

# *Paws to Dance*



The Newsletter of the Canine Freestyle Federation, Inc.  
August 2018

## **Why I Treat My Freestyle Partner Like a Flying Squirrel**

**By Julia Gregory, Canis Major Guild**

I work at the Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga. I have the privilege of working with the members of our education collection who are used for programming. These animals currently include (but are not limited to) three opossums, a woodchuck and a flying squirrel.

The process we use to train, handle and present these animals is one learned from Natural Encounters, Inc. (NEI.) See more about NEI at <http://naturallengounters.com/>. Our staff attended a workshop presented by NEI and brought back a culture of training that is both effective and humane.

The smallest animals are weight managed, that is, we weigh them and their food daily and manipulate their diets to maintain a healthy working weight. We save their favourite parts of their daily meals to use as reinforcers and ask them to work for that. Food is never withheld from the day's meal, but if they are overweight and refuse to work their favourite foods are cut back. They still get the whole ration, just with foods

they would eat last if all foods were presented. They are given 20 minutes to eat and leftovers are pulled, weighed and recorded. This system is probably not practical for the average freestyle dog living in our homes, but I thought I'd lay all my cards on your table.

Our training program is built on two things; **trust** and **choice**. Why? Because this results in more reliable behaviour from the animal. It has nothing to do with "being nice". It's about success. Training with a brand new animal begins with one, perhaps two people at most, **building trust** with the animal. We call it our trust account and we make deposits daily. We do this with free food, providing comfort, physical contact, play, grooming or whatever seems to please the animal. During this phase, we learn a lot about what motivates an animal and what behaviours we might capture. We strive never to frighten or force the animal because if we do, that's a big withdrawal from the trust account and we'll have to work hard to build it back up. So we never physically manipulate an animal to achieve a behaviour. We lure. We use objects with which the animal must interact (but they mustn't frighten the animal!). We use food reinforcers and split-second timing to shape the behaviours we want. The animals also often offer behaviours that we capture with

reinforcement. We're building the animal's trust in us, but we're also coming to trust the animal to offer behaviours reliably.

Every day of their lives, all of our trained animals have the **choice** to work or not to work. They are never taken out of their homes and forced to go do a program. Another aspect of our training culture is that if the animal makes a mistake, it is ALWAYS the handler's fault. Either I cued the animal incorrectly, or I threw away the cue without having the animal's attention or I misjudged the situation or the animal's behaviour. I'm supposed to be the higher life form in this partnership and I'd better act like it.

So what do I do when Velcro, the flying squirrel and my absolute favourite at work, won't come out of his box to work? Well, for starters, he's a nocturnal animal and it's asking a LOT to ask him to climb out of his cozy bed to start work. Luckily he seems to like the activity of programs, not to mention the special seeds and apple and grape. So once he's up, he's a shoo-in, but there are days when he's overweight and sleeping hard. Those are the days I need a secret weapon. The two most effective are the probiotic gel he gets every other day or the vet-approved Nature Valley Oat and Honey granola bar.



**Velcro in his treat container**

Sometimes he tells me clearly that he is uncomfortable with something I'm asking him to do and then I must be a competent animal handler and make the task easier until he can succeed. This builds both trust and confidence. Here's an example. This summer, my colleague, Susie, when doing animal programs for our summer campers, started letting the campers lie down on the floor and Velcro would glide over them to her. One day, while doing the same, I allowed too many campers to lie down at one time and was barely able to catch Velcro before he landed on the face of the next-to-last camper. Velcro didn't seem upset, but when I tried to repeat the behaviour, he would NOT comply. So I asked the campers, "Would you like to learn what we do when our animals don't do what we ask?" Great kids! They said yes! So I had one camper lie down and Velcro glided over her. Then two campers, then three and we seemed to be back in business. When four campers lay down for their turn, I asked Velcro to go to the starting position, but instead, he hung off my right hip and took a long, hard look at those four children lying on the floor. I asked him again to go to the starting point and he acquiesced and glided over the four, but you'd better believe I didn't ask him for five that day!! That day I felt that we were a tight team and each was communicating clearly to the other. I live for those days!

So after all this responsibility and reading of animal behaviour at work, Nina, my freestyle partner at home seems, if not easy, tremendously forgiving! She will eat way more treats than Velcro before she's full and she will forgive many mistakes quickly without seeming to take offense at all. But I still have responsibilities and rules to follow. They go something like this.

1. If I say we're going to work, we'd better go do it and it had better be fun.
2. She works fast so I had better train fast and pay fast.
3. I must be watching every move she makes and be ready to reinforce the correct one, every time. This means that I must have a picture in my mind of the correct behaviour before I ever meet her eyes because that's when her brain begins to churn out possibilities.
4. As I shape behaviour, I must be mindful of her literal perspective. She is only eight inches tall at the shoulder. If I turn upside down to start training a behaviour, I cannot expect her to recognize the cue when I'm standing up straight unless I achieve that posture gradually with lot of reinforcement along the way.
5. Nina does NOT generalize (yet). If she has learned to back away from me from the vinyl of the kitchen floor to the carpet of the sitting room, I cannot expect her to back when the floor is carpet all the way. I learned this last night when I thought I had accidentally found a shortcut for teaching backing. I tell her to "get out of the kitchen" and she backs to the carpet, but she's using the carpet as a marker to stop. She knows she's "safe on base" when all four feet are on the carpet and she won't take another step because it's time for me to pay, gosh darn it! Together we'll solve the puzzle, but her inability to comply IS NOT HER FAULT!

While we seem to have a solid basis of trust (until I make a loud noise, then she runs for cover) I try to respect her right to have choices. When on lead and I want to go in a different direction than she, I don't just pull her around and drag her off. I hold my position and ask her if she'll come with me. Usually she does. If she can't seem to give me her attention, I repeat the request with a touch for attention. When I get it and she comes I pay for that whenever possible. I praise at the very least. And here's a shocker ... sometimes we go HER way! Why not? She smells something out there and wants to investigate more closely. It's the equivalent of window shopping. If it's not over a cliff and I have the time, what's the harm? As my friend, Katherine Taylor-Worth said during the team-building portion of the class for Veterans, "This is a relationship, not a power trip."

So I try to stick to the rules ... with Nina and Velcro both. And they try to figure out how to get me to give up the treat while they depend upon me for protection from uncertainty. I've learned so much from a rodent who weighs two ounces about working with a fast, smart partner who has a sense of humor and a mischievous streak. It's standing me in good stead.



## North Coast Canine Freestylers



By Bridget Telencio and Janet Dayton

We have been enjoying warm weather and sunny skies here on the North Coast. We continue to meet for class and explore CanineFreestyle DogWork®. Some of us are already thinking about next spring's titling event. Music possibilities and opening shapes are being tried out.

We were fortunate to have Shari Bryant join us for two guild sessions this summer. Shari was up visiting her mom in Erie, PA and made the 1 ½ hour drive to join us. It was great to have her here with us. It is always a treat to talk and share with a fellow DogWork® enthusiast. Thanks Shari.

Sad news to convey; Janet lost her greyhound, Rain to osteosarcoma in June. Rain was one of a kind and a fun companion. Bridget lost Lance, her Dalmatian to old age in July. Lance took Bridget to many people, places and experiences. Both Rain and Lance are dearly missed. So onward to fall.



Lance



Rain (left) with Lark

## Sirius Guild



By Mary Sullivan

Hello from Sirius Guild. It's been an intensely hot and rainy! rainy! rainy! summer here in the D.C. metropolitan area. I personally cannot wait until autumn, when it's not too hot or rainy to work dogs outdoors. Being summer in the swamp of D.C., not only is it hot, humid and rainy; it is also vacation time. Our class met infrequently, as most of us were away on vacations, traveling, or enjoying a vacation home. Also, the landlord of our training building made August the month for repairs, involving major ceiling renovation, insulating, and repainting. Once the job was completed, the building required extensive airing for defumigation purposes before classes could resume. When class has met, we've had the fun of introducing two new members to freestyle and developing lesson plans that work for experienced and inexperienced members alike. For example, regarding choreography development, an experienced class member might present a basic ring

pattern, such as an X, that all members can perform, while asking for variations on the X pattern according to training level. Our “library” of music choices is large and varied so class members can sample something they like for their dogs, work to it, then receive feedback from the class. Our class will resume on a regular basis in September, as will the polishing of routines to be shown at our upcoming co-trials with the North Carolina guild. The trial weekend date had to be moved from the usual first weekend in November to the SECOND weekend in November because another event the first weekend had reserved most of the hotel rooms. We look forward to seeing you all then!

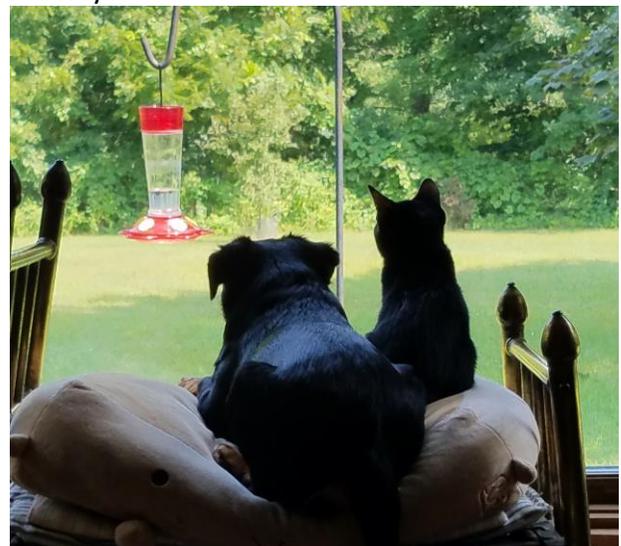
## North Star Notes Guild



**By Kate An Hunter**

North Star Guild is on hiatus for the summer, still basking in the glow of the event in Ohio last spring. Our summer has been unusually hot and humid, for Minnesota. We are excitedly anticipating the opening of a new training school in our area where we hope to find a “home” for our guild. Keegan continues to train in Nosework and Rally. He loves to ride with Kate An in the cart pulled by their horse, Altan. A kitten joined his crew and they play and nap together, requiring Kate An to take a million pictures a day! Jeanine is training Iko in scent work, and Iko will be dock diving this fall. Finally, Kady, Jeanine’s “little one”, continues in agility and working toward level 2 in Freestyle.

**Never buy a border collie when your drunk.**



**Keegan, with friend Altan**

## Carolina Canine Freestyle Guild



By Gaea Mitchel

The DogWork® classes in Durham continue, though of course the number of participants fluctuates with members' vacation plans, family and work commitments. Luckily there are several instructors who can fill in for one another as needed, so the planned schedule has had few interruptions.



**Laurie Sue Bakay and Lonnie**

Meetings have revolved around organizing volunteers to cover the numerous tasks involved in a successful titling event. As Mary, our Sirius Guild reporter, announced, the dates have been changed to November 10-11. Wake Forest homecoming will have Winston-Salem motels (and roads) full to capacity the weekend before.

## Get Ready to Celebrate The Joy of DogWork!

**Titling Event**  
**November 10-11, 2018**  
Jointly sponsored by  
the Carolina and Sirius Guilds

**Winston Salem, NC**

Please plan to join us in a weekend of friendship and celebration in Winston-Salem NC. What a great opportunity to reconnect with old friends, meet new ones, and share the joy and inspiration that always warms us when we get together with our canine partners to celebrate our beautiful sport.



### **Run-Throughs**

Available in the competition space,  
Winston-Salem Dog Training Club.  
Sunday, October 7, 2018

\$10 for 10 minutes of floor time.  
There will only be time for 12 run-throughs, so sign up early. Registration form with more information is in the Events area on the website.





## From the Editor's Cluttered Desk

There's been a slight shift in the membership of the Board of Directors. Betty Swenson has moved to Judges' Chairman. Reach her at [bswenson@bettyandjim.info](mailto:bswenson@bettyandjim.info). Guild Chair has shifted to Gaea Mitchel. Reach her at [gemitchel@earthlink.net](mailto:gemitchel@earthlink.net).

## Help Grow Our Sport!!

We need more friends engaged in Freestyle DogWork®, and you can help. I'm sure most of you have friends who are active in dog sports, training classes etc. Invite one or two to be your guest at a Freestyle class, practice session or titling event. Share with them what you love about DogWork, what your dog loves, and how the training can enhance the relationship between dog and human. What a gift this could be for their team!

Also, Joan Tennille is presenting a half-day workshop on September 15 at All Dog Adventures in Richmond, VA. This would be a great time to introduce those new folks, or to find new inspiration for your own DogWork journey. Registration information is in the Events section of the website. Hurry, working spots are limited to 12, auditing available.



A cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind. Or a weak arm.



## Sirius Guild Photo Contest

Selections have been made, and are now being transformed into note cards. These would be ideal for any of your correspondence, especially with dog friends. They will be debut for purchase at the November Titling Event in Winston-Salem, NC. Never fear, though. The cards will be available to all; details to follow soon.



**Paws to Dance  
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**Coming Events**

Workshop with Joan Tennille	Richmond, VA	September 15, 2018
Run-Throughs	Winston-Salem, NC	October 7, 2018
Carolina Canine Freestyle Guild/Sirius Guild Titling Event	Winston-Salem, NC	Nov 10-11, 2018

**Federation Board of Directors**

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