

# *Paws to Dance*



The Newsletter of the Canine Freestyle Federation,  
February, 2019



## **Tears and Friends**

**Gaea Mitchel**

"It is with deep sorrow that I am informing you of the passing of the Founder, Mothership and Guru, Joan Tennille, on February 8, 2019." This was my email message from Carl. It chilled my heart.

Who thought Joan would be gone? How could she be? She had shown us, time and again, that she could overcome insurmountable obstacles. Didn't she *tell* us that she would never leave us, to teach, to

train, to perform, without her? I will be listening for a familiar voice, heard only in my head and heart, advising, cajoling, and encouraging me as I continue my DogWork journey. I suggest you do the same.

I met Joan in 2001, she diminutive with palpable energy and confidence, myself a klutz (her term, and true), shy but excited about a sport that I knew my dogs would love. Over the next eighteen years Joan worked diligently to expose whatever creativity I possess, open new channels of communication between my girls and me, and in general show me the delights of DogWork. In the process I have found a community, both human and canine.

I attended the celebration of Joan's life in Montpelier, VA. The church was filled with her family and friends, a merging of many communities. Friends from her past, when she taught in Ohio, as well as some from DC, rubbed elbows with local friends involved in church and gardening, and there were a number of her DogWork friends blended in. Tears were shed without shame, but the predominant sentiment was of gratitude that we all, with our different windows into Joan's multifaceted life, were together truly celebrating the joy of the generosity she shared with each of us. Joan had transformed us into a single, grateful community.

Thank you, Joan.

*What follows is the eulogy, by Joan's son Daryl, and a compilation of tributes from members of the DogWork community.*

## **Eulogy**

### **Daryl Wickstrom**

I suppose the purpose of a eulogy is to try to sum up someone's life in a few brief words. To give a sense of who someone was through memories, impressions, a bit of biography and maybe an amusing anecdote or two. All of you knew my mother Joan – some of you for many years, and others perhaps who may have only met her recently. And anyone who knew Joan will understand that the task of summing up her life or faithfully describing who she was is just about impossible – particularly in a few paragraphs. Joan was a woman who defied categories, one who made her own path, followed her own muse and built her world on her terms and certainly not by following the rule book.

As I began to think about these words, there were many adjectives that came to mind to describe my mother. Creative certainly, indomitable perhaps, loving, fierce, tenacious, frequently a bit pugnacious, but also incredibly generous with her time, experience and knowledge. A natural teacher, Joan's instinct was always to teach, to share her knowledge and vision with others. While this is a wonderful virtue for many, I must say that as her sons, my brother and I did lose patience at times when she offered her guidance on various subjects for the ten-thousandth time in 50+ years. I guess that while her passion for teaching ran deep, over time we learned that it just didn't have an off switch.

But there was one word I kept coming back to. Courageous. Joan came of age in the

50's – a time when women were expected to marry early, raise children, build a home and become the perfect domestic goddess. Seriously not my mother. From an early age, she made her own way and followed her own path. Passionate about dance, she studied classical ballet at first, turning to modern dance during the artistic explosion centered in New York in the late 40's and 50's, studying with some of the greats including Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and Alwin Nicolais among others. Her passion for modern dance was not something her parents particularly supported, but that did not stop Joan.

Building on her years of training, Joan pursued a life on and off the stage, performing, choreographing and teaching first at Bradford College in Massachusetts, then at Ohio University. Joan also became a bit of an entrepreneur, founding her own dance studio in Athens Ohio, and teaching a generation of young women not only to dance, but also to follow their hearts and pursue whatever path they chose. Dance would also take her to the stage of the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, where she performed solo representing Ohio at the nation's bicentennial celebrations.

Alongside her busy professional life, she also found time to raise both my brother Jeff and me. Life with my mother was rarely boring. For a fair bit of our childhood, Joan was a single mom, and our home could best be described as barely controlled chaos. Money was not plentiful, but somehow she made it all work though, managing a household of two kids, two dogs and two horses.

Joan showed the same courage when she decided it was time to move from Athens to the suburbs of Washington DC. She had no job, and not much of a network, but she

packed up the two dogs and the two horses and headed east with us. While many might have questioned the soundness of Mom's decision, I wonder if she had some foresight of what was to come, because not long after we moved, Joan met a wonderful man, who would be her husband and partner for the next 40+ years. Carl went quickly from the singular life of a bachelor to the 24-7 reality that was living in a household with a new wife, two teenage boys and of course the extended animal kingdom that came with us. Carl's transition to marriage and family was flawless, and to us at least - and to use an analogy he will understand - it just felt like we had finally found that missing piece that completes the puzzle.

As Jeff and I headed off to college and moved on with our lives, Joan was looking for yet another new challenge. Claire, a new Cavalier King Charles Spaniel puppy, had entered the picture, and with Claire Joan embarked on the next big chapter in her life. At first, Joan trained and competed her Cavaliers in obedience trials, ultimately earning with Claire one of the highest obedience titles awarded. But as was typical with Joan, that was not enough. Joan went on to create the discipline of Canine Freestyle, literally dancing with dogs, combining her love of movement and creativity with her love of dogs and the knowledge and experience she had in training them.

When my mother was diagnosed with COPD almost 15 years ago, she approached her situation with the same courage and fight that had served her well over her first 70 years. While the disease sidelines many, Joan did not miss a beat - maintaining a hectic schedule of training and teaching, leading seminars, and judging canine

freestyle competitions, and designing and creating her beautiful gardens and landscaping. She even managed frequent trips back and forth across the country, and one journey to Egypt, memorable for the frequent portage of my mother in a wheelchair on and off the boat, and up, down and around various tombs and temples that were not meant or prepared for disabled access, and all of it with a smile on her face. Of course none of this would have been possible without the extraordinary support and devotion of her husband Carl. Over the years he has worn many hats -- as well as acquired a few new skills -- including driver, chef, respiratory therapist, landscaper, shopper and counselor among others - and all with endless patience and love.

Joan wanted today to be a celebration of life, not about the ending of a life. So perhaps this is her final lesson to us all. While our memories of loved one's past will not be forgotten, she would want us to look forward to the future, planting our gardens for the spring, enjoying the blooms and fragrances of summer and the color and rejuvenation of autumn, and then to start the cycle afresh each and every year.

I will always remember, years ago whilst attending my first canine freestyle show, a lady turned to me after my performance with my little Cavalier, PrinceHarry, and beckoned to me, with a big smile, and a look of authority. Little did I know the journey I was about to be sent on. Thank you Joan for this gift of canine freestyle, for changing the way I look at life, and art, and for reinforcing a genuine love and respect for dogs always. I promise I will try to keep my choreography simple and JOYFUL.....

**Sarah Jinnah**

## ***Thank You Joan***

Kristin Sicotte  
2/8/2019

I hold my dogs close, cherishing the bond and excited about the endless possibilities on our journey together.....thank you

I look out onto our frozen northern landscape and see contrast and flow and marvel at God's artistry and sense of humor....thank you

I watch my son grow and can't help see his beautiful uniqueness, knowing that where ever life takes him will be okay because its his life.....thank you

I understand that a good partnership has great value and requires continued effort so never stop nurturing it....thank you

I feel the support of a unique community that is united in the common language of DogWork....thank you

I embrace life long learning and continue to stretch myself in all ways even when its uncomfortable.....thank you

I am humbled by the creative process, and awed at how it comes and where it takes me...thank you

I am heavyhearted at the loss of a larger than life mentor, who changed my life forever ....thank you

## **The way I saw Joan**

Janet Dayton

I met Joan 11 years ago at a retreat. Well, I didn't really meet her, no formal introductions were made. I went to the Retreat knowing absolutely nothing about CFF, but came away hooked. One of my class sessions was instructed by this little, energetic, dynamic lady. Her presence was

much larger than her diminutive size. I didn't know her name or who she was, but she knew what she was doing and what she wanted. She told us a floor pattern and wanted it presented in right heel. Right heel? My dog doesn't do right heel. But we did and since then, my dogs and I have done so much more. Joan instructed, instilled, pushed, critiqued, explored, encouraged, delighted, pursued, educated, elevated, released, challenged, and inspired. This is the way I saw Joan, as teacher. She saw something in me I did not see. She drew it out of me and pushed me to it. She had more confidence in me than I had in myself. Joan saw the possibilities in me. One of my favorite things to do at a CFF event was watch Joan as she watched a dog and handler team work. Her smile, twinkling eyes, and attentiveness were evidence of the delight she had in them. She was engaged and she enjoyed being on their journey. Sure she was quirky, but I think she wanted the best for each team and as always respect for the canine partner. Joan wanted more for each of us. I have often wondered if any of us ever hit the ultimate picture of what was in Joan's mind when she conceived the sport. I'd like to think we all have in some sort of way by the mere fact we chose to go on the journey with her. Thanks, Joan. You changed my life and I went to places I never would have gone without you. That is the true mark of a remarkable teacher.

I first encountered Canine Freestyle as an audience member for the 'half-time show' at the 1996 Cycle Regional Obedience competition in Raleigh, NC. At this type of event, I anticipated watching well-trained dogs put through their paces. What was unexpected was the emotional reaction these performances created. The grace, beauty, and joy illustrated brought tears to my

eyes; I learned that day to always have tissues handy when watching Freestyle. At that point the only personal involvement I envisioned with this sport was as a spectator. Fast forward a few years, and some of my training buddies let me know that Joan Tennille, creator of those lovely routines I had seen in Raleigh and inventor of Canine Freestyle, was going to be teaching a class at our obedience club in Richmond. Since the class was being held on my day off, I was successfully recruited as a student. What a life-changing decision that was! Never have I met a person with more evangelical passion for the discipline she created than Joan. Besides teaching weekly classes in the DC area she tackled I-95 twice a month for years to mentor our group in Richmond. With apparently limitless energy and zeal, Joan traveled nationwide producing seminars and demonstrations. Later, after moving to the Richmond area, she continued to regularly travel to NC to teach classes and to hold seminars and classes at her home training facility, in spite of her severe health challenges. All lovers of our sport owe a huge amount of gratitude to Joan's husband Carl for enabling her to continue to pursue her goals as her mobility diminished but her spirit persisted. Like many, perhaps even most, of us when we first endeavored to give Canine Freestyle a try, I had never thought of myself as artistic or creative. It was Joan's unique gift to all her students to convince us that yes, we were. She never wavered in her quest to make us the best we could be. Out of the hundreds of dog/human teams Joan Tennille introduced to her sport, not all have chosen to continue in it. For certain, though, none of them will forget Joan

### **Betty Swenson**

When I think about the life of Joan Tennille, I think of the creativity that was the core of her thinking and living. Her passion to share that creativity created a dog sport that is unique and beautiful. Her gift for teaching enabled her to reach out to people of all kinds and help them find the creativity in their own souls so they

could express their feelings and relationships through the teamwork of CanineFreestyle Dogwork®. Joan believed everyone has the capacity to grow and she constantly searched for ways to inspire us and increase our awareness and appreciation of life, nature and our ability to express the unique relationship we have with our dogs. She shared generously without limits and she will forever be a part of us who knew and loved her.

### **Ann Holder**

I am so sorry to hear this sad news about Joan and she will be sorely missed by the many people whose lives she touched with her love and passion for the creative and always wanting to help people be their best at their craft. What she created with the Canine Freestyle Federation is truly amazing and I feel so fortunate that I was able to participate in this sport under her flag for the many years that I did – a truly joyful experience, not only between myself and my dog, but in coming to know all the wonderful folks who were part of her organization and being inspired by the amazing talent and creativity of everyone within the CFF. She was indeed the Mothership and guru for CFF and its members. My heart also goes out to Carl at this sad time.

### **Cinda Verbin**

Joan was a wonderful person so willing to give of herself to make sure CFF prospered after she was no longer able to steer the course. The thing that gives me peace is how thrilled Joan was at the trial in November, her face just lit up watching the performances and that is a memory I will cherish. I was invited to join a class in Winston teaching me how to dance with my dog. KaJen had just been retired from obedience and I was looking for something new to do with him. I went and was introduced to this very petite woman with huge attitude and personality. She was worried because I was a very successful handler, I was worried because

what she was teaching was so outside of my comfort zone. I loved what she was teaching and asked her a million questions which she did her best to make clear to me. She was a phenomenal teacher as is evidenced by our success, even though I know I made her nuts sometimes. She loved working with dog and human teams and was devoted to the sport she created. She was giving of her time and her knowledge and I will miss her very much. The world is diminished without her in it, I will miss you Joan and I am so glad you got to see Chip creating his own dance. I finally got it, let go of the control and roll with him in charge. Rest easy my friend

### **Rickie Morrison**

The first time I ever saw Joan Tennille, she was in the ring with Claire, her precious and funny cavalier. It was outdoors at a Cavalier National Specialty. It was raining and chillily. Joy and competence and artistry shone out of them, warming the air. They were both grinning from ear to ear. I was captivated. I admired her training talents as we saw each other at Cavalier Nationals in far - flung cities over the years. As we got to know each other I began to understand and admire her knowledge and skill with dog training. I found that we shared the enthusiasm of being with, really with, dogs, and we shared a quirky sense of humor. In between the silliness and humor, she began to teach me to be a better dog trainer. She challenged me as no one ever had. We were friends and shared an interest in cavaliers and dog training before she recruited me to learn freestyle. When she gave me the gift of teaching me freestyle, she changed my view of life and opened a new relationship with my dogs. As she was forced more and more to retreat to the wheel chair and oxygen that allowed her to continue out in the world, she accepted me as one of her facilitators. She was an intense and emotional person, who loved life with all her heart. She was able to wring so many vivid drops of joy from every minute she had. One of my happiest memories is racing her wheelchair down a hall

in the Hyannis Hotel, both of us laughing uproariously. She shared her gifts with so very many people over her long life, and that teaching will live on in her many students. So, Joan is not really gone, she has just transitioned to that voice in our heads that tells us sharply to look at our dog, straighten our stride, be our best training selves, and have another glass of wine for her.

### **Dee Wallis**

### **The Sun Came Out for Joan**

Julia Gregory

The drive to Virginia to attend Joan Tennille's memorial service could have been a sad, gray experience for my sister, Gaea Mitchel and me, except that the rain was hard enough and frequent enough that we had to concentrate on safe driving. That distracted us from our sad errand. The day of the service dawned windy and bright. A lovely drive through semi-rural Virginia took us to the Church of Our Saviour in Montpelier. This sweet, diminutive church, established in 1882 seemed to me an oddly traditional environment for our wild, unbridled Joan, but it was clear that she had been at home here. Clergy and congregation alike spoke glowingly of her participation in the life of the church and community. Sun streamed in the windows. Quietly elegant flowers graced the altar. you'd have been proud of the number of DogWork folk in the pews. The choir had mustered a generous showing to sing Joan on, even on this weekday workday. Their music was lovely. For me, the most amazing part of the service was the remembrance, delivered by Daryl, one of Joan's sons. It made me smile and weep. It comes clear to me now, that Joan's best product has always been in humans and dogs. At the

reception later, all was as Joan would have wanted. The food was plentiful and delicious. The buffet table was enlivened by an arrangement of flowers cut from her very own beloved garden. People talked and planned and got to know one another. And then we had to go home. And once again I felt what I had only twice before; once when I was nine years old and my father came home from the hospital to tell me that Mother had died. Again when I received Carl's email informing us of Joan's passing. My mind screaming, "What am I going to do now?" Luckily, I have a family and my sister supplied the answer, "We must keep Joan's dream alive." So I declare now, that I make it my personal responsibility to carry on DogWork as Joan saw it (at least to the best of my ability) here in Chattanooga. I invite you, my DogWork family, to join me in Chattanooga and in this resolve.

### Special Awards

The Board of Directors has approved a new special award, The True Grit Award may be presented to those practitioners of DogWork who have demonstrated outstanding persistence and good sportsmanship. It is awarded by consensus of the CFF board on an as-needed basis, and any member may nominate, to the Board of Directors, another member for this award.

Members may also nominate to the Board, for the CFF Hall of Fame, any dog they feel has made an outstanding contribution to the sport. Approval for the Award is not dependent on particular scores earned, nor based on the handler, but on the dog's involvement in multiple aspects of the sport. The nomination must be presented to the Board at least 90 days prior to the show dates where it is to be presented so that, if approved, necessary preparations may be made.

**Canine Freestyle Federation, Inc.**

**Freestyle Titling Event**



**Sponsored by  
North Coast Canine Freestylers Guild  
Saturday May 18, 2019 1 P.M.  
Sunday May 19, 2019 9 A.M.**

**Location: Canine Affair Center  
8495 Mulberry Road  
Chesterland, OH 44026  
[www.canineaffaircenter.com](http://www.canineaffaircenter.com)**

Performance space is 40 x 50 ft.  
(black rubber matting)

**\*\* Limited Crating Space \*\***

**Mail all entries with fees to Show Secretary:**

**Bridget Telencio  
7781 Lester Dr. Painesville, OH 44077  
[bridget.hambrecht@gmail.com](mailto:bridget.hambrecht@gmail.com)**

Entries **close** at 6 p.m.,  
**Saturday, April 27, 2019**, at the Secretary's  
address after which time, entries cannot be  
accepted, cancelled, altered, or substituted.

### Trophy Donations

Donations for trophies will be accepted until  
**April 27, 2019.**

Checks payable to the **North Coast Canine  
Freestylers**. E-mail trophy pledges, mail trophies  
or donations to show chairman, Janet.

**Paws to Dance  
c/o Gaea Mitchel  
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**FIRST CLASS MAIL**

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Ohio Event  
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