

FEATHERED QUILL INTERVIEW

- You've written two books about equines. What made you decide to write a book about dogs?

Well, the advice is to write about what you know, and my life is full of animals, so my books concentrate on them. I really love these dog stories; they are timeless and could be written by many other dog lovers about their own pets. I usually work on several books at a time, because I try to write about animal things as they happen so I don't forget. Finally, the dog book got finished and published.

- You developed an interesting way of selecting new puppies, by sitting with them and watching their interactions and how they related to you. Would you share with our readers a little of your philosophy about picking a new best friend?

I believe the animals in our lives should have a choice to be a part of it, if possible. It isn't always possible, and not all of mine have been "chosen" that way, but it is a real thrill when a dog or puppy decides "you are the one." My favorite way is to sit quietly and observe what happens. I also write about adopting a little poodle from the humane shelter by observing him in his little pen while sitting outside while a friend played with one she eventually adopted. He definitely called me, and I heard him!

- I'm a horse show person too and while tempted, I've never brought a dog/puppy home from a show. Did your husband Hal eventually get used to seeing new dogs when you returned from a show?

I think my dear husband was more resigned than anything else, but he is a real trooper, even to this day. As I meet other ladies who are really into fostering and adopting needy dogs, I hear the same refrain, "My husband threatens divorce each time I bring home a new animal." Most are joking as their husbands are actually supportive too. Hal, however, never even in jest said that. He knew his wife, and knew that animals are as much a part of my life as breathing.

- I found the 'BARF' diet interesting. Would you discuss this a bit?

The very first thing about feeding BARF, or raw foods to dogs, is that it is controversial. It is like being a Republican or Democrat. There is no middle

ground, apparently. You either love it or think it will kill your dog. We got started doing it sort of on a whim, after talking to a Doberman breeder in Indiana who used it. Her dogs were beauties and I am a health food "nut" for people and my animals. Husband Hal was a chiropractor (now retired), and good diet and nutritional supplements are second nature to me, so it was only natural that I would investigate the BARF diet. It just made sense. Dogs need meat. Fortunately for us, we had a large wholesale meat market available and chicken backs are the mainstay because the young chickens are tender and bones more flexible. (NEVER feed cooked, bones become sharp and brittle) It also is relatively inexpensive compared to other meats. However, other meats and supplements must also be fed. Feeding raw isn't cheap, or particularly easy if you do it right. I think the reason BARF gets a bad rap is that folks don't do it correctly. Much can be found on the internet about this diet, so I won't say more here, but as I write in the book, we did see a very wonderful effect in one of our dogs. Almost a miracle. Don't want to spoil the story for readers, but our Giant Schnauzer ended up with a hip problem similar to hip dysplasia when she was around four months old. After eating the young chicken backs with the raw cartilage, she responded better than she had on medication and many, many supplements, even with cartilage supplements. The raw natural substance was a miracle worker with Lady Blue. To this day, we still feed raw, and Blue is now nearly 11 years old (and just had a nearly perfect annual vet check up). As she is aging, her hips give more problems, but considering what happened to her, and how she is now, we are more than happy with feeding raw foods. We just got a 2 year old Doberman male, and after hearing that we would feed raw, the gentleman almost had apoplexy, said we would ruin him, and that NO vets he had talked to approved of raw. (I have not found this to be true) Just goes to show...

One can purchase already prepared raw dog food. It includes the vegetables, fruits and various red meats. Because we have big dogs and that would be very expensive for us, we did our own.

- Related to the best diet for dogs – all natural, grain-free diets are all the rage now. Some of the well-known brands are very expensive. What would you suggest dog lovers do to be sure their pet is getting the best? Make their own or?

I admit feeding raw foods is more time consuming than dumping kibble in a bowl! Sometimes I just think I cannot look at another glob of frozen chicken backs. To be safe, we cut them in half now that Blue is older, to be sure she can chew safely, and it can be yucky. When we got Jac, the Doberman, he was in a breeding facility; they were shutting down because of health reasons, and wanted a nice family home for him. I had been looking for a

puppy, but found Jac instead, so wanting to do a nice thing, took him. These folks had developed their own brand of dog food, and I admit, all the dogs looked wonderful. So, thinking I would keep Jac on his food, I bought 2 large bags. Life would be easier in my "older age." Well, Jac had horrible gas and he now got to sleep in the bedroom, so something had to change. As a treat to Lady Blue, we had been giving her a small portion of very expensive Bison/Sweet potato dry kibble in the morning, raw food at night. We switched Jac to the same program and the gas was gone. He is a big boy and eats a LOT. So I admit, we are no longer "pure." I think that isn't a bad thing. They get the best of both. The dry kibble is, as you say, very expensive as it is a meat product. I have a friend whose four dogs are their family. She had fostered about 40 dogs in her past, and she cooks food for them every day. It is meat and vegetables, but cooked. She is a vegetarian! So there are many ways to feed dogs correctly. I would definitely stay away from the cheaper mainly grain diets, which have been proven to be detrimental. However, a dog that is starving, alone and afraid, would love to be pampered with less than perfect dog food. So do what you must, and save and love as many dogs (and cats) as you can!

- Some of your early dogs didn't fit into your lifestyle/farm and you were forced to find them new homes. I found your honesty in discussing these episodes refreshing. Some people say you should never give up on a dog, but yet, your dogs found great homes. What would you advise somebody who just can't make it work with their present dog?

This is a question near and dear to my heart. As I wrote, I did find some dogs didn't work for me. I never took one to the shelter, but did find other homes. What doesn't work for one, could work for another. I also write about this in my mule book: Mules, Mules and More Mules. The deal here was that I had horses for nearly 40 years, and when I retired from showing, I wanted a safe, trained mule for trail riding. It took me several buys and re-sales to find the right two that I still have. That made a good book, but again, what didn't work for me did for others. One mule, Samson, was very big and beautiful, my first gaited (didn't trot) mule. We had a lovely year together before Samson decided he should run the horse farm and that included me. First I gave him to my son to ride, and that sort of worked, but I still had to feed/turnout etc. It was obvious he was going to hurt me someday. In all good conscience, I couldn't sell him to another unsuspecting person, and I had paid a LOT of money for him. I ended up selling him back to the person who had trained him as a young mule and had later sold him. She and her family never had any problems with him. And, yes I lost a *ton* of money...

The dogs were the same way. One went on to become a famous cow dog in Texas but for me she chased my horses dangerously. She was bred to chase. I didn't need that talent, or know what to do with it. I think more problems, grey hair and mental breakdowns can happen to both animal and human if you think you have to conquer every problem. But, find a home or foster group for the animal yourself, do not relinquish to a shelter. That is my motto.

- There are several times in your book where you mention seeking the wisdom of an animal communicator. People have very strong opinions about animal communicators, both pro and con. Is there something you can point to that led you to believe in them? What would you say to somebody who doubts their validity?

First I would suggest they read all three of my books, as I tell stories of communication with my animals. Second, it again is black and white in some folk's minds. They are not open to a higher level of love and communication. I have learned not to try and change their minds. I also have found that is usually the men who don't believe it. I first got hooked on it with a young colt I was trying to teach to lead. I simply couldn't get him to follow along beside his mom with me "leading" him with a rope which *should* be easy. He fought, backed up, fell over and it was ugly. I was in tears. Now by this time in my life, I had taught numerous baby horses to lead, indeed had shown some. This colt was my pride and joy, sired by my new stallion, and out of a super mare. A year or so earlier I had been told about a lady who talked to the animals over the phone. She didn't need to see or touch them. She was psychic. I am open to most things, and fascinated by things intuitive. I called Mary the next day. We talked to the little colt, she explained to him what I wanted, gave him the feeling of being led. The next day, with great excitement, but apprehension, I put the halter on his little head, attached the lead rope and simply led him out of the stall *without* his mother! I was hooked forever. Over years of chatting with Mary (my favorite communicator) I discovered talking to the animals is like talking to children. Sometimes they are very communicative, helpful and willing to cooperate, sometimes not, but I still love it and work at communicating with my animals myself. I am getting better, but I am not as good as Mary.

- Proceeds of your books go to various animal support groups. Would you tell our readers a little about a few of those groups?

There are a few that are close to my heart. One is in Elkhart, Indiana, The Second Chance Small Dog Rescue. I adopted a Miniature Schnauzer from

them after my special dog, Muffitt passed on. Now that we have moved to Arizona, I have found 3 that I am currently supporting. One is United Animal Friends: <http://www.unitedanimalfriends.org/> which is again a foster/adopt group. I cannot say enough about these dedicated folks who take in the unloved, change their lives and hopefully find new wonderful homes. They do the most challenging part... house training, finding out if they will like cats/other dogs. Some are medically challenging and hard to find homes for. Many times these volunteers keep them. Another is a horse rescue in Snowflake Arizona, Equine Well Being: http://www.equinewellbeing.org/Home_Page.html. It is a "Mom and Pop" rescue. They do all the work. And another is run by a friend of mine. Her husband was one of the 19 Arizona Hotshots who died in an AZ wildfire last year. Saving horses from a feed lot in Nevada where they would then go to slaughter in Canada, has "saved her life" she says. All of these are run by small groups or individuals. I also support the National Anti Vivisection Society (NAVS) which fights to get animal testing outlawed and find homes for animals thus used. They do a lot of good things small groups cannot do. <http://www.navs.org/>

- Any advice for our readers who may wish to donate to an animal group? What are some of the ways to find a good, reputable organization?

As you can see from the above statements, I love to support small groups of people that are in my own town or state. I do feel that money donated in this manner is best spent for the animals. Perhaps one exception that I know of might be "Best Friends" in Utah. Their motto is: "Save them all." And they work hard to do so and have outreach help throughout our country. <http://bestfriends.org> Many local pet stores support local foster/adopt groups, and you can donate time, money, and kind words to the groups at that time. The local animal shelters appreciate dog walkers. You should check them out, meet some of the foster parents and see for yourself the need. It will make you want to donate more and maybe even foster! Veterinarian clinics can make suggestions as to good ones, or those needing the most donations. When I met up with a representative of UAF to do a book signing (where all my profits were donated to UAF) she told me many local groomers donate time to make the fostered dogs presentable for adoptions. It makes my heart swell with gratitude for all these charitable people. The dedication to "Little Miss Muffitt" says it all:

This book is dedicated to the many men and women who tirelessly, unselfishly and devotedly work to make this world a better place for all animals. I am honored to count many of you as friends.

