

Paws to Dance



The Newsletter of the Canine Freestyle Federation, Inc.
February 2013

Trust the Dog

by Elaine Nabors

How many times have you heard these three words and thought, sounds easy enough in premise, but in reality, not so much? The idea of trusting one's dog and the actual practice of trusting can seem daunting, and yet it can be the absolute difference between sheer success and miserable failure in many dog sports.

Trust suggests opening oneself to the belief that someone or something will be there and do what is needed for you when things may get quite stressful and intimidating. It applies having some sort of unwavering faith in someone or even in oneself and hanging onto that faith when it has been challenged for whatever reason. For many, trust is challenging on all levels, even personal ones. I can say with confidence that few, if any human beings in the world have absolute, steadfast trust in themselves, let alone someone else. How many times have I looked at myself and a challenge before me and wondered if I am capable of overcoming whatever odds are set before me ... more times than I can count. In daily life, we are often pushed to rise above our insecurities and face the music out of necessity. If we counted how many times throughout our lives we have lacked trust and yet risen to the challenge, I think we might surprise ourselves.

So what does all this mumbo jumbo have to do with the dog? It is interesting to me how we willingly will place ourselves time and time again in a position of having to trust another species, namely the dog. Why do we do that? What compels us to place our egos out there to be judged by others based on how the dog does or doesn't perform? It really seems risky if you don't understand the compelling animal and its gifts of reassurance and honesty. After all, people literally place their lives in the paws of dogs trained for the blind. Talk about unbelievable trust, wow!! One missed judgment on the part of the dog and a person could be hit by a car for goodness sake. Why then do the rest of us struggle with this concept? Is it a need for control? A controlling personality is not a defining personality trait for owning a dog. People with all kinds of personality traits sign up for the job. Dogs have no egos. They live life in a way that disregards judgment and prejudice. That is often what we love so much about them. That trait should make it easier to trust and open up to them and yet somehow doubt trickles in and rears its ugly head.

Trust doesn't imply lack of training! Some people seem to take the idea of trusting the dog to the opposite extreme and they trust to the point where everyone is left to their own devices. Geez,

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A Message from Your President

At our recent board meeting we discussed the fact that our treasury, under the able management of Carl Tennille, has remained healthy over the past twenty years. Each of us should be proud; that's quite an accomplishment! The early decision of the board was not to solicit outside sponsors, but to depend on the creative ideas and energy of the organization itself, allowing the organization to maintain its integrity and original purpose. An important source of funding comes thanks to the talents and energy of Cameron Foster, who volunteers all that time, energy and equipment in producing our videos, Jim Moore, who donates to CFF all fees for his masterful music edits, and Kristin Sicote, who likewise donates her fees for help in music selection. To these loyal volunteers we owe a debt of deep gratitude.

In addition we talked about the continuing growth of material coming to the Learning Center. Joan Tennille has been busy as only a really creative mind can be, and she has rounded up a number of others to provide information and tips on various topics. Keep an eye on the Learning Center; things are hopping there!

Gaea Mitchel



Trust the Dog, continued from page 1

people isn't there any balance here?? You have to establish a relationship and work together through the hard stuff and celebrate the easy stuff together before the notion of trust can even be considered viable. You don't just trust some stranger off of the street, but when sufficient life experience has been gained through mutual exchanges in a variety of environments, hopefully you are open to trusting. The same applies to the dog. You must experience LIFE with this dog. You must suffer through disappointments and savor success and learn about one another and then for goodness sake, let go and trust!!

I am taking agility lessons with the youngest member of my pack, Vera and to be honest, trust runs rampant within our sessions. Should I stay close here, give her some distance there? Whoops, I turned my shoulder too fast and lost her, my fault, not my dog's problem. Can she read my body language, the movement that talks, of course she can and DOES often to my dismay! Trust means having spent enough time with Vera to know, with certainty that she will pick swimming in the lake over any other activity if given free choice. So how do I keep her on course at a friend's house where a lake is ever tempting her? I open up and trust her and we work together through the challenge as a team. I HAVE to be more compelling and a strong team mate when the obstacles get close to the lake. I have to be present and give more of myself there because it is a known area of struggle. The same applies to freestyle, if not more so. Dogs want a partnership and CFF and its style, offer the purest essence of true teamwork, more so than any other dog sport. There you are, in this empty space together and all you have is your relationship, you are exposed and what you choose to do at that moment, will tell the story. If you grab control and suck away from the dog, you have abandoned your partner and that dog will tell on you to some degree. The experienced dogs will sometimes carry you for a bit hoping that you will return and offer yourself to them and the green inexperienced dogs will do whatever their default behavior is. The friendly ones will go visit. The stressed ones will shrivel up

and the runners will RUN!

So why do it?? Why put ourselves in that position of vulnerability? It is the power of the euphoric sensation, the pink bubble, which sends tingles down our spine and a rush of happiness that compares to nothing else in the world, which hooks us in and keeps us driving towards that feeling over and over again. Animal behaviorists would call it variable reinforcement at its best.

But how do I get there? How do I trust my dog, what is the magic bullet? I have no definitive answer for that. It depends on your relationship with your dog. I can tell you that the creative component of CFF and the problem solving that you will do with your dog, will present opportunities for undeniable growth and that growth leads straight to trust. Improvs, creative studies, demonstrations, and ultimately performances with CFF, will create a bond that is held together with trust. You must recognize it, feel it is worth something and learn to be open to it, in order to truly TRUST YOUR DOG!!

A Creative Freestyle Demo

By Ann Holder

On the first Sunday each November, Brevard County Dog Training Club holds an AKC Responsible Dog Owners day. It is held in the big park downtown in the center of the City of Cocoa and runs from 11 am to 4 pm. It is free to the public, people can bring their own dogs and it attracts a big crowd. There are vendors, vet clinics, rescue organizations, therapy dogs, businesses, and other dog groups represented. Our freestyle class is always given a 15 minute slot to do demos. We look forward to the opportunity to show off our sport and recruit new students. This year, the timing was not good for us. One of our class was off competing in Winston-Salem, another put down her dog a day before, another had an injury and couldn't walk, so I was left with only one team, Barb Ettrich and her Vizsla, Darcy who drove for an hour to help out.

“So much for retirement!” I told Pippin! “Looks like you are being drafted. And you too Aidan!” But, along with Barb and Darcy, that was not going to add up to 15 minutes. What could I do to fill in the remaining minutes? I hatched a plan to use volunteers from the audience to come up on stage and take part in a freestyle lesson without their dogs. Would it work? Time would tell! Nothing like flying by the seat of your pants!

The day of the demo was beautiful, sunny and bright, on the warm side but it brought out great crowds. The stage of the amphitheatre is a very chaotic area. Only the front part is covered. Directly behind the line marking the back of the stage area are tables and tables of raffle baskets. There is constant motion of dogs and people no matter where you look. I have to put club members all around the stage to keep folks from wandering through the stage area while we are performing.

After a short speech about freestyle, Barb and Darcy took the stage and did a very nice job with their level III routine which is a work in progress. Pip and I went second and as long as there was food available, Pip was right there with me. Aidan was another story. He got out there, took one look around and his eyeballs started spinning. There was motion everywhere he looked. He was paralyzed—food, my presence, verbal cues or signals, nothing penetrated. He was a statue, frozen in a “stack”, reverting back to his early conformation training days. Luckily, I had a leash in my pocket. Once I clipped it on, he was fine. “Now I am back in work mode and know what is expected”, he seemed to say! It seemed that the three routines were over in a flash.

I grabbed the microphone and asked for volunteers without dogs who wanted to learn a little freestyle. I was very lucky to get four volunteers who were teenage girls. I put visors with dog ears on two of them, pinned tails on their backsides, gave each one to a handler and before our very eyes we had two brand new freestyle teams. I proceeded to teach them how to do the Tugger

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Guild News—Staccato Notes



By Pat Rapaport



We've had a quiet winter so far for our guild. The trials at Winston-Salem were exciting. Now is time for a well deserved rest. However, things are still very active. The Durham Kennel Club in cooperation with the Carolina Guild is sponsoring monthly Beginner and Advanced classes taught by Joan Tennille. Turnout is better than expected with a waiting list for the beginner level. Both technique and artistic movement are emphasized. Could there be a more accomplished instructor? We are so honored to have Joan share her expertise.

Word is out that membership is on the rise due to these classes. It is a great opportunity for many to learn and practice freestyle activities. We are all thrilled that many new dog handlers are giving this sport more than just a look.

An update and pictures will be available for the next newsletter.

Want to Save Trees and CFF Money?

Request the quarterly newsletter *Paws to Dance* by email. This will save the number of copies printed and reduce CFF's cost of printing and mailing plus you will get your newsletter several days earlier. In addition you will see color photos from events as opposed to the black and white in the printed newsletters. To receive your newsletter by email just send Carl Tennille an email with the subject being CFF newsletter by email. Carl's email address is ctennille@aol.com

Howdy everyone from COLD cowboy country!!! We had to cancel our last Freestyle class due to a storm that rolled through here dumping 7-8 inches of snow. We had howling winds with wind chills down to 20-30 below zero, and blizzard conditions. It closed schools, businesses ect.

In our last class we made an instructional video on technical moves and their relation to material for choreography. It was fun and now my out-of-town people can use that for reference. I have three others plus myself working on routines and we have been having a great time learning together and exploring all the "What Ifs". Two of the people are newbie's to Freestyle. Linda Tufvesson and her Sussex Spaniels from Gillette, Wyoming (Linda drives 130 miles one way to attend class) and Kathy Sjomeling and her mixed breed Nevada have been an absolute joy to work with and have added so much to our class. They are so willing to learn! Peggy Behrens and her little Dachshund, Simon, and her veteran dog, Kayla, have just been wonderful. Peggy has so much expertise to offer. Right now we are in the midst of choreographing. Everyone has their music selected except me. We have selected music for my oldest boy, Doogie but my youngest boy, Douglas is proving to be a challenge. At any rate, we are having fun!

That's what is happening out west. Take care everyone and Happy New Year!!!

Dawn Madge

Canis Major Guild

By Julia Gregory



The venue for our titling event (shared with First Florida Freestylers) has given us quite a fit! We'll have it nailed down soon and let everyone know what that performance opportunity will look like.

Meanwhile, amidst the flurry of winter obedience and agility competition, we have had several productive work sessions in Chattanooga and are looking forward to bringing our partners to the performance space – especially our veterans! Our freestyle sisters in north Georgia put on a lively “Introduction to Freestyle” in Norcross (north metro Atlanta) at the Atlanta Obedience Club. This included demos, a delicious lunch and a short lesson for newcomers. The result of that afternoon is a shot in the arm to “Canis Major South”. We'll be restructuring our classes that have previously been offered in Woodstock, Georgia. It's such fun to have excited new folks coming into the fold.

By Marcia Barkley



Our annual titling event was held Saturday, December

1st, 2012 with the able and much-appreciated assistance of judges Sally Kirschenman and Susan Colledge. Two new titles were achieved, including what we think is our Guild's first in a brace (applause and kudos to Chris Bond and her beautiful blue merle Border Collies Magic and Skye). Sally and Susan spent time with us in the afternoon, showing DVDs and helping us understand a bit more about what judges are looking for at different Levels.

Since then, things have been quiet, but on January 27th we'll start monthly Guild meetings, and we are determined to focus our training time at these meetings on better understanding how to apply the Federation's choreographic concepts. We also have a very exciting opportunity for fundraising and publicity in October – it will require some effort on our part to pull this off well, but the potential results should be well worth it! You'll likely hear more about this in future Notes.

Where are the Guilds Located

(in alphabetic order)

Canis Major Guild —— Tennessee and Georgia

Carolina Canine Freestyle Guild —— North Carolina

Dance with Woofs Canine Freestyle Guild —— South Dakota

First Florida Freestylers —— Florida

Gold Coast Guild —— California

Misha Guild —— Utah

North Coast Canine Freestylers —— Ohio

North Star Notes Guild —— Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa

Sirius Guild —— Virginia, Maryland, DC

Guild News More Staccato Notes



By Eugenie & Kasie
Podojil

The North Coast Canine Freestylers have been busy! With our decision to hold a titling event in 2013, ideas began flying, organization for the event became foremost on our agenda, musical selections for routines continually played in our heads, and creation of routines for us and our canine partners are in progress! Whew!

Funding was a priority for holding the event so we Freestylers held an agility run-thru on December 2nd at our “home,” Canine Affair Center. Our active members all worked hard at putting the run-thru together and holding the 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. event. The agility community of our area came out, supported us, and had a rewarding and fun time. We were particularly pleased with the turnout and number of very positive comments regarding the run-thru -- considering it had been a new challenge for all of us to hold our first!

Since 2013 began we are indeed a busy guild. Every Friday night is an intense blend of a new Freestyle class as well as a Guild session in which each week we focus on a freestyle concept (such as “pauses,” “turns,” etc.), work with it, and then practice our developing routines for our titling event on May 4th and 5th. February 15th, the final Freestyle class, will be an evening of sharing in which our guild will hold our official CFF Run-thru for the titling event in May.

North Coast Canine Freestylers are hoping that we see you May 4th and 5th for the first ever canine freestyle titling event in Ohio. We look forward to welcoming you to northeastern Ohio and guarantee you’ll enjoy yourselves!

By Kathy Noble

Happy New Year!
Well actually, at the time I’m writing this, we’re already closing in on the end of January, but it does indeed feel like a time of new beginnings. Guild members are searching out new music, working on new moves for their dogs, and developing new routines for the trials to come. It’s wonderful to watch the growth of the skills of the dogs and trainers, and to see the enthusiasm become even greater than before!



Members of Sirius Guild are looking forward to co-sponsoring (with the North Carolina Guild) the trial in November. You will hear more about that as time goes on and the time of the trial approaches.

At the Guild Holiday Party (think food and fun dog games like “find the food under the tennis ball in the muffin tin”) there was also a brief Guild meeting, elections were held, and this year’s officers are as follows: Brandy Clymire will continue as Chair, Joan Tennille as Training Director, Sally Kirschenman as Recording Secretary, and Carl Tennille will be Treasurer. THANK YOU ALL!

A topic of conversation which has come up a number of times among members of the Guild is how to “spread the word” to more people about our wonderful sport and also how to encourage new members and students in our classes. Because of the nature of some of the videos that are posted on the Internet—some of which have “gone viral” and been viewed by thousands of people, many think of Canine Freestyle as “someone out there wearing a costume and dancing with their dog, who is wearing a tutu and doing the whole thing up on its

hind legs". I have actually been asked by people who care about their dogs and find out that Freestyle is what I do with my dog, "How much of the time is the dog on its hind legs?" I have heard many people express a strong desire to actually see what Canine Freestyle is all about. Somehow, we have to get them to the trials.....spread the word and encourage the growth of our sport. This is a question for more thought and discussion!

My Start in Freestyle

by Dee Wallis

I started my Freestyle career in a hotel bar in Los Angeles. The Tennilles and the Wallises have been meeting at Cavalier National Specialties for many years, bonding over Cavaliers, performance with dogs and a good glass of wine. In 2008, Joan brought out her lap top and started showing me videos of Freestyle routines. She had me with the cavalier photos, and she wanted to do a demonstration at the next National, including a conformation dog without much experience. I certainly could provide a few of those, and it looked fun. During the next year, we trained; flunked out a dog or two and finally created a passable performance to deliver in Hyannis Port. I can't tell you how much fun it was to cooperate with my dog rather than being required to boss her into My *continued on page 9*

Canine Freestyle Federation Titling Event Sponsored by the Gold Coast Guild

Saturday December 1, 2012 Results

Level II

First Place Patricia Martin's Shitzu Lollipop

Second Place Sue Osborn's German Shorthaired Pinter IAT's Paris Lorraine

Level III

First Place Chris Bond's Border Collie Ghostland Reflections **NEW TITLE**

Level III Brace

First Place Chris Bond's Border Collie Ghostland Reflections **NEW TITLE**

Border Collie Ghostland Magic in Motion

Level IV

First Place Debbie Crain's Australian Cattle Dog Maha's Regalo del Ocho de Mayo

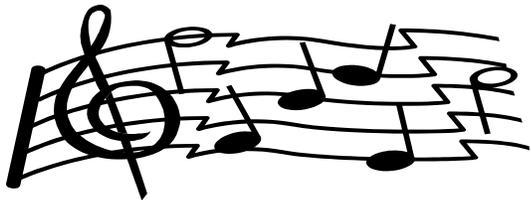
Highest Artistic Score

Chris Bond's Border Collie Ghostland Reflections

The event was held at the Napa Valley Dog Training Center in Napa, CA. The judges were; Susan Colledge and Sally Kirschenman A huge thank you goes out to the members of the Gold Coast Guild who put so much effort into making this event a tremendous success.

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phrase. The “dog” kids were great! They got down on hands and feet and pretended to be dogs and only did what their handlers told them to do which immediately got the handlers in trouble! Neither of them had a clue how to communicate with their dogs! It took about three tries before the handlers could cue their dogs to do the around movement that would bring them into right heel. Not bad really! I’ve had real teams that took more tries than that. Once they could complete a Tugger, I added the heeling forward, right about turn, heel to back of stage, switchback turn and heel to center. Two tries and they had it. Now was time to add the music and stage their big debut. Both teams pulled it off beautifully, staying together and ending in the right place. The audience gave them a big round of applause and they giggled and grinned, very pleased with themselves. It was fun and filled up the remaining time slot very successfully! Freestyle does teach you how to be creative!



Judges' Notes

At a member's suggestion we are introducing Notes From the Judges' Table. In an effort to communicate improvements and suggestions for improvements we are offering general comments from each of the four judges at a trial. All judging comments are collected immediately after the trial by the director of judges and organized to eliminate repetitions and posted in the next issue of "*The Paws to Dance*".

The following judges' commentary is from Winston-Salem.

In level I and II there was a lack of attention as well as some lagging and the dog was distracted. Handler was too busy and commands although subtle were not enhancing the movement shape or design and affected the perception of the intent.

There was a lack of energy and drive indicating a lack of understanding of technical execution and its relationship to artistic expression and the importance of training technically for execution and expression in performance and training to develop your test to fulfill the definition and the rules of the discipline.

There was a nice variety of heel work to express training in right and left heel position. There were also a number of teams that showed very little right side work. There should be a balance of both sides in level II work.

The level II presentations filled the space with movement and used the presentation space well.

The presentations in II did not over-face the dog

On a cautionary note: do not use skills required in higher levels. If you want to show these skills enter IIB.

Wait for the dog to complete a movement that you the human partner initiated.

Rushing the dog muddies the shape and design.

There could have been greater invention or imagination creatively shown in heel work other than constant heel position. Some heeling patterns became muddy and meandering and lacked crispness and clarity

Choice of attire distracted and interfered with dog. Check with your instructor. The partner cannot see what happens with jackets etc.

Level III

At least one handler on Saturday moved to the beat too frequently and distracted from the dog.

Walking into dog to get a back is a big no-no indicates a lack of trust and training.

Level IV

Too many distracted dogs difficult to determine what they were trying to show me

Some posing as opposed to stillness of a pause, suspect they were waiting for a music cue and this takes away from the unity and the continuity of the choreography.

Several presentations started off with a lot of inventive potential and then petered out and lapsed into a narrow horizontal band in front of the judges. This would indicate a lack of exploring movement material with additional concepts so material did not appear so limited.

The teams need more work to determine the importance of duration relative to length or number of say laterals or backing. When is it too much? When too little?

Music choices generally good with interesting choices that complimented the dogs.

Use of hand for a target held in a stationary position is a lure and distracts from the performance. It affects your performance and stops the flow of the choreography and sends confusing messages to the dog.

Leaning over the dog is not creating a visual pleasing design (see rules)

There were several intricate floor patterns with frequent stops changes of pace, which appeared in performance to interrupt the flow of choreography. Rushing the joy and delight which the performance of the natural gait would have expressed

California

A good core group that seems to work together well

They have an ability to see and discuss points from other trials. We need to help them to train more effectively.

Change the color of the duct tape on the mats it appears to create an artificial barrier

Speaker needs to be moved farther from the ring.

Needs more knowledge relative to movement and concepts but not as steps.

More invention

Need assistance in developing movement relative to phrasing in III.

Need to use the full presentation space not just part.

Much improved, but still need work

Level II

1. More experience being tweaked and pushed to explore the possibilities

My Start in Freestyle, continued from page 7

submission. The patterns fascinate me. I wanted to keep on and see if we could do it for real.

Celia, who did that demonstration with me, is a gentle middle aged matron who would try anything to please me. During the next year, she achieved two Rally titles and worked hard to get through a freestyle routine. My challenge was learning to trust in her desire to cooperate; her challenge was self-confidence. But in November of 2011 we got a Level II title. In the ring she was concerned with all the people watching what she thought should be our private moment. However, she generously trusted my decision that we should share the joy of our companionship with the spectators and soldiered on to qualify. Since I backed into my work with Celia based on her status as a finished champion and brood bitch rather than selecting one of the dogs who needs and wants to work, a Level II event is all I can reasonably ask of her. She is very content to stay at home in front of the television when I go off to train. So, now it is her daughter and granddaughter who work and travel with me. I have two dogs who shoot off like rockets when I put on my jeans and sneakers. As I approach the front door with my training equipment they are dancing at the front door with leash in paw, singing about the joy of going to work.

Now my challenge is to learn how to really choreograph and train these two young girls who are eager to dance. I have two partners who are up to the challenge of learning new things in new places, and the burden is on me to keep up with their drive. Joan supported me with such love and kindness through the first year or two of our journey as I worked with a dog who was stretching her limits and struggled to learn the basics myself. In the course of my study I have found so many wonderful people who share insights and encouragement. I am certainly hooked.

I have found that I love walking through a routine in my head, spotting the balance and the possibilities. I love seeing what my dog will make of my suggestions, and best of all I love the idea that I can follow her lead and concentrate on adjusting myself to her pace and energy. So, I am three or four times over a novice, and the knowledge comes slowly, but the dogs make me dance with joy.

The First Versatility Award- Reflections of the Journey

by Renee Filep



Radiant's Chili Will Do CFF I Team, II, III, III Brace RN, NAFP, TDI

During the summer of 2009, the board approved the creation of the Versatility Award. To title, the dog must have previously titled at a minimum of two individual levels and two multiple dog levels, either team or brace (for example, CFF I, CFF II, CFF IT and CFF IIT or CFF II, CFF III, CFF IIB and CFF IIIT, etc.). The purpose of this award is threefold- to recognize dogs that can perform with even more distractions, to encourage collaboration between freestyle teams and foster mentor/mentee relationships, and to stretch freestyle training and choreography in new and innovative ways.

At the training retreat this past April, my Chili was the first to receive this award and hopefully, many others will follow in her paw prints. This honor was very emotional for me since Chili is my first freestyle dog and our journey together has been one of growth- in training, creativity, acceptance and friendship. So please indulge me as I share some of the highlights with you... perhaps you will be motivated to expand your freestyle "box" and your dog will be a future Versatility Award winner.

I adopted Chili from Blue Ridge Border Collie Rescue July 1, 2003. It was the day before her 3rd birthday. Believing that dogs need a "job", I was interested in eventually competing in agility with her. Our training and the few trials we entered were frustrating. Although willing, Chili struggled. Her conformation and limited physical activity as a young dog combined to create a clumsy dog who *liked* agility, but didn't *love* it. That fall, Janet McBrien invited me to a CFF titling event. I was fascinated! Watching dogs perform heelwork artistically to music totally intrigued me. I could envision Chili doing this, and doing it gracefully. I attended a training retreat and learned that the choreography is all about showing the strengths and beauty of the dog.

Not having any obedience background, both Chili and I struggled in our first few classes with Joan. Thanks to Joan's patience, and a firm belief that my dog could "dance", I soon discovered that Chili was a very opinionated dog. She started expressing herself- frequently. No, she doesn't like heavy percussion. No! Despite being a Scottish breed, she doesn't like bagpipes. NO! She doesn't like synthesizers and "electric" music. Her musical tastes encouraged me to explore many genres of music. We both continued to learn and we grew as a team.

Janet and I decided to work on a level I team. Just thinking about how different her Welsh Terrier Nicholas was to my Chili made us both laugh. We called ourselves Madison Contrast. We both live in Madison County, Virginia, and "contrast" described our dogs and our motivation. We wanted to show that two very different dogs could move and work together harmoniously. What better way for Chili and me to start performing in public? Janet and I collaborated on the choreography. We had a great time playing within the space with our dogs. Yes, there were additional challenges. For one example, I had to be aware of where Janet and Nicholas were in addition to myself, but it was well worth the effort. We received our Level I Team title in June, 2007. Our music... "I'll Go Home with Bonnie Jean" from the Brigadoon sound-

track. It was the soundtrack I was listening to when I first brought Chili home.

Using the skills we learned from Joan and the rest of the CFF community, Chili and I continued to grow artistically. We earned our level II title in November of 2008, and our level III title the following year.

At the 2010 titling event in Chattanooga, we performed a level II team with Verna Allanson and Breezy. Although Breezy got the “zoomies”, Chili held together remarkably well and we were able to show our team routine successfully during the retreat when Janet and I conducted a class on teams and braces.

During this time, I also started training my younger dog, Zig, in freestyle. Whether out of lunacy, ignorance or inspiration, I would occasionally improv with both dogs at the same time. I lived with two dogs... why not dance with two? The possibilities for new shapes and movement phrases were mindboggling. It seemed the ultimate “What if...?” I knew Janet had done a brace, as had Fay Taylor, so the idea started to take root. I then stumbled upon a Celtic traditional reel entitled “Three Young Ladies Drinking Whiskey before Breakfast.” It was perfect. Chili choreographed the routine in less than a week. Zig and I just had to learn where to fit in her grand plan. We performed it at several demos, including the Board Walk Kennel Club in New Jersey. It was a blast! Unfortunately, I learned a valuable lesson when we performed it at a titling event. Dogs get bored! I just wish Chili had let me know she was going to change the choreography. Her changes, however, inspired developing some new phrases and shapes. Chili, Zig and I received our Level III Brace title in November, 2010.

Chili is now 11, but we are still dancing and will continue to do so as long as possible. We are currently working on new level IV performance, while I learn to adjust to her slower gait. Arthritis is also limiting what she is comfortable doing. Making it “all about the dog” is taking on a different meaning now. We still enjoy improv with Zig... *what if* we tried a Level IV Brace...

In addition to being a veteran of 17 demonstrations for CFF (ranging from NJ and the Timonium Kennel Club in MD, to the Madison County Fair and Canine Cancer Awareness Day in Harrisonburg, VA), Chili has done nursing home visits (and holiday performances) for five years, participated in the Christian Brethren Camp for Burn Victims for 4 years and BARK N’ READ program at the Madison Elementary Schools. She continues to be the star of the “Responsible Pet Care” program at Orange County HS with the Special Needs students every semester since 2003. Looks like my versatile dog is too busy to retire just yet.

So why not consider sharing your performance space with a friend or two, collaborating on some choreography and stretch those creativity muscles, or bring that older dog out of retirement... the next Versatility Award awaits!



CFF, Inc.
c/o Julia M. Gregory
222 Parks Road
McDonald, TN 37353

FIRST CLASS MAIL

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CFF Board of Directors

President

Gaea Mitchel
2902 Terry Road
Tallahassee, FL 32312
850-385-7875
gemitchel@earthlink.net

Vice President

Susan Colledge
3750 Midland Dr.
Roy, UT 84067
801-731-6027
scolledge@q.com

Treasurer

Carl Tennille
14430 Overlook Ridge Lane
Beaverdam, VA 23015
804-883-1174
ctennille@aol.com

Recording Secretary

Sally Kirschenman
5743 N, 16th Street
Arlington, VA 22205
703-536-7450
skirsch122@verizon.net

Membership Chair

Janet Dayton
818 Marshall Dr.
Painesville, OH 44077
jadayton@oh.rr.com

Director

Ann Holder
945 Indian River Drive
Cocoa, FL 32922
rxdogs@aol.com

Director

Renee Filep
507 Tinsley Drive
Radiant, VA 22732
luvmyzap@yahoo.com

Director

Joan Tennille
14430 Overlook Ridge Lane
Beaverdam, VA 23015
ctennille@aol.com

Director

Brandy Clymire
10603 Seven Oaks Drive
Spotsylvania, VA 22553
heypresto@verizon.net