

Profile: Kathi Galotti (August 2016)

BY NANCY IGLESIAS

Kathie Galotti lives life to the fullest, making the most of the many hats she wears. For more than 30 years, she has

juggled the rewards and challenges of being a professor, author, mother of two children, and working with dogs – as a dog handler, dog obedience training judge, owner of seven dogs (over the years) and one grand-dog.

Hailing from the Boston, Massachusetts area, Galotti is a professor of psychology at Carleton College, where she has worked since 1983. She attended Wellesley College where she received a B.A. and did her graduate and post-graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania. She helped establish the Cognitive Studies concentration at Carleton and serves as its coordinator. She also served as chair of the Psychology Department from 1991-1994. She is the author of two textbooks and has written more than 25 articles for academic journals

One might wonder where she finds time for anything else, but her solid contributions in the academic world are just part of Galotti's life. She is a devoted mom to son Tim, 23, and teenage daughter Kim. She raises and trains Bernese Mountain Dogs in obedience and is a licensed obedience judge in the American Kennel Club (AKC) and the Australian Shepherd Club of America (ASCA) registries. Bernese Mountain Dogs are one of four varieties of Swiss mountain dogs. They are described as intelligent, strong and agile.

GF: Have you always been an avid dog lover?

Yes, I did have dogs as a kid. Fearless was my first, a lab/shepherd mix who was one of the sweetest dogs ever. Jupiter was my first purebred dog - a beagle - that I bought with my own money at age 13.

GF: How did you choose the Bernese Mountain Dog breed?

After we arrived in Minnesota, I started researching dog breeds. I guess I have always been a "big dog" person. I definitely wanted a dog that would be family/children friendly. Bernese Mountain Dogs are just really beautiful dogs I love their beautiful tri-colored coat. They are extremely loyal to their family. They are great with children and have a very sweet personality. There is nothing better than coming home after a long day at school and have these big dogs come bounding up to greet you, tails wagging, just waiting to hang out with you for the evening.

We got our first Bernese, Tandy, in 1985. Bussey followed the next year. Since then, we have had three more Bernese - Eskie, Flit and Tackle - all of whom have "passed over the rainbow bridge." We currently have two Bernese - Lizzy and Nimo - and a King Charles Cavalier, Tryker.

GF: You started with obedience training for your first dog and moved on from there to becoming a licensed judge. What was your impetus for taking your dog to obedience training, and what was the process like for becoming a licensed judge?

Just before I left the East Coast to come to Minnesota, our family had an unfortunate incident with our family dog. We did not recognize that our dog was showing signs of aggression, particularly with children. Our dog bit my 18-month-old niece. I was hoping to take the dog with me when I moved to Minnesota, but I never, ever wanted to go through that kind of serious injury with a dog and a child again.

I knew that if I was going to have big dogs and a family someday, obedience training was important. Tandy and I attended our first obedience class, and it was a bit of a disaster. I was not a very good handler, and Tandy was not a very obedient dog. But we pressed on. Eventually, Tandy became the first Bernese Mountain Dog to achieve the Super Utility Dog award (one of the top awards given by the AKC).

The approval process of becoming a licensed judge is a very rigorous one, and it took me almost five years to go through the many levels of testing, mentoring and provisional judging.

GF: Can you tell us about one of your most rewarding experiences as an obedience trainer?

There are really so many, but I will share two highlights. My dog Eskie was nationally ranked in the "First and Foremost" rating five years running. He was the top scoring Berner in the United States in 1998 and became the first Berner in history to achieve the Utility Dog Excellence award. I received cards and congratulatory letters from all over the country, and someone even sent a beautiful embroidered vest to commemorate the honor.

The second highlight is really of a much different nature. Over the years, I have found a great deal of satisfaction in working with all kinds of students at Carleton. I find it particularly rewarding to work with the kind of student who is perhaps struggling at first but through hard work and perseverance, understanding comes! I would share a similar experience with my dog Flit. Flit had a personality disorder, and obedience training was very difficult for her. We persisted and eventually she successfully completed the various levels of AKC training. Somehow the extra work and perseverance made those levels of mastery all the sweeter.

GF: You have a teenage daughter and a 23-year-old son. Do they share your love for dogs?

When my daughter Kimmie turned 10 and wanted a dog of her own, we decided that a smaller breed might be a little more appropriate for her small stature. That's when Tryker a King Charles Cavalier joined our family. Tryker is just beginning her road down the obedience training path. Through the 4-H program, Kimmie and Tryker won second place in Beginner Obedience as well as Reserve Grand Champion Rally Level at the Dakota County Fair in 2013. Tryker has also won her class at the State Fair in obedience and is now doing agility training. Kimmie loves her dog, but also loves dancing with much hard work going into preparation for recitals and other dance competitions.

My son, Tim, decided in his senior year of college to get a dog. He listed me as a back-up home on his application to the local Humane Society. While I declined to take on the co-responsibility of another dog, the Humane Society granted him the adoption and the rest is history. Tim needed a temporary home for his dog last summer. He brought the dog back to our house with the expectation that I could become grandma to Gordo. The first week was pretty rough as Gordo struggled to forge a relationship with Lizzy, Nimo and Tryker. He spent the whole first week in my son's room, hiding out from the rest of the pack. I was really worried and even reached out to my dog training family, but eventually Gordo came around and we had a great summer!

GF: Kathie Galotti has an amazing zest for life, sense of humor, and love for her university students, her own children and, of course, her four-legged furry friends. She is the kind of "Girlfriend" you would definitely like to get to know better.

-Nancy Iglesias is a freelance writer and non-profit consultant. She spent 20 years working as an Executive Director for Habitat for Humanity in Winona, MN. Prior to that, she was the Marketing Manager for InterVarsity Press in Downers Grove, IL. Nancy enjoys entertaining, water fitness and teaching preschoolers at her church.