and licking me.

"Over the past couple of years I have had Willie I have noticed something about him. He had developed a bump on his head at the age of three. My family and I liked to refer to it as 'the bump of knowledge.' He was fine for the first couple of years and acted normally. I treated him like

my brother, I loved him very much. He taught me responsibility, and how to care for someone. I had to walk him twice a day but I enjoyed the time with him. But then he started acting weird.

"At the age of seven he started waking up in the middle of the night. Sometimes he would destroy the family room. We took him to the vet and the vet put him on two different types of drugs. When the first type of drug did not work we put him on the stronger drug. I loved him very much and supported him all the way. I was a little scared in fear that something would happen to him. Then we found out that he had a brain tumor and that he was acting that way because he was in a lot of pain.

"We felt terrible for Willie. The vet had told us we had to put him to sleep. I was terribly upset and was miserable for days but then I thought, 'Would I rather be in a lot of pain each day or live happily in heaven?' Then I realized it may not be the best thing for me but it would be for him. But Willie truly did

teach me to live, love, and laugh. On April 8th 2003, Willie, my dog, my brother, my best friend, passed away. This essay is to let people know that I love Willie and I believe that he is happy in heaven and watching over me. My Guardian Angel. So this is to my dog Willie. Willie, I'll always love you!"

When folks learned about Kelly's sad tale, many shared their heartfelt thoughts. And, several indicated that they were lighting candles for Willie to honor his memory. But my love and understanding for and the importance of sharing Golden stories appeared to come full circle when I received the following story from Kathy Blue entitled *Eyes of Love*.

"The call came four days before Christmas. 'We have a young boy who needs a foster home. His family wants him picked up today.' 'Well, I don't know; I'm not sure I'm ready. It has only been a month and a half.' The crack in my voice and the hesitation gave me away.

"I wasn't even ready for Christmas let alone caring for an unwanted boy. Sure I had gone through the motions of putting up the tree and unpacking the many boxes of treasured keepsakes from years past. Entering my home you would think all was well. All the signs of this blessed season were there from the wreath on the front door to the Manger, representing peace, hope and joy. Yet this year there was no joy and little peace in my heart. My heart was broken and my spirit wavering. I had undergone thyroid surgery three weeks ago. My body was mending and I had returned to work. The pathology report confirmed no cancer. I had received the news thankfully but it was not my body that needed to heal as much as my heart.

"On November fifteenth I had held my darling Sally in my arms one last time as we gently released her spirit. Twelve years had passed so quickly from the time I had first held her in my arms. A little ball of Golden fluff, all ears and paws and eyes. Those big dark chocolate eyes that mirrored her soul. She was an amazing creature and we had weathered many a storm and shared many joys in those years. I reached for the

picture book sitting on the table.

"My eyes scanned page after page of happier moments in time. Sally's first Christmas, snuggled in Santa's arms, wearing her tassel hat, curled up in the quilt by the fire after licking snowballs from her tiny feet. She loved to snowplow and make little puppy angels in the snow. Sally peeking through the garland on the stair railing, a vantage point she often used to reach down from to muss the hair on the head of any unwary visitor sitting on the couch. It was her contented spot when I was busy and there was no lap for her to cuddle in. She could keep tabs on her world from there. She was a mixture of angel and imp and from the very first day I brought her home, she filled my life with joy. She was and still is my Heartgirl.

"All of our foster homes are full and many people are away for the holidays. You were our last hope. It looks as if he will have to stay in a kennel until we can find his forever home.' The words brought me back to reality and I noticed the pain had returned to my chest. 'Oh, no don't do that. I have five days vacation left. Bring him on over. I didn't have plans anyway.' A momentary concern crossed my mind but I had committed. Oh well, I'll make the best of it. No Golden baby should have to spend Christmas in a cage.

"An hour later the volunteer pulled up in front of my house. I went out to greet her. The day was as warm and sunny as my soul was dark and cloudy. I live in Phoenix now and there is no snow and ice and cold to deal with, at least on the outside. 'Gizmo,' as he was called by his former family, was in the back seat. He was a year and a half old, a beautiful red gold boy about seventy pounds. Curls accented his thick wavy coat. We coaxed him out of the car. He was not coming willingly. It was at that moment that our eyes first met. Eyes can be the window to the soul and this boy's eyes reflected a broken spirit. They were not dark chocolate brown but rather amber brown and they were avoiding my gaze. No one wants to share misery with a stranger.

"As he tentatively entered my

home for the first time he carried the burden of all that can go wrong in a Golden's life. He was abandoned by those he loved. It seems that they were just too busy now. They wanted to put a pool in and there was no room for him any longer. Well, at least they called rescue and didn't just turn him out to the street or dump him at the pound. His first act of defiance was to 'christen' my Christmas tree. 'No, no no, outside - ah, er, Gizmo.' Well, that was a stupid name. We'd have to do something about that.

"His second act of defiance was to growl ever so softly when I picked up the woobie I had given him. 'No, you don't growl at me. I am Alpha.' His third and last was to let me know on Christmas Eve that he didn't like his kennel and would be good if I just let him sleep on his bed in my room.

"The following week we went to Dr. Ferguson's office and she gave him shots and evaluated him. Good health and yes he needed THE operation. The week after that we were busy learning to play ball, what was permissible to chew and what was not, that belts were for wearing not hitting, brushes could have a kind touch and baths were fun, halo collars do not come off when they are duct taped and a name befitting a beautiful red-gold boy would be Russell T, or Russ T for short. When

it came time to have the stitches removed I was standing in the veterinary office and the technician remarked, 'He's a different boy when he's with his Mom.'

"Somewhere during that busy time of getting to know each other an amazing thing happened. I was in the bedroom and all was very quiet, you know, too quiet in the household of a Golden. I called for him and no answer. I looked and could not see him, very unusual for my now 'Velcro' man. A momentary panic, did I leave the front door open? Oh my, where is he? This is a small, modest home, not too many places to hide. I quickened my step and rounding the hall corner, I saw the hall bath door slightly ajar. Something told me to peek in and as I slowly opened the door, I saw a sight to behold. There, standing on the top of my vanity was Russ T in a classic pose, chin held high, tail out straight and he was smiling! He was staring intently at his reflection and apparently liked what he saw. Then the amazing thing happened. He turned his head and looked into my eyes. He held my gaze and his eyes were no longer dull. They were sparkling. He had opened his window and willingly shared his soul.

"By now you have probably guessed that his temporary stay became permanent. Russ T and I are



*Heavens Golden Lullaby. Photo provided by Debbie Johnson.*

a family. We continue to live in Phoenix and are active with Rescue A Golden of Arizona (golden-retriever.org). He has earned his Canine Good Citizen designation and continues to enjoy his nights by my side, only now, he owns the other pillow.

"If you are fortunate enough to have been loved by a Golden then you know three things. First, God loans them to us to teach us how to behave. Second, the time we have with them is never enough and third, the heart mends and becomes full when you return love to a Golden."

While I believed Kathy's story had brought the story full circle, it wasn't until I received this letter from Debbie Johnson on September 19, 2003 that I realized the domino effect of one story going on to inspire another, and that story inspiring another as well. Although I may never know how many lives are affected by these heartfelt journeys, I'd like to believe it is many.

"Dear Rochelle, I wanted to thank you for such a wonderful website. You have no idea how your website has affected me and my family. I am a 45-year-old married mother of four who 'stumbled across' your Land of Pure Gold. I read your bio and found myself relating to you. Two years ago I woke up one morning with arm pain which lead me into neck surgery that would change life forever. I am now on permanent disability. This drastic life's experience has made me see the world in a completely different way. I am so much more sensitive and aware of how many go overlooked in life who are suffering from health problems.

"It is through this experience that led me into the search for a Golden Retriever. Rather than sit home and dwell on my disability, I want my life to count for something. And with that in mind I have been on a search to find a Golden Retriever puppy whom would be trained to become a therapy dog. My vision is to certify her to work with children in hospitals and abuse centers in my area.

"During my search for a good breeder I somehow came across your website on the internet. Many days I

sat at my computer with the tears running down my cheeks reading many wonderful stories about this amazing breed. I read some of your rescue stories and sobbed through each one. I even brought my husband upstairs to sit with me while I read aloud the story of 'Gizmo' who later became 'Russ T.' We just wept.

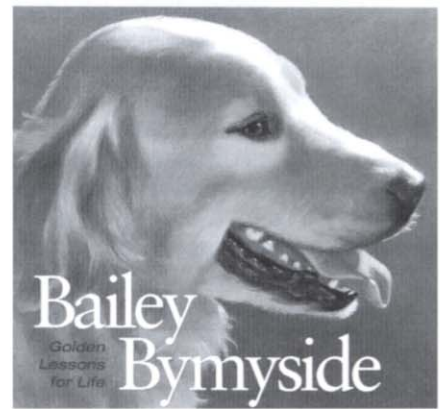
"By the time we finished reading so much of your website, we knew without any doubt that this was indeed the dog for us. It was like anticipating the birth of a child as we spent months searching for our own little angel. I spent endless hours searching for a good breeder and finally we found one right in our own neighborhood.

"We have just brought her home and words can't describe our joy! I wanted to share her with you since it is really your website that taught us how blessed our lives would be with one of these little angels. We thought long and hard about a name for her. We wanted her name to reflect the journey that we have planned for her. Since her life will be loving needy children we have named her Lullaby. She is eight weeks old and her registered pedigree name is Heavens Golden Lullaby. I wanted to share her with you and thank you for your amazing website. We just can't begin to share our joy in owning our very own nugget of gold! Thank you for all the hard work it must take to put together such an amazing site. Our family will never be the same."

#### **Bailey and Patty Bymyside**

I cannot recall exactly when Patty

PATRICIA BUREIN KENNEDY ✦ ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT CHRISTIE



*Reflexions Photography photo.*



Kennedy's email arrived, but I do know that it powered the most special of Golden friendships. How



lucky I was to have created a website that so invited others to share.

I was unfamiliar with Patty's work even though she and gifted artist Robert Christie had collaborated on the Maxwell Award-winning book, *Through Otis' Eyes: Lessons from a Guide Dog Puppy*. But, when I received an advance copy of book proofs, I could not believe my eyes.

Patty's book includes exquisite Golden illustrations depicting canine situations that are universally recognizable. But, it is her eloquent communication of 52 Golden lessons which truly sets this book apart.

Sadly, at the time that Patty's book was published, an almost fourteen-year-old Bailey was not up to the rigors of attending book signings. So, Darcy was the token Golden at the U.S. Senate Gift Shop's book signing on December 7, 2000.

Patty received this invitation as she's an aide to Senator John Warner.

Darcy's Therapy Dog cape was a

great icebreaker as it details on one side, "My name is Darcy," and on the other, "It's OK to pet me!" The shop personnel loved having such a furry diversion and were impressed by Darcy's good manners. In appreciation for our help, we received an Official 2000 U.S. Congressional Holiday Ornament. And, how touched I was when I saw it was personally engraved, to Rochelle and Darcy.

With our workday complete, Patty took Darcy and I on a mini-tour. We visited Senator Ted Kennedy's office and learned that he brought his dog to work, along with a tennis racket so that he could hit balls for him to retrieve. We then visited Senator Warner's private office, viewing his collections of trains and ships, Darcy also taking some time to rest on the Senator's suede pillow.

Wanting to further publicize this touching book, I held a photo contest so that others could portray their own

*Goldens Bymyside*. The response was overwhelming, Patty so excited each night as she viewed the latest entries. And, the winning photos remain at the site as I truly believe they cheer the soul.

Teresa Bullard's moving prize-winning photo (shown here), *Cinny and Daddy Giving and Receiving Love*, shows a picture of Steve Bullard with Cinnamon, the family's first beloved Golden. Cinnamon was rescued from a Humane Society in 1996. Teresa says it was hard to believe that he had been "disposed of" as he is truly an angel in disguise who just "gives until he has no more to give."

While Patty's beloved Bailey is no longer by her side, fourteen years of memories are safely tucked away in her heart. But, it was a lonely time at the Kennedy's, a career-changed Otis lonesome as well. So, an enchanting Georgian peach has now happily joined the family.

#### **Treasured Golden Bonds**

Fresh on the success of Bailey's contest, I held the Treasured Golden Bonds Storywriting Contest to celebrate the Human-Golden Bond. And, so many glorious stories were shared.

The grand prize winner was Chandler Rudd, his enchanting entry, *Her Name is Lucy*, skillfully weaving a tale of compassion with that of a man's true passion for turning adversity into opportunity. Lucy, found at five weeks of age, was discovered to be paralyzed in her hind end. But, she was adopted by the Rudd family through Yankee Golden Retriever Rescue ([www.ygrr.org](http://www.ygrr.org)), who decided to give her a chance despite repeated medical recommendations for euthanasia.

Please enjoy my own favorite passages from Chan's tender tale.

#### **Her Name is Lucy Excerpt**

"Her name is Lucy," I said as I pushed her closer to the boy. "Hi, Lucy," replied the boy. "May I pat her?" "She would like that," I told him. I moved Lucy's stroller closer to him so he could reach out and touch her. He stroked her head and allowed her to smell his hand. "She is so soft," he breathed. "Why is she in the stroller? Is she handicapped?"







*Patty with her new puppy Georgia.*

“Yes,” I told him, “She has Spina Bifida.” “Oh my God! So do I!” he cried. So began an amazing relationship between a young handicapped boy and his canine equivalent, a special four-year-old Golden Retriever named Lucy.

“My name is Joshua.” The boy offered, holding out his hand. “How old is she?” As I shook his hand I replied, “She’s almost four.” I noticed that his handshake was firm and he sounded very mature for his age which I guessed was around ten. Joshua, I must tell you, was also in a stroller, which was what captured my attention in the first place.

His large brown eyes belayed an intelligence that transcended his age. He had a ready smile and a cheerful voice. “Can she walk?” Joshua asked. “Believe it or not,” I answered, “Lucy walks on her two front legs!” “Wow! She sure is strong! I wish I could do that.” Josh exclaimed with wide eyes. “I have to put on my braces. Then I can walk with my crutches.”

I watched as the two of them got to know each other. I noticed that they both had the same color strollers. Both of them were smiling and obviously connecting on the same level. I have always been amazed at the way Lucy communicates with the children. As Joshua leaned over and began rubbing her ears, Lucy began to gently lick his face. He let her lick him for quite

some time, and then laughed in delight. Lucy sneezed, which looked to me more like a laugh too. I felt a silly grin spread across my face.

The next day, my wife and I were relaxing on the edge of a grassy field. Lucy was out of her stroller

and was lying on the grass next to us. We saw Joshua and his dad coming over to us. “Hi, Lucy!” Joshua cried excitedly. His father pushed him over to where Lucy was and as he scratched her on the head, she eagerly licked him back. “I think she is happy to see you, Josh,” I said. Joshua turned to his father and asked, “Can I get out? I want to get down and see Lucy.” “Sure,” said his Dad, and lifted Joshua out of the stroller. I noticed the same trusting look in Joshua’s eyes that I see in Lucy’s when I lift her from her stroller. Again I was overwhelmed at the similarities between these two.

Joshua used his arms to move himself over to Lucy and the two of them were soon engaged in a conversation that was beyond my understanding. They were nose to nose, Josh rubbing the side of Lucy’s face, and Lucy was reciprocating with warm, wet kisses. Joshua looked up at his father and asked, “Can I put on my braces? I want to show Lucy how I walk.” His dad then spent the next twenty minutes installing and adjust-



*Chandler Rudd with his little Lucy. Photo by Teresa Bullard.*



*Lucy and Joshua at GoldStock 2000. Photo provided by Chandler Rudd.*

ing the mechanical contraption that gives Joshua's legs enough stability to allow him to stand on them. Josh was picked up and given his crutches. "Come on Lucy!" He called cheerfully, "Let's go for a walk."

We watched as the two of them walked away from us, Lucy on her front legs, holding her rear in the air, and Joshua with his crutches. It was a very moving sight, one that I will never forget. The two of them walked a short distance, then turned and headed back to us. Lucy, normally very devoted to us and not one to go with strangers, was following Joshua as if she were his dog. When they returned, Joshua made a statement. "Lucy and I are exactly alike. We were both born the way we are and we don't know any different. She is happy and so am I!"

I was amazed at the maturity of this young man. Somehow the two of them seemed to draw upon the positives in their lives and not dwell on the negatives.

"We're going home this afternoon," Joshua revealed, "I want to tell Lucy that I will never forget her." With that, he leaned over to her and gave her a gentle kiss on her nose. Lucy returned the kiss by licking every square inch of Josh's face. The two of them stared at each other, again communicating in a language all their own. We all watched and knew that this was something special.

"Are you coming again next year?" He looked up at his father and asked, "Can we come back next year?" "I don't see why not,"

answered his dad. With that, they said their good-byes, and we watched as they made their way back up the road to the bunkhouses. I knew that I had witnessed something that would affect me for the rest of my life. Every time I look into Lucy's eyes, I will see a little bit of Joshua. I found myself renewed and I looked towards the future and the wonders that this little Golden Retriever would reveal.

#### **Golden Awards and Nominations**

Wanting to recognize Chandler's work, I inquired about nominating Lucy for the Golden Retriever Club of America's Gold Standard Award. But I was told Lucy could not be entered as she did not have an AKC registration. At around the same time I learned about a tragic Arizona rescue named Grace. So, I enjoined Joyce Hubler, Rescue A Golden of Arizona Founder, to help in creating an awards program, also honoring Grace by naming the award for her. And, Lucy was the 2001 Outstanding Rescued Golden winner of the Golden Rescue And Community Excellence, or GRACE, Award.

I went on to nominate Danielle Wilson's Therapy Golden Jake for the Gold Standard Award, learning about their work through her recent storywriting contest entry.

Countless children have been comforted by Jake's charms. The parents of one eight-year-old boy noted their son's sole motivation for going for chemotherapy was having Jake beside him during his treatments. And, when the inevitable happened, Jake was cuddled in bed

beside this dying child.

Jake became the premier recipient of the Gold Standard Award; my entry, *Jake: A Golden for All Reasons: Enriching and Inspiring Us for a Lifetime*, featured in the *Golden Retriever News* May-June 2001 issue. And, Jake was further recognized in Kim Dearth's book, *The Compassion of Dogs: True Stories of Animal Courage and Kindness*.

My most recent nomination came about during the summer of 2002. I had learned, as so many others had, of a very special Golden Oldie named Bullet who at the grand old age of fifteen had alerted to a human baby brother's distress, so saving his young life.

I was able to contact Bullet's mom, Pam Sica, so beginning a very extraordinary and endearing relationship that will forever be detailed at my website. Learning about the family's being consumed by continuing health concerns with their infant son, I told Pam that I would be honored to nominate her Bullet for the AKC's coveted ACE Award.

With a large monetary stipend of \$1,000 and a silver collar medallion at stake, I knew that my pen would need to work overtime. But, I was determined that Pam would be so recognized, as it was her selfless care and love for Bullet, as well as for many other neighborhood animals, that needed to be rewarded. Amazingly, even at the age of thirteen, the family had been willing to take out a \$5,000 loan in order to have life-saving surgery performed



*Jake comforting a friend. Photo provided by Danielle Wilson.*



*Troy Joseph with his Golden Bullet.  
Photo by Troy Sica.*



*Baby Troy Joseph with his Golden  
Bullet. Photo by Troy Sica.*



*Pam Sica and son Troy Joseph with his life-saving Bullet at Suffolk County Kennel Club's AKC award ceremony on September 28, 2002. Bullet celebrated his sixteenth birthday on April 1, 2003, but lost his continuing battle to cancer on August 1, 2003. Photo provided by Troy Sica.*

on their Golden guy.

Bullet had been exuberant about his baby brother's impending arrival, a blanket from the baby's bassinet taken home to him a week before Mom and baby returned from the hospital. Dad said he began running around with glee, dragging the blanket with him everywhere he went, and using it to sleep with at night.

Finally, when Pam and Troy Joseph came home, Bullet was ecstatic. He ran right for the baby – seeming to understand that this was the newest member of the family. And, while Bullet wasn't thrilled about being awakened at feeding times, he was quick to alert to the baby's cries. At that point, he would look to Pam to be sure that she, too, had awakened and was aware of the baby's need for assistance. Then, softly groaning, he would venture back to sleep until the next feeding.

When asked by CNN's Jack Cafferty what it was about Bullet that impelled him to alert her, Pam responded: "He knew it was his baby. He knew it belonged to me, and he was protecting his baby." And, I knew it would be impossible for Bullet to go unrewarded, his later becoming the much-deserved recipient of the AKC's 2002 Exemplary Companion Award for Canine Excellence.

#### **Golden Dedication**

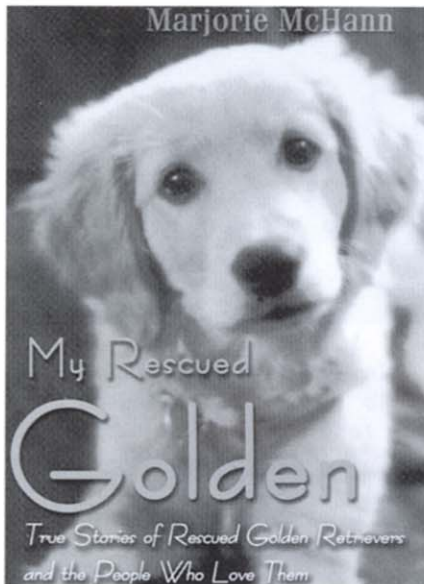
The true champions in the dog world are our defenders of rescue, their performing miracles day in and day out. How can one not be moved by their compassion and emotional resilience in the face of society's inhumanity? So, how could I refuse when Margo McHann asked for me to write the foreword for her lovely book, *My Rescued Golden: True Stories of Rescued Golden Retrievers and the People Who Love Them*, knowing the book's profits would be benefiting the rescue groups whose Golden Retrievers were so featured?

Although my own furry homestead is rounded out by a feisty six-pound rescue kitty, it has yet to be adorned by a rescue Golden. However, I did have the opportunity to provide an emergency foster home for a sad and hurting Golden named

Penny who came to be a lucky Penny after all.

Just before Christmas 1998, I had received a heartbreaking call from my pharmacist husband, telling me about an elderly person's Golden. She had been battling cancer, and, as a result, was unable to give her gal Penny much love or attention. Sadly, the woman died, and now Penny was alone with no one to care for her. If a home could not be found, Penny would be euthanized.

So, we took Penny into our home. She was very needy due to several illnesses and much neglect. And, she



had no desire to play or to remain near my side, surely grieving all that had recently transpired in her life.

Penny was a quiet and sorrowful gal, both her beauty and pain revealed through gorgeous deep brown eyes.

Within days of contacting Mary Ellen Lunde, the exceptional intake and foster home coordinator from GRREAT ([www.grreat.org](http://www.grreat.org)), she was at my door ready to transport Penny to her new foster home. Tears, which stung my eyes as I watched Mary Ellen drive off with Penny in tow, now return as the memory is revisited with this writing.

Debbie Iwanczuk provided Penny with a loving and caring foster home for the next three months, then sharing her experience in the rescue's newsletter. And, thankfully, a caring

family from West Chester, Pennsylvania responded, knowing they could provide Penny with the life she so deserved.

Debbie detailed to the family Penny's intensive medical issues (thyroid problem, ear infections, arthritis, bladder infection, recurrent hot spots and itching that required a permanently affixed Elizabethan collar), knowing that a huge commitment would be necessary. However, rather than prove discouraging, it only increased their desire to finalize the adoption. GRREAT had provided them with a Golden dream in 1997 when they adopted a guy named Scholar, and now they could show their gratitude.

This extraordinary family included stay-at-home mom Kate, dad Seth, two young boys, two cats, and, of course, Scholar. When Penny arrived at Seth and Kate's home, she seemed to draw strength and energy from the children, her tail wagging furiously whenever they would talk to her.

The update I received a few years later on Penny's progress was beyond my wildest hopes. Only requiring a single thyroid medication, the vet who had given Penny only six months to live now believed this ten-year-old could have another four years. Amazing what a little love can do.

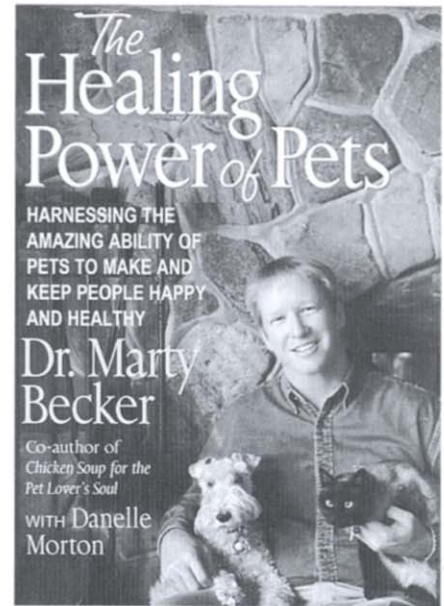
#### Dr. Marty Calls

I am fortunate to have many supporters, their being enamored by my huge Golden playground in the sky. One such fan is veterinarian and writer Marty Becker, the man most associated with *The Human-Canine Bond*.

Through his appearances on *Good Morning America* and *Petsburgh USA*, and his best-selling *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books, Marty has been able to convey both the science and soul of animals and their relationships with the people who love them.

So, you can well imagine the response when Dr. Marty asked for my help in "spreading the gospel about the Golden" in his new book in order to create an "awareness of the tremendous value of The Bond."

Published in February 2002, *The Healing Power of Pets: Harnessing*



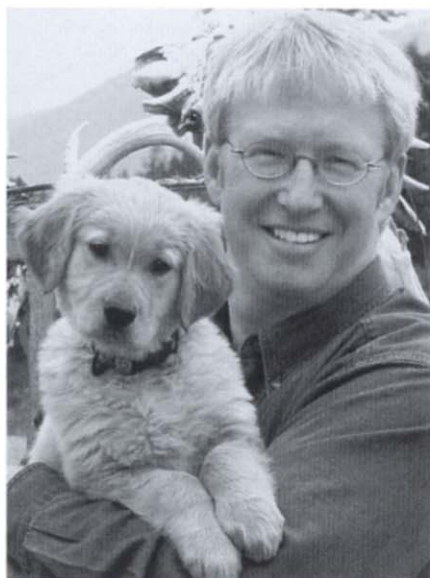
*the Ability of Pets to Make People Happy and Healthy* blends scientific findings with affecting stories of people who through the love of an animal have prevailed over chronic pain, phobias, sedentary lifestyles, and life-threatening conditions.

I subsequently designed the Healing Power of Golden's Contest in order to showcase stories in which a Golden's love had served to be therapeutic. Many wonderful sponsors made this contest an exciting one. And, the stories that were shared will continue to inspire others for years to come.

I don't know whether it was to thank me for my efforts, but Marty had me beaming with this email: "You'd better sit down Rochelle. We're getting a Golden!" Then asking if I had any part in this devout Labrador man finally going Gold, Marty wittily replied: "YOU had more than a hand in my getting a Golden; it was more like a velvet sledgehammer ... ha!"

Of course, the real thanks for my efforts came in the 30 heartfelt stories that were received during the contest run. Alice Johnson was our first-place winner with her entry, *Alice and Abel (and Four Other CCI Puppies)*. Disabled since 1987, her life has been changed by not one Golden, but five! And, a career-released Abel has now become her own mobility service dog. Here is an excerpt from Alice's story: "After our last son moved out of the house in 1998, I

really didn't have a reason to get out of bed anymore. My husband was traveling and only home every other weekend at best. Around 1989, I had seen a segment on the old *Home* show about Canine Companions for Independence (CCI) that I never forgot. CCI is a nonprofit organization that provides service dogs for people with disabilities. I have always been a dog lover and thought maybe being



*Dr. Marty Becker with puppy Shakira. Photo by Drexel Love.*

a volunteer puppy raiser was something I could do. Having a puppy certainly demands you get out of bed in the morning and sometimes at night too. I also knew at some point I might need a service dog of my own so what better way to prepare for that than puppy raising. I had no idea what a huge difference CCI was to make in my life."

#### **Golden Wonder-a-Day**

Wanting folks always coming back for more, I created the *Wonder-a-Day* page to detail new publications and news articles that featured a Golden. And, while finding goodies on a daily basis can be tough, I've come to uncover the most delicious of discoveries.

One such find was a January, 2002 Mokena, Illinois newspaper story, *Helping Paw: Golden Retriever Known throughout Town*, which revealed the exploits of Golden



*Golden Service Dog Abel. Photo provided by Alice Johnson.*

Sandy and her disabled human companion, Barb Hostert. It seems Barb lives at a busy corner; Sandy having insisted that she be on her tie-out in order to help crossing guard Phyllis keep the kids safe as they crossed the street before and after school. The children would visit with Sandy until it was safe to cross the street, her then barking until they were safely back on the sidewalk.

This article was mailed to me by Mike Chytracek after it appeared in his local newspaper. He went on to contact Barb, telling her the story was now featured on a Golden website. She was thrilled but Mike wanted to do more, so he arranged for a meeting with his own Golden, Jordan, in tow. And, the incredibly sweet man that he is, Mike timed the visit to occur on Valentine's Day so that he could give yellow roses to Barb as well.

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Another wonder came about after I read an April 2002 National Brain Tumor Foundation press release. Joining two of my life studies and passions – chronic illness in the family and Golden as healers – it announced the publication of the moving book, *My Name is Buddy*.

To help children understand what having a brain tumor means, author Dave Bauer had recounted his Golden's journey through diagnosis and treatment of a brain tumor. Dave is planning to start a retirement home for Golden Retrievers who have overcome serious illnesses and are then able to

visit folks battling the same illnesses.

Later given permission to premier the book on the web at my Land of PureGold site, I reproduced all twenty incredible pages. The book can additionally be obtained at no cost by calling the Foundation at 800-934-2873.

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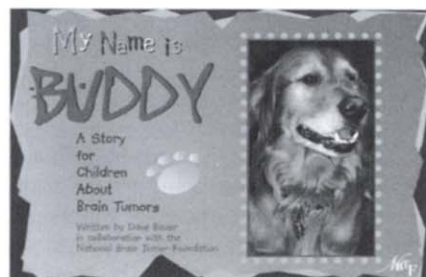


*Barb Hostert with Sandy and her roses. Photo by Mike Chytracek.*

In November 2002 I came across Mike Penketh's inspiring tale. As the result of a racing car crash rollover in September 1993, this airline pilot's hands were sheared off. Yet, since that day, Mike says life has actually gotten better as he's now busy counseling other amputees and giving school presentations on disability awareness.

Mike also had taken in a Canine Companions Change of Career Golden named Magy, who has gone on to become a wonderful service dog, as well as agility star.

It was a wonderful day when I found Freebo, and his Golden-inspired CD, *Dog People*. His song, *More Like You*, actually welcomes my site's visitors. Don't you just love the



following message that it sends?

"Here and now you know what's real, no one tells you how to feel. You lie there so peacefully, loving unconditionally. I wish I was less like me. What can I do to be more, more like you?"

To honor Freebo's work, I created the Spirit of Gold photo and verse contest. I was taken with the chorus



*Mike Penketh and Magy enjoying a dog agility practice session. Photo provided by Mike Penketh.*



*Keith Maynard and Reilly. Photo by Carol Maynard.*



*Freebo and his Golden Garbo.*

in the verse, *This Old Friend of Mine*, submitted by New Zealander Keith Maynard.

My dog, my mutt  
My canine friend  
He'll never cheat me  
or try to pretend  
A four legged hustler,  
a floppy eared fool  
He's never abrasive, rude or cruel  
And I love him so  
This old friend of mine.

And, I was charmed by Jon Tobin's *My Funny Brother* about his rescue Golden Tristan, the entry's fun photos taken by his mom Laura who also shared: "Jon has enjoyed the Freebo disk, especially the *My Dog Has Fleas* song. It really made him laugh, and he played it over and over until he'd memorized all the words."

#### **Fur-Ever Golden Love**

Although it is enchanting to enter into the glorious world of dogdom, it can be heartrending dealing with the realities of how quickly these furry loves leave our lives. This led me to create extensive pages on cancer and loss, their remaining among the most visited of my 600-plus page site.

"Thank you so much for putting out your website. I just lost my beloved Golden of twelve years, Casey. After reading about Ollie, and reading your section about handling pet loss, I feel much better about Casey's death. I hope you continue helping people in the same boat as me." – Jess

#### **Funny Brother**

I have a brother  
Who is like no other  
'cause he's got four legs and a tail

He really loves me,  
And it's because he's  
got a heart as big as a whale

He is really funny,  
He jumps like a bunny  
When you hold his food bowl up high

The mailman will meet him  
And he likes to greet him,  
'cause he is never shy

He likes to have his tummy rubbed  
And doesn't mind baths in the tub  
He loves to hear "go for a ride?"

By day he snoozes in the chair,  
Flat on his back, feet in the air  
we laugh at him, but he doesn't mind

At night he sneaks into my bed  
And snuggles up right by my head,  
He talks to me with eyes so kind

Tristan made us so happy  
We used to cry so sadly  
'cause we missed our Golden pals

I could never love another  
'til I met my Golden brother  
the one with four legs and a tail!





*Elwood and his treasured blue ball. Photo by David K. Mason.*

"I read your link on Ollie. It got me all choked up. We recently lost our Golden after eighteen years, believe it or not. His name was Lance and he sounds like he could have been Ollie's twin." – Dan White

"A friend who has Bernese Mountain Dogs recently lost her 'big love' to cancer. But when he started his battle, I referred her to your site to check out the info you had, and with a wink told her that 'Berners' are just tri-colored Golden Retrievers, you know. Well, he recently lost his fight, and she returned to your site on her own to mourn, because of the love that permeates every electronic page." – Sherri Skanes

Golden Retrievers don't get older, they get better. And, these mellow yellows are celebrated at many venues on the web. One such place is Yahoo's Golden-Seniors group. This is where Golden Retrievers such as Elwood, and his adventures in the dunes, have provided inspiration.

So, it was disheartening when his dad, Dave, wrote: "Elwood spent fifteen years, ten months, and eight days on this earth. Take heart in knowing that Elwood went to the bridge with his blue ball, and that he is showing his tricks to all the other Bridge kids right now."

#### **Jasper's Day**

It was a welcome day when Mar-

jorie Blain Parker contacted me about *Jasper's Day*, her children's book on euthanasia and loss. Aided by touching illustrations by Janet Wilson, Marjorie leads readers through an elderly, beloved Golden's final day. I then initiated the Fur-Ever Love Contest to celebrate this new publication and allow folks to pay tribute to their own Golden Oldies.

The top winner in this memorable competition was Madison, Wisconsin's Karen Mier, with her Kaytee's *Golden Birthday* entry. Blind since six weeks of age due to a bite to the head, Karen's Special K has taught everyone around her that regardless of your disability you need to be given a chance to lead a full and happy life.

According to Karen, "Everyone who meets Kaytee falls in love with her. She hears a new voice, runs over, locates them with no trouble, snuggles up and leans right next to them."

While Jasper, the Golden depicted in Marjorie's book, had succumbed to cancer at a senior age, many Golden Retrievers are now being diagnosed at ages as young as one year.

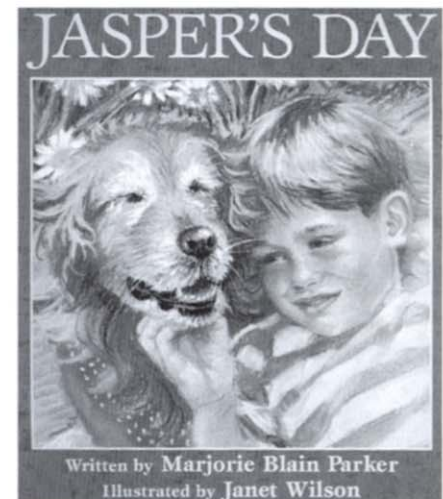
However, my Fur-Ever Love Contest required that the submissions depict senior-aged Golden Retrievers, or those who were at least eight years of age. So, I decided to initiate an additional contest for our Young Cancer Bridge Kids, that is, those young Golden Retrievers who had lost their battles to cancer. And, my dear friend, Suzi Beber, sponsored this additional contest,

generously providing gifts for every entrant.

Suzi's six-year-old Blues lost his battle with lymphoma in March 2001, and in his memory, she set up a cancer fund through the University of Guelph's Ontario Veterinary College Pet Trust Fund. Despite being disabled herself, Suzi has raised over \$20,000 for canine cancer treatment and research, through her Smiling Blue Skies Ceramics, all proceeds going to this fund. And in August 2003, she raised over \$2,800 with her premier Ontario Smiling Blue Skies Walk for Canine Cancer.

#### **A Golden Labor of Love**

Over the years, I have come to meet many wonderful working Golden Retrievers, in roles as varied as guide dog to arson detection dog. And, I have always come away inspired. So, a Labor of Love Contest was



"I don't want to say good-bye. But suddenly, Jasper whimpers. The pills must be wearing off. He's hurting. It's time to go after all. A surprising thought hits me. Maybe Jasper's ready."

designed to champion the working wonders of The Human-Golden Bond. And, wanting to be involved in a more uplifting venture, Suzi Beber signed on to provide a huge prize package.

Although the contest had only recently begun, I had already received a much-treasured *Tea Time with Dustin* entry from Diane Rampelberg, creator of The Healing Paw Newsletter (thehealingpaw.org). It depicts her Canine for Companions Facility Dog Dustin II at work with a young student.

According to Diane: "Dustin's gentle urging and unconditional love have motivated some children to say their first words to him. Some have taken their first steps with him. Others have conquered fears. Dustin responds to switch-activated speaking devices that allow some children to give him commands, and responds to over twelve commands in sign language allowing hearing-impaired children the opportunity to learn to communicate. He sings *How Much is That Doggy in the Window* to get a laugh or just a smile. He just plain loves children."

#### Hero Goldens R Us

My newest contest, Hero Goldens R Us, came about after Donna Jackson sent up proofs from her now-



*Karen Mier's winning entry of her Kaytee's birthday celebration.*



*Rachel and Dustin having tea. Photo provided by Diane Rampelberg.*



*Suzi and her Ch. Teacherspet Smiling Blue Skies CGC. Photo provided by Suzi Beber.*

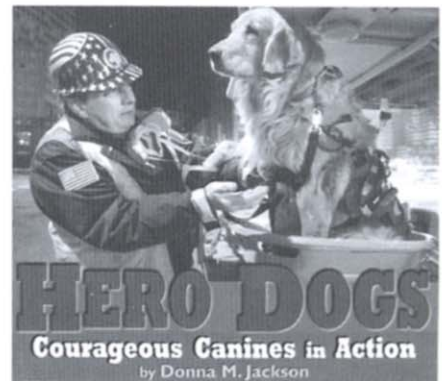
published children's book, *Hero Dogs: Courageous Canines in Action*. She honors those "canines with a cause" who so demonstrate special skills and talents as well as a superior work ethic, such as assistance dogs, therapy dogs, detection dogs, and even entertainers.

This family-oriented prize-packed contest will span the 2003/2004 school term and I'm hoping to entice lots of kids to become involved. Chase that Golden Thunder on board to cheer our kids on.

I have come to know many talented working Goldens. One of my favorites is handsome Caesar, from Dogs for the Disabled in England, who works by the side of his

wheelchair-using companion, Wendy Morrell. Wendy and Caesar have many adventures together, even attending the tennis championships at Wimbledon and performing a demonstration at Crufts, the world's largest dog show.

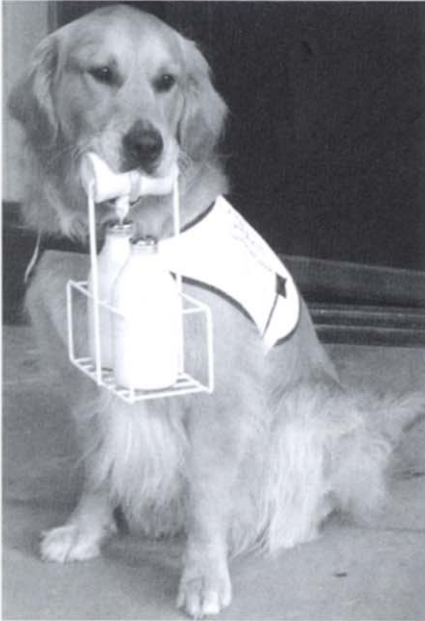
Another special guy is Pam Patton's Polar, who despite a lack of function in his hind legs, now does pet visitations and regularly works at a school with special needs children. Pam feels Polar has changed her life in this way: "Polar has made me a better person, also helping me open up my heart to children. He is very good at making people love him and want to spend more time with him, and he just loves children so. The biggest thing Polar has taught me is that he is normal. He may look different but he is a true Golden on the inside."







*Trenton Thunder Bat Boy Chase.  
Photo provided by Bill Cook.*



*Caesar retrieves milk and crate from  
doorstep and carries it into the  
kitchen to the fridge, later returning  
crate with empty bottles to doorstep.  
Photo by Wendy Morrell.*



*Polar photo by Pam Patton.*

### **Goldens Gotta Dance**

I've been joined by Dave Mintzer of Ideogram Productions to produce a documentary film of world-renowned Carolyn Scott and Golden

Rookie's life and continuing work – their being the Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire of the canine freestyle world. Dave brought Carolyn's talents to the world when he rendered a digital clip of her routine "You're The One That I Want" from *Grease*. You can see the routine by clicking on the dancing dog rookie.wmv at [groups.yahoo.com/group/AlternativeCanineFreestyle/files/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AlternativeCanineFreestyle/files/).

The film will showcase the benefits of this sport in working with children, the disabled, and senior populations. And, we are most fortunate to have Debi Davis lend her expertise to this project. Debi, a double-leg amputee due to vascular insufficiency, challenges us all by her continuing spirit in the face of adversity.

We filmed Carolyn and Debi during the February 2003 PAWS for Service Dogs' operant conditioning Service Dog Seminar for Mobility Assistance Dogs. As freestyle and service dog training melded together, it was inspiring service dog persons experience the pure joy that only dancing with your dog can provide.

Carolyn also got into the groove by working from a motorized wheelchair in order to better appreciate the needs and possible moves for persons dancing from wheelchairs. Then experimenting with her boy Rookie – once she figured out how to drive – this Golden gem never missed a beat.

While my goal of the film is to demonstrate how The Human-Canine Bond is deepened through the sport of freestyle, an added benefit is that those profits generated from its sale



*Carolyn Scott and Rookie.  
Photo by Sara Nugent.*



*Dave Mintzer shooting footage  
of Carolyn and Rookie.*

are to be provided to the Perseus Foundation ([perseus.foundation.org](http://perseus.foundation.org)), so designated for service dog handlers who are unable to bear the expense of canine cancer treatment.

### **Made for Each Other**

What more could I say about the love affair between children and Goldens that these images don't already convey? Kids, whether they are of the two- or four-footed variety, are great at stealing the show.

And, that's just what was depicted when I snapped this scene at GRREAT's Parade of Rescued Goldens during the 2000 Eastern Regional. And, don't you just love Adele Rouser's photo of her Zoey and granddaughter Alexandria in their matching St. Patrick's Day headbands, obviously fascinated with the "boinging" going on above their heads? Zoey is a patient poser, having been accessorized for every holiday imaginable. And, Alexandria loves posing as well as she gets to keep the accessories when these photo sessions are complete.

### **My Wales Connection**

It was one lucky day when Gra-





*Joan Peddicord's nephew Stan and her GRREAT rescue, Beau.*

ham Morgan emailed me this adorable Hatti puppy girl face, a photo actually used last year on Cruft's Golden stand! Many of Graham's exquisite photos adorn the site, especially at my popular Ollie's Golden Posts e-card page ([landofpuregold.com/post.htm](http://landofpuregold.com/post.htm)).

Ten years ago after Rusty, his seventeen-year-old mixed breed dog, died and broke his and his wife, Judith's, hearts, Graham found his way to their local Golden Club, so beginning his own love affair with the breed. He joined the Golden Retriever Club of

Wales and within a year was bundled onto a committee, his wife Judith now the club's secretary for the last three years. And for the last ten years, they've been busy helping with Working tests and breed shows, obedience rallies, arranging eye tests, running seminars, and on a weekly basis, assisting with a training class involv-

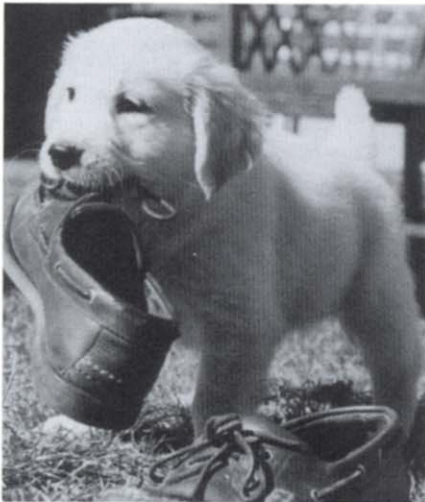


*Watson looking to retrieve his canvas dummy during a Golden Retriever Club of Wales Working test.*

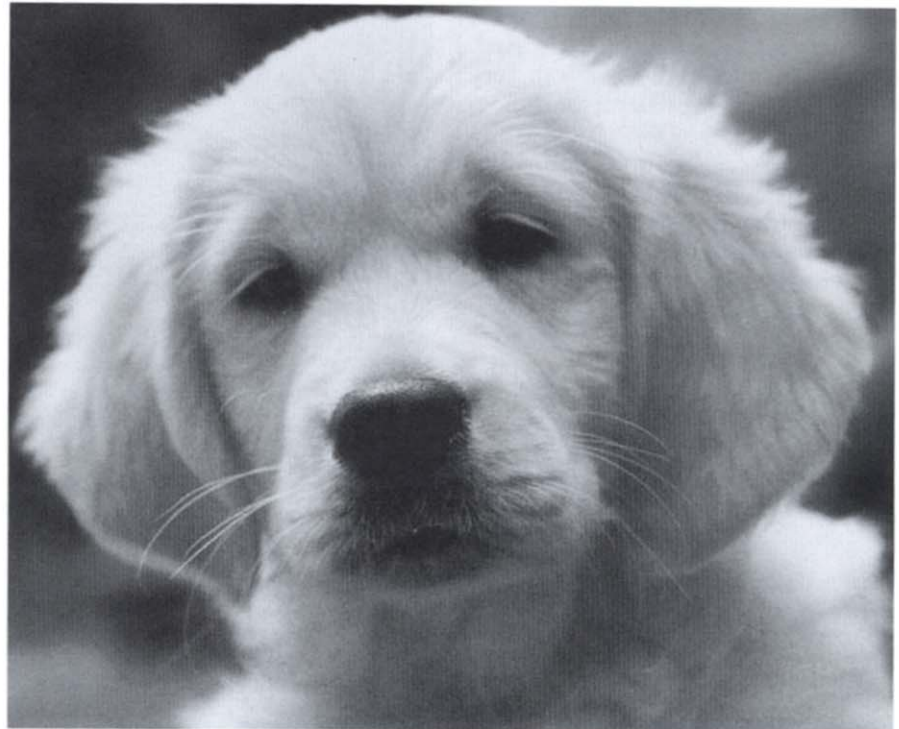
ing up to 25 Golden's a week!

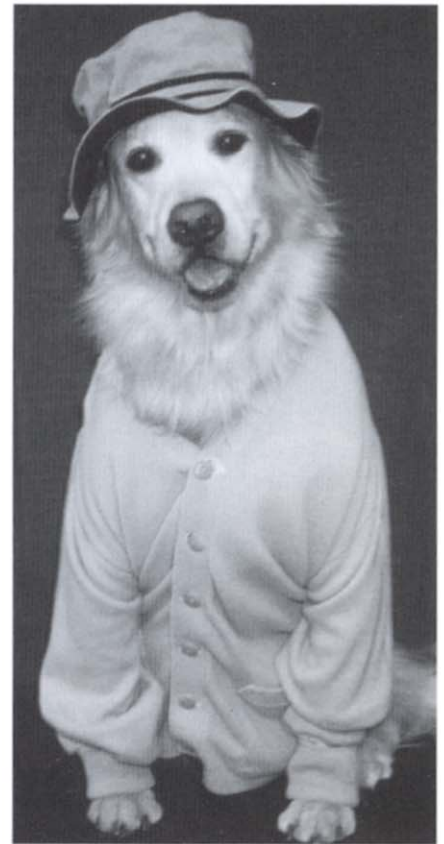
#### **Carolyn's Golden Costumes**

Carolyn Kreider is one amazing lady, and I thank my lucky stars that she found her way to me. She has produced the most dear poses and scenes with her Golden's Libby (nurse), Logan (student, groom and Henry Fonda from *On Golden Pond*), and Meggie (bride). I've been told Carolyn brings so much



*A Hattie puppy already at work.*





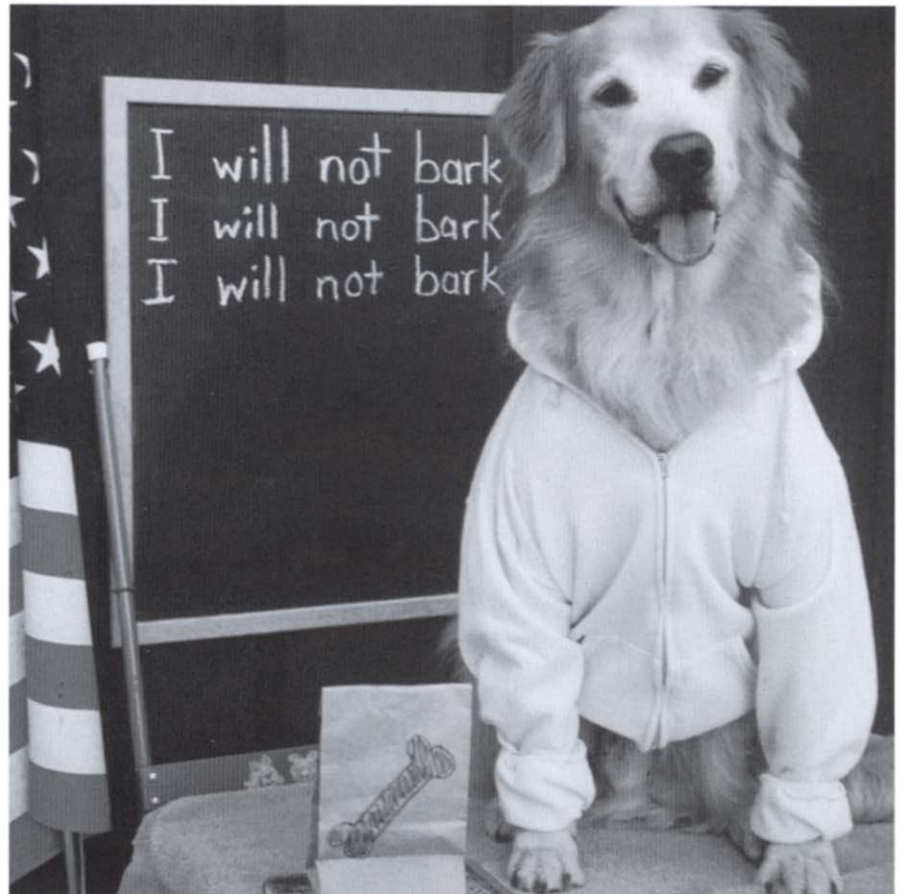
cheer to others when she shares her many Golden albums of delight.

When Carolyn doesn't have a camera in her hand, she has shared her Gold by making pet visitations, participating in cancer walks and various doggie benefits, marching in parades, and entering costume contests. And, she and hubby, Denny, are both very active in Ohio's rescue organization, Golden Retrievers in Need ([www.grinrescue.com](http://www.grinrescue.com)). Well, I did tell you she was amazing, didn't I?

#### **Golden Artists at Work**

While Carolyn makes art through her camera, Anna Moore creates magic from her paintbrushes. And, with her husband Terry's way with wood, they've produced some of the most beautiful Golden works of art and crafts.

After discovering Anna's wares at a Golden specialty dog show, I simply had to commission her and Terry to create some special wood visions for me. Five years later, they remain as gorgeous as the day they arrived. This sweet guy below is an Anna painted image featured on one of my wood pieces. Anna has also created a lovely line of notecards based on her





gorgeous watercolor paintings. But, there's only one problem – I never want to part with them!

My Land of PureGold is proud to feature artist Michael Johnson's Golden-themed work. Art literally opened up Michael's world, and although born with Down syndrome, he displays an amazing sense of wonder. He paints animals from a cheerful and innocent point of view, finding inspiration from his very own community.





This painting was a commission that Michael completed of a three-year-old youngster named Joshua, and his Golden Retriever companion, Nutmeg.

I searched for a jeweler to convey the inner beauty of our beloved Goldens, finally finding Esquivel and Fees Craftsmen. And, Ted Fees went on to create a piece based on my own darling Darcy that does just that and more.

You can just imagine my excitement when Dale Taylor, talented cartoonist, freelance designer and illustrator created a cartoon just for my Ollie. It was done through his *Not In My Backyard!* comic strip. I love it

### My Golden Hero

I cannot recall what impelled me to write to a world-renowned veterinarian such as Allen Schoen. But, I do know that his communication back to me served to renew my faith. Retaining a soulful innocence that is surprising given his 25 years in practice, I am always cheered by Allen's sweetly signed notes – "blessings from a kindred spirit."

And, I remain forever moved by the heartfelt story of Golden Megan that he shares in his pivotal book, *Kindred Spirits: How the Remark-*



*A pensive Alfie. Photo by S. Haman.*

*able Bond Between Humans and Animals Can Change the Way We Live.* A very ill stray who found her way to the good doctor just in time, Megan went on to become one of Dr. Schoen's most influential teachers.

### Kindred Spirits Excerpt

I fell in love with Megan the moment she bounded into my small cabin. Despite her grave illness, the look of love in her eyes and the deep reservoir of soul lurking behind them were enough to make me not just want to save her but also to adopt her. Still, her gums were pale, and harsh, rasping sounds came from her lungs – both signs of serious infection. With my stethoscope I could detect a heart murmur as well.

Blood tests soon revealed that she seemed to have more microfilaria in her blood than blood cells. I'd never seen such an advanced infestation, and it was hard to believe this dog could still wag her tail and stare up lovingly at me. By all reckoning, she should have been dead weeks – or months – earlier. I made a pact with her. If somehow she managed to survive, I agreed to adopt her as my companion.

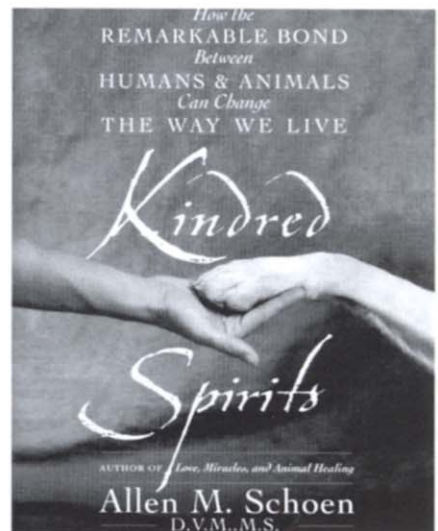
Megan, who appeared to be about four years old, was weak and undernourished, but I had no choice but to go ahead with the intensive treatment. Twice a day for two days I injected an arsenic derivative into her bloodstream, hoping to destroy the worms before they destroyed her. Although tiny now, without treatment they could grow to almost a foot in length, clogging Megan's heart.

Megan seemed to understand that I was trying to help her. Unlike most

animals, who flinch or run from a needle, she held up her paw as any cooperative patient would every time I went to administer the medication.

Her health slowly improved, and within a few months, she was a lively and happy addition to my household – and my practice. Indeed, not long afterward I learned that Megan had an unusual talent, which I realized when she met an injured baby lamb that had been attacked by wild dogs. The lamb was covered from head to tail with bite wounds; it was a miracle that she'd escaped death. I brought her home to recuperate, but it was Megan who took over her care: licking, cleaning, and nuzzling the lamb with her tongue, even cuddling up with her at night. By the next morning, the lamb was standing on her own, looking worn but alive and healthy. My treatment for the lamb had been an intravenous electrolyte solution and medications to treat shock, but Megan's treatment of pure love may have been the key to her recovery.

Megan soon became my unofficial nurse and partner. She seemed to feel it was her job to offer tenderness to any wounded or needy animal. I let her accompany me on my nightly rounds and on emergency calls, where she'd always wait calmly outside the exam room door, wagging her tail and wanting to come in and see the patient as soon as possible. Invariably sensitive to the situation, she mastered the art of a cautious approach, so as not to frighten the animal. Once she was perceived



as non-threatening, Megan would shower her charge with soft, warm licks. Her maternal, loving nature permeated every room.

Over the ten years we spent together, Megan administered to a veritable Noah's ark of animals: dogs, cats, ferrets, horses, cows, lambs, and so on. She was truly an ecumenical aide. On one occasion she even saved the life of another Golden Retriever by giving her own blood. When she did so, she patiently extended her paw up to meet the needle, just as she had when I first saved her life.

I thank Megan for becoming half of a solid team – the more intuitive half, the one who always seems to know to give animals exactly what they need to get better. I have a degree in veterinary medicine, and my understanding of the healing process comes from Western science. But Megan understands how to heal with love.

I talk aloud to her – as I always do when we're alone. "Is this due to your basic maternal instinct? Is it because you knew what it was like not to be loved? Or is there a deeper connection, a deeper communion?"

Megan doesn't answer – but that doesn't stop me from continuing. "Are you really a Golden Retriever?" I ask. "Or have you evolved to a higher level of functioning? Have you consciously evolved to be an angel in canine form, a four-legged teacher for us two-legged folk?"

"How do you know how to do all this?" I ask her. She looks me right in the eye, and for one brief moment I flash on her thoughts, "I wish I could answer you, pal."

But, in a way, she did answer me. Throughout the rest of her life Megan taught me that a healing power exists outside of conventional Western medicine. My more scientifically-minded peers might tell me that my companion was just a loving Golden Retriever exhibiting typical canine behavior patterns. I believe she was more than that. Megan was my teacher, a Florence Nightingale in canine clothing. She helped me realize that other species have a great deal to offer humankind. Megan taught me that there was more to healing than drugs

and surgery. She guided me to open up my heart space ...

\*\*\*

Ten years later, Megan taught us all another lesson when she developed cancer. While my distraught wife and I fretted, we noticed that Megan was treating herself, regulating her own activities. Just as so many humans have sought out mud packs to heal inflammation, she was choosing to soak her tumor-ridden front leg in the mug by a natural spring behind our house.

Finally, when her time arrived and she could barely move, Megan lay on the floor of our living room, looking up at me as if she knew that we'd never see each other again on this earth. In her eyes I saw the enormous love and gratitude, and I hope she saw the same in mine.

When it was time to give her a final injection of euthanasia solution, Megan slowly – and without prompting – lifted her paw to the needle, the same paw she had raised when I had saved her life and when she'd saved the life of that other Retriever. She left this world with the calm grace of a wise soul. For me, Megan was more than a companion ... Megan was a profound teacher. And she continues to be.

The intensive education of veterinary school helped instill in me a dogmatic thought process focused on developing a diagnosis and a therapeutic plan based on medicine and surgery. Most of us graduate from school confident that this is all we need to treat an animal. But Megan was my guide on a journey to a deeper, clearer perception of that is truly considered healing. Step by step, through example, metaphor, and insight, she reopened the doors to my heart and soul; she reawakened my sense of kindred connections to animals I had felt as a child.

As Megan was dying, I lay beside her and promised that someday I would share the wisdom I had gained through her – and my other animal teachers – with as many people as possible. And that is why I dedicate this book to Megan and all the others who have taught me that our potential for connection to all the world's kindred spirits is deeper than I had

ever imagined.

### Love and Inspiration

Goldens are truly my lifeline, and *Dogs Never Lie About Love* author Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson undeniably sheds light on why: "There is some profound essence, something about being a dog, which corresponds to our notion of an inner soul, the core of our being that makes us most human. In human animals, this core, I am convinced, has to do with our ability to reach out and help a member of another species, to devote our energy to the welfare of that species, even when we do not stand to benefit from the other – in short, to love the other for its own sake. If any species on earth shares this miraculous ability with us it is the dog, for the dog truly loves us sometimes beyond expectation, beyond measure, beyond what we deserve, more indeed than we love ourselves."

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