



# Let Dogs Be Dogs:

## Understanding Canine Nature and Mastering the Art of Living with Your Dog

By The Monks of New Skete and Marc Goldberg (Little, Brown and Company)

REVIEWED BY PATRICIA B. MCCONNELL, PHD

The new book from the Monks of New Skete (actually written by Brother Christopher and dog trainer Marc Goldberg) boldly takes dog training several steps backward by encouraging the use of leash jerks and emphasizing the importance of being dominant over your dog.

It begins with a dystopian description of our current relationships with dogs: “The leisure time today’s dog owners have is often devoted to events and activities deemed more important than creating a healthy relationship with their pets... Too many of today’s basic obedience class are dumbed down and truncated, more concerned about being politically correct than with offering dog owners effective solutions.”

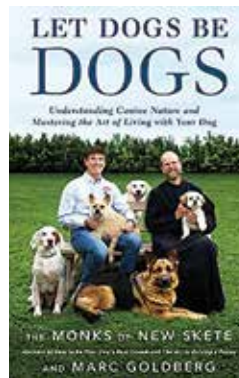
The book’s primary message is that dogs are pack animals who need strong leaders. “Put very simply, by being a strong pack leader you will strengthen your dog’s pack drive, which in turn will lead to good behavior and a happy relationship.”

According to Brother Christopher and Goldberg, one achieves leadership in part by using leash pops, which are meticulously defined: “A quick in-and-out motion with the left hand on the leash... reminiscent

of the way one snaps a towel at someone at the local pool. Its purpose is less punitive than attention-getting.” (No mention is made of the fact that many classes teach attention as an exercise.)

Along with a “strong verbal no,” leash pops are advised for a dog who fails to sit on command, while an abrupt about-turn “redirects the dog’s focus on you as you walk in the other direction.” Well, yes, it does. The dog focuses on you because if she doesn’t, she’s going to get hurt. On the other hand, there are glimmers of progress. They advise owners to teach dogs “leave it” by trading them for something better. Whew.

I find two things to be particularly disappointing. First, dog owners who know nothing of progressive dog training methods and the science behind learning



are going to snap up this book like a dog with a doughnut. It’s already #1 on Amazon in the Dog Training category. (The Monks’ first book, *How to Be Your Dog’s Best Friend*, published in 1978, is still the book I often see facing out on bookstore shelves,

which is astounding given how long it’s been around.)

Confession: When I started reading about dogs, I loved *How to Be Your Dog’s Best Friend*. Just about everyone did, because it felt like a balm of benevolence compared to what else was out there. For example, Koehler, who advised us to “fill a hole full of water and hold your dog’s head in it to stop him from digging.” At the time, the Monks’ advice felt revolutionary. But that was then, this is now. Compared to the resources now available to dog owners, this book

doesn't feel benevolent—it just feels sad.

Second, this kind of thinking pollutes the concept of leadership, in its best iteration. Dogs do need to know that we have their back, that they can count on us when they need protection. Dogs do look to us to protect them, feed and water them, and provide nurturing and social acceptance. One can indeed argue that dogs are attracted to people whom some would call “natural leaders” in the best sense of the word. *However* (and I can't say this strongly enough), this has nothing to do with leash pops or “strong verbal no's.” It has everything to do with being someone who is comfortable in his or her own skin.

Do you know someone who dogs love to be around? I've found that these people don't fuss over dogs, but rather, have a presence about them that everyone can sense. They come into a room and everyone looks at them. People want to stand beside them. I've known a few; some were dog trainers, some were not. What sets them apart is their aura of comfort in being who they are; in some unquantifiable way, they are rock solid. Like the earth. Military veterans tell me that this is the kind of person they see as a natural leader, and who they would follow to hell and back.

Perhaps this is what the authors also see, and are trying to teach people how to achieve. However, I would argue that the ways they suggest you try to get it—by using physical force and taking away your dog's autonomy—are wrong.

We are advised to put our dogs

on leashes throughout the day so they are forced to get up when we get up and to go where we go. The monastery's dogs are expected to be on a down/stay during dinner and while their owners are working. If we treat our dogs this way, the authors guarantee, they will be calmer and more obedient.

Well, yes, there is some truth to that. My young Border Collie, Maggie, was recently spayed, and for a week afterward, was on a leash, a down/stay or in her crate. Rather than being buzzed up from lack of exercise, she became very quiet. No doubt many people would have considered her to be calm and well behaved, but I believe that she was resigned, if not unhappy. As she gradually got more autonomy, she became more animated, with a sparkle in her eyes and an open, relaxed face. Guess which dog I'd rather live with.

I have no doubt that the authors of this book love their dogs, but theirs is a road I hope few decide to travel. Join me in helping counter such old-fashioned ideas by recommending all the great books, videos and web-based programs that teach progressive training perspectives.

If you need direction, go to my Learning Center's book reviews, to *The Bark* and its many excellent articles, or to Dogwise for the dozens (if not hundreds) of books that describe truly benevolent and effective training methods not based on control, hierarchy or physical punishment. Or take Dr. Susan Friedman's BehaviorWorks class, or watch videos made by the late Dr. Sophia Yin or check out the Fenzi Dog Sports Academy or

read classics like *Don't Shoot the Dog*, *The Culture Clash* or even my own book, *The Other End of the Leash*, or, or, or... The options are endless.

Take the road that should be most traveled. Your dogs will thank you for it.

### **Craig & Fred: A Marine, a Stray Dog, and How They Rescued Each Other**

By Craig Grossi (William Morrow)

Reviewed by Claudia Kawczynska



#### **Craig Grossi has**

achieved much in his comparatively young life. He was a U.S. Marine for nine years, which

included intelligence work for the RECON unit. He won a Purple Heart, came home and worked for the Defense Intelligence Agency, then got a degree from Georgetown University. Along the way, he rescued a remarkable dog, a short-legged, personality-plus pup he met while on duty in Sangin, a remote area of Afghanistan. And now, he's written his first book, *Craig & Fred*, telling the story of how it all came to be—how, in between fighting the Taliban, he struck up a friendship with a stray dog he'd seen nosing around his unit's compound, and sealed the deal with a piece of beef jerky.

Their story of mutual rescue is inspiring and also enlightening. Grossi, a talented storyteller, gives a sense of immediacy to the combat scenes, and to the everyday slog that comes from going out on nighttime patrols looking for IEDs and the men who are planting them. His portrayal of Fred, and

how he won the hearts of the marines by giving the troops a feeling of home also rings true. As Grossi says, the dog had a “way of reminding me of the little kid inside of me. It was a thing that only a dog could do.”

The book’s chapters don’t follow a linear timeline; narratives about Afghanistan—including how Grossi managed to get Fred out of the country—are sandwiched in with a cross-country road trip that Craig, Fred and Josh, a veteran pal, took in 2015, visiting many of the men who knew Fred back when. If the reader feels a little overwhelmed by the sheer brutality and terror of battle, the next page will provide relief with a story about Fred’s rescue, or where the trio is on the road trip.

We learn that the military has a strict no-dog policy, and often kills dogs who have befriended the troops. But somehow Fred made it, with a little help from a lot of friends, including the Ugandan manager of a DHL office in Camp Leatherneck (the marine base in Helmand Province), and Grossi’s sister back home, who made sure all the “export” paperwork was in order.

This work has a lot in common with one of my favorite books of 2015, *No Better Friend*, by Robert Weintraub. In that one, which is set in WWII, the dog, Judy, was a prisoner of war on the Pacific front. Similar to Judy’s, Fred’s story highlights the nature of resiliency, courage, and the strength of the bond between man and dog. There is just something so compelling in these rather extreme cases of “how I got my dog” stories, and

how the dog, in many ways, saves the lives of those he or she touches. Timed well for holiday gift-giving, *Craig & Fred* is published in two versions, including one for children.

#### ALSO NOTED

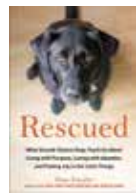
##### Rescued

By Peter Zheutin (TarcherPerigee)

Reviewed by Zoe Conrad

##### I’m a big fan of Zheutin’s first book,

*Rescue Road*, which centered on Greg Mahle, the long-haul transporter and owner of Rescue Road



Trips who chauffeured the author’s own dog, Albie, from the South to him and his family in the Northeast. Zheutin

also profiled many of the everyday heroes and volunteers who facilitate this ongoing South/North migration, moving dogs from shelters with high euthanasia rates to new homes.

In his second book, he again addresses the importance of rescue, this time though individual narratives from those who have adopted rescue dogs. All of their stories highlight the dire situations faced by the many thousands of dogs languishing in shelters. The stories also reinforce the widely held belief that “rescue” is definitely a two-way proposition; when asked who rescued whom, the adopters pointed to themselves. Zheutin’s stories of his own two rescues illustrate the impact they can have on the family units as well. Finally, he considers the emotional lives of the animals and how their gratitude binds them even more closely to their adopters.

I, for one, never tire of rescue stories, and these are certainly inspirational. For readers who might not realize how many dogs are killed each day for lack of a home, the book should serve as a wake-up call and will, I fervently hope, cause them to consider adopting a rescue dog today.

##### Chancer: How One Good Boy Saved Another

By Donnie Kanter Winokur

(Grand Harbor Press)

Reviewed by Kim Young

This is a heartwarming story of a childless couple who adopted two babies from Russia. It quickly became clear that one, Iyal, suffered



from fetal alcohol spectrum (FAS) disorder as well as other developmental issues. As he grew, his behavior became

increasing unpredictable, a challenge for the whole family to navigate. Although her husband was skeptical, Winokur wisely sought assistance from 4 Paws for Ability, which trains dogs to assist special-needs children. Into their lives came Chancer, a young Golden Retriever. From the beginning, Chancer’s gentleness and attention comforted the troubled boy. Chancer, who had his work cut out for him, not only brought relief to Iyal, but also helped the family draw back together. Along the way, the story also shines a light on FAS, an under-discussed disorder. This new memoir is both illuminating and poignant.