

Society Tails

Companion pets are good for the heart, body and soul

By Joe Elmore

Pet owners have a strong bond with their furry companions. The level of devotion and unquestioned love they bring to us is a constant source of joy in our lives. The hypothesis that companion animals can have a therapeutic effect on adults with serious health issues has been borne out repeatedly over the years. Recent studies have not only affirmed this, but have also demonstrated that they can have a palliative role on children's health as well.

Contemporary research, such as studies from the United States Department of Health (USDH) and the American Heart Association (AHA), consistently demonstrate the positive effects canines can have on human well-being. The recent USDH report showed that heart

patients who were also pet owners were 22 percent more likely to survive a severe heart attack than patients without a pet in the home. Similarly, the AHA study conducted in 2005 revealed that even a brief visit with a therapy dog reduced blood pressure among heart failure patients and brought down their levels of stress hormones, thereby abating anxiety. Furthermore, the study found that having a companion pet is as effective in decreasing blood pressure as a lower sodium diet or a reduction in alcohol intake.

Probably the most well-known example of pets-as-healers is therapy dogs and the role they play in providing comfort for military veterans. A well-received article in a recent edition of the U.S. Army Medical Department Journal entitled "Canine-Assisted Therapy in Military Medicine" outlined the many ways

these healers help assuage the psychological scars induced by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Therapy dogs in the study were so attuned to angst in PTSD victims that they were frequently able to identify signs of their stress before their human medical providers were. Upon recognizing manifestation of anxiety in patients, the dogs proved quite deft at redirecting attention to themselves through cuddling and nuzzling against PTSD sufferers, thus drawing them out of their distress.

Of course, dogs are not the only companion animals that have been shown to provide propitious medical results. A ten-year study by the Minnesota Stroke Institute of more than 4,000 cat owners demonstrated a direct correlation between cat ownership and lower rates of heart disease. The study also found

that cat owners were 30 percent less likely to suffer a heart attack than individuals without pets.

There is also strong evidence to show that pet ownership is beneficial to maintaining a mental sense of well-being. A joint study conducted by psychologists at Miami University and St. Louis University found that the emotional self-esteem generated by animal ownership was often on par with that derived from human relationships. Before one jumps to the conclusion that the study merely reinforces the stereotype of the lonely pet owner, it should be pointed out that the researchers conducting the study were quick to debunk this myth. "We repeatedly observed evidence that people who enjoyed greater benefits from their pets also were closer to other important people in their lives," they wrote,

"and received more support from them, not less."

Naturally, the positive effects of pet ownership are not only seen in adults. Last year, a study published in the journal *Pediatrics* concluded that children who lived with dogs or cats during their first year of life got sick less frequently than children without them. Children sharing a household with a pet dog were 44 percent less likely to develop ear infections and were 29 percent less likely to be prescribed antibiotics in this same time frame. Asthma and other respiratory issues were seen far less frequently in children with household pets as well. It is believed that the dust, dirt and microbes introduced into the home by companion animals actually helped build up their immune systems.

Just as with PTSD victims, interaction with

therapy dogs appeared to be helpful to autistic children. According to a study conducted by the University of Montréal, stress hormone levels decreased dramatically in children with autism when they were engaged by therapy dogs or their family adopted a shelter dog.

Every day at the Charleston Animal Society we see hundreds of animals that are eager to become your personal, physical and spiritual therapist. If one of your New Year's resolutions was to build a healthier lifestyle, adopting a pet from Charleston Animal Society would be a perfect complement to that plan. They need you now, and you need them!

Joe Elmore is chief executive officer of Charleston Animal Society, South Carolina's first animal organization and one of the oldest in the nation. He may be reached jelmore@charlestonanimalsociety.org

Start 2015 with a pair of medically-themed reads

By Robert Salvo

Occam's Razor

By Roger Newman
Softcover, 272 pp.,
\$12.95
(Moonshine Cove
Publishing, Abbeville,
2014)

"Occam's Razor" is not Roger Newman's first foray into writing: A professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the Medical University of South Carolina, Newman has authored scores of medical publications. Clinical writing must have left his itch for creative writing unscratched; he digs in with gusto in this, his first novel.

Set in Charleston during the Reagan era, it centers on Dr. Declan Murphy, an Ob/Gyn at MUSC. A set-piece

opener establishes the protagonist's mental quickness and physical toughness; the good doctor is, quite decidedly, an action hero. Soon thereafter we face a stock character and a worn trope (an old flame — now the governor's daughter — re-enters Murphy's life) and the whole affair seems on the verge of being an eye-roller.

At least it might be, in hands less talented than Newman's. The good doctor has a talent for keeping the plot moving and ensuring the scenery remains interesting as it moves. Lowcountry landmarks are rendered with great faithfulness and he re-creates the Charleston of three decades ago: Not *Travel + Leisure's* top travel tip, but still a little "too poor

to pain" and sufficiently off the radar enough to allow the notorious "Operation Jackpot" drug runners in its creeks and coves.

Newman's own areas of professional familiarity make frequent incursions into the storyline, but he manages to remind us that Declan Murphy is a doctor without weighing down the story with aimless facts and jargon in the regrettable manner of many modern bestsellers. Newman is a fine storyteller — and never forgets it. Cracking one-liners, bad guys you love to loathe, an impossible escape and a satisfying conclusion make "Occam's Razor" just what the doctor ordered.

The Broken Circle
By David P. Bridges
Softcover, 362 pp.,
\$25.00

(Resource
Publications,
Eugene, Ore., 2013)

History buffs know that 2015 is the final year of the sesquicentennial commemoration of the War Between the States and those looking to remember the event via their reading list may want to consider "The Broken Circle" by the Rev. David P. Bridges. A professor of writing at the University of Richmond, Bridges' historical fiction centers on James Breathed, a young doctor who joins Jeb Stuart's cavalry. While "The Broken Circle" is a work of historical fiction, Bridges brings an incomparable depth of knowledge to his subject, as he is not only a descendant of Breathed, but has already penned a nonfiction

biographical volume about him.

Bridges follows Breathed out the doors of medical school, into a fateful conversation with Stuart, onto the battlefields of Virginia and through the conclusion of the War. As we make a journey of a decade in less than 400 pages, we see things episodically. While things progress from day to day and conflict to conflict, narratives do emerge. Beyond motives of honor — national, regional or personal, we also have his fight to protect his love, Mollie, who happens to be a Confederate spy.

Perhaps most compelling are Breathed's struggles. No doubt many complexities went through the mind of this doctor-turned-soldier, and Bridges successfully paints him

as a complicated figure. From winning the Medal of Honor fighting like a tiger at Spotsylvania to comforting the wounded — even if wearing blue, Breathed's story highlights horrors of the battlefield and the hazard they risk to a man's morality. Certain to be of interest to those with an affinity for reading about the period, Bridges is also collaborating with translators in the Ukraine in an effort to have "The Broken Circle" published in that conflict-threatened region. In the words of Oksana Slipushko, head of Ukrainian literature at Kyiv National University, "I believe that his novel has a very timely historic message for modern Ukraine." This is a certain reminder that the lessons of war apply to all men and all times.

JO BACON
**HISTORIC
CHARLESTON
BED & BREAKFAST**
RESERVATIONS

FURNISHED MONTHLY RENTALS EXECUTIVE TEMPORARY STAYS


MONDAY-FRIDAY, 9AM-5PM
WWW.HISTORICCHARLESTONBEDANDBREAKFAST.COM
(PHOTOS AVAILABLE)
TOLL FREE: 1-800-743-3583
LOCAL: 843-722-6606

TOO BUSY 

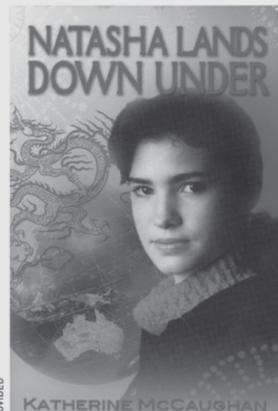
FOR WEBSITE MAINTENANCE?

Good intentions often pave the road to outdated content.
Contact me. No update job is too small.
Joomla, Wordpress and HTML/CSS
(and other CMSs)

Nancy Lucas
www.nancylucas.com / 843-224-3828
nancy@nancylucas.com

MONDAY, JANUARY 12
12NOON

artē
WITH A TWIST



**Twisting the Art of Memoir
with Katherine McCaughan**

In her compelling young-adult novel, *Natasha Lands Down Under*, Katherine McCaughan examines issues of migration and adaptation through her personal journey. Join us for a discussion and book signing.

\$20 MEMBERS, \$30 NON-MEMBERS
(BOX LUNCH INCLUDED)



LOCATION
CHARLESTON LIBRARY SOCIETY, 164 KING ST.

Visit GIBBESMUSEUM.ORG/EVENTS or
call 843.722.2706 x21 to purchase tickets.

GIBBESMUSEUM.ORG
843.722.2706