

## A Life Gone to the Dogs

By Lynne Bettinger

Do you know what you want to be when you grow up? I often asked myself that question, even long after I became an adult. Childhood dreams of being a veterinarian gave way to the realities of adulthood, but despite a successful career in the telecommunications industry, I knew I'd rather do something else. Something with dogs. Always more comfortable with dogs than with people, I wanted to spend my days with my cocker spaniels (all six of them) instead of corporate types.

Ten years ago I got my chance. I left the corporate world and started a business creating gifts for pets and pet lovers. About the same time, my husband and I began volunteering for a cocker spaniel rescue group. With a constant flow of foster dogs through our house, I became interested in health issues. I trained in canine massage and learned pet first aid—just in case. For nearly seven years now, I've been teaching the American Red Cross pet first aid course around the mid-Atlantic region. I've trained everyone from pet owners to pet sitters and vet techs to animal control officers. I enjoy teaching and giving educational presentations at schools, camps, and other pet-related events.

These days I am interested in training dogs and their owners. I was introduced to positive training methods a couple of years ago when I took my disabled rescue puppy, Toby, to puppy kindergarten. It was fun for both of us. I liked it so much I took McDuff, another rescue, to obedience and then agility classes. We followed that with a week at Camp Gone to the Dogs in Vermont where we could try tracking, sheepherding, and dock diving as well as agility. Training dogs is a blast! When I discovered Kutztown University's Canine Training and Management program late last year, it was a no-brainer that I would sign up, even though it is a three-hour drive each way for me. In addition, I am apprenticing with an excellent trainer close to home.

I'm still not sure exactly what I want to be when I grow up, but it will involve training dogs. For now, I plan to work with other cocker rescue volunteers to help make some of the dogs more adoptable. I will continue teaching pet first aid classes and giving educational presentations. And, if I'm lucky, someday I will write a book, or at least a few articles, based on my knowledge and love of dogs. Dogs are my life. My license plate says it all: DOGZRUL!



**Lynne Bettinger and her dog Toby at the Red Cross National Convention in 2006, where they participated in the Parade of Volunteers.**

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