

Our Animals

Vol. 91, No. 1
\$1.95

**Cat + Cat =
*Double the
Love***

**With a Little
Help from
our Friends**

**The Joy of
Rex**

**Heralds of
Spring:
*Migrating
Birds***



Jib, Happy Customer

Happy SF/SPCA Customers: Xavier & Melissa



With a Little Help from Our Friends

Stories and photos by Stephanie Gold, SF/SPCA

We're always saying that San Francisco SPCA volunteers are extraordinary — and they keep proving us right. Meet three exceptional animal-lovers.

Dog Devotee

Tanner is a gorgeous German shepherd mix, black and tan with big brown eyes. He loves affection, and he's a real gentleman on the leash. But he's been here for months. He's not the most adoptable doggie on the block because he goes bezonkers whenever people walk by his kennel.

Enter Jean Lehman, a dog walker volunteer at The SF/SPCA. She started wearing the blue dog-walker aprons a year and a half ago, and what happened next was all Spot's fault. Spot was an Australian shepherd pointer mix, and he must have been abused before he came to The SF/SPCA. He was hand shy, he didn't trust anyone, and he personified what folks mean when they talk about a hang-dog expression. His head would droop, his tail would slump, and oddly enough, he'd snap at anyone wearing dirty sneakers. But he seemed to trust Jean, so she started spending more time with him. And that was the beginning of a beautiful new volunteer niche.

Jean now works with dogs who need a little extra help and a lot more consistency in order to get adopted. She takes one case at a time, and sticks with him or her till the dog goes home to a new family.

Jean's really been getting into



Jean and Gracie

it, and she's learned a lot about dog behavior and training in the past year. She even carries a dog training manual with her to the laundromat to read while her socks are drying, and The SF/SPCA behaviorists, of course, have been wonderful. And she needs all the help she can get with Tanner.

Tanner's a very big commitment. She spends at least an hour a day, seven days a week with him. He's not aggressive with other dogs, nor is he bad or vicious, but he bounces off the walls when people walk by, and that's not good. So now she's using a haltie, a special training collar, to correct his bad habits. The leash fastens under his jaw, and a pull tightens

the mouth shut and makes him look at you. It's power steering with a leash.

Consistency is crucial, and so is lots of exercise. Otherwise one volunteer will say "no no no" in a sugary voice while another volunteer means business, and the dog learns nothing, except, perhaps, that people are very con-



Sherry and Kelly

fusing. Along with the exercise, Jean also likes to spend quiet time with her dog. It didn't take Tanner long to learn "their" special space in the park: to flop, get his belly rubbed, get groomed, and even massaged. He's responding to the consistency of it, and learning to relate.

As for Jean, she goes for the high energy, dominant dogs as a matter of course. "I'm partial to big dogs," she says. "I like dogs you don't have to bend over to pet." Tanner's her main bundle of energy for now, and her goal is to have him adopted soon so she can go on vacation. And after her vacation? Jean's already got her next project, in the form of an 8-year-old rottweiler named Gracie, picked out.

Canine Convert

Sherry Gregory's another real volunteer gem. She started here three years ago, and she, too, likes to give her time and care to special canine projects. She comes every Monday and Thursday (her days off from work) and sometimes, like now, she comes in every morning before work, too, just to visit and walk her favorite of the moment. These days that's Star, a beautiful, affectionate akita with gorgeous eyes and a bad hip. But Star's going to get a total hip replacement, courtesy of The SF/SPCA, and once she's recovered she'll likely be adopted in a hot second. But in the

meantime Sherry is lavishing her attention on lonely Star.

When Sherry started here she'd never owned a dog in her life, though she'd always loved them. She just wasn't sure she could handle a dog all on her own, but thought walking them at The SF/SPCA would be a good start. Three years later she has four dogs, and would get more if she had the room for them.

It didn't take long for her to get hooked. Three months after she started here, Sherry was training them. She read lots of books on training, SF/SPCA behaviorists encouraged her a lot, and getting her own dog helped incredibly. That was Jack. She took Jack home to foster after he'd been hit by a car. He's

still missing a hip, but not a home, because she kept him.

On a typical Monday, Sherry arrives around noon and goes straight to Star. She takes her out of the kennel and goes to the park to play ball or work on specific problems. Then she moves on to the next dog who looks like he hasn't been out yet. She spends about 45 minutes with each, and she hates to leave them, because as she says, "there's so many dogs, so little time." She's there about 6 hours, skips lunch totally, and works with 8-10 dogs. Often she'll come with a volunteer friend and they'll partner up, making a foursome so the dogs can socialize together, too.

Like Jean, Sherry's favorite dogs tend to be big, goofy and challenging. She goes for what she calls the "big head, big feet" dogs. She also loves the older dogs, and in fact she's got plans to make a retirement home for old, bereft dogs when she retires herself.

"It kills me" she says. "I cry to see these dogs who've spent most of their life in someone's home, and now they're in a kennel." Lucky for them, Sherry and Jean are devoted to preparing them for new homes. They give these dogs a comforting sense of stability, and help iron out the behavioral kinks that could keep them from getting placed. They do a tremendous service, and it's ironic that their best reward is saying good-bye to the dogs with whom they've formed such a bond.

Cat Caretaker

L-Danyielle Yacobucci is one-of-a-kind, from her unique name to the feral cat services she provides. The cats may not think much of her devotion at first because their introduction to her kindness comes in the form of a steel cage, but L-Danyielle has



right in her face.

L-Danyielle first became interested in helping ferals from an SF/SPCA feral cat meeting in 1994. From those beginnings, her "hobby" has really taken off. She finds out about cats and kittens who need attention from the SF/SPCA feral fix line, and of course she monitors the needs of the Mission district colony. And lately, people have been calling her with their fostering problems, too, complaining that the feral kittens they're fostering are growling and hissing. L-Danyielle to the rescue; she takes over and finishes the job.

She's learned a lot over the past year, and that helps. She noticed, for example, that when a mom cat in a feral colony comes back to her kittens she meows to say it's okay. So now when L-Danyielle wants to catch young kittens, she meows like a mother cat, and sometimes the kittens toddle right out.

One day in September she had a hunch about a cat. She knew the cat had kittens, and just had a feeling that the mom was sick. Sure enough, the mother cat was so ill, she had to be euthanized. L-Danyielle then went looking for the orphan kittens. She made meowing sounds and they came right to her. She was thrilled, and she found foster homes for them all, too.

Says L-Danyielle, "I've been given a lot in my life and I'm very grateful, and this is a way I can give back. I used to volunteer at the S.F. General [Hospital] nursery, but I like working with animals better. Animals are my cup of tea."

Three hours a week, that's all we ask. Volunteer for SF/SPCA animals. Call (415) 554-3087, 24 hrs., for more information. 🐾

only their happiness and comfort in mind. As she says, "Feral cats really have it tough and I like to make their lives better." L-Danyielle takes care of a big feral cat colony in the Mission district, so she knows first hand how difficult it is for them to survive out there. She tries to help by giving medical care to those who need it, spaying and neutering the adults to keep the colony from growing, and placing the kittens in foster homes to socialize them to domesticity.

The first step is setting the trap. She lines the trap with newspaper so the cat won't have to walk on wire, then she puts little dabs of tuna that lead all the way to the back of the trap where the trigger is, and a big tuna jackpot at the end of the trail. She sets the traps in a strategic spot, hides at a distance, and waits, and waits some more, for a kitty to mosey in and trip

the trigger.

L-Danyielle has trapped over 100 cats (adults and kittens) since April of 1996. She sends the adults to The San Francisco SPCA so they can be examined, spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and then returned to their feral colony. But not so the kittens. She either takes them into her own home to socialize (she did 30 or so this year) or farms them out to other foster homes to ready them for adoption.

With all this kitty traffic, her own cats have had to chill out and adapt. She now has three cats of her own, but when she started fostering kittens, she just had Kity, now 10 years old. Kity was not so thrilled at first with L-Danyielle's new fostering hobby. She hissed and growled and so on. But now she's much mellower, hides in the bedroom when she feels overwhelmed, and only growls when the kittens get