

finding



George and Dodge

balance



Christine of Green Dog Pet Supply



Patti and Sadie



How their love of animals led these individuals to seek changes in life, bringing more harmony to mind, body and spirit

By Karen Asp

Balance is the buzz word these days. Everybody, it seems, is trying to find balance today, and we're not talking about the kind of balance you get from doing yoga poses (although that's important, too). This is more serious stuff — namely, how you manage all that life is throwing at you.

The reason why we need balance makes sense. "If we're in balance, which I view as natural harmony, we're happier, take better care of ourselves and contribute more positively to those around us," says Kathy Faulstich, fitness professional and yoga instructor in Santa Monica, California.

Turns out, while there are numerous ways to achieve balance, the solution may be at your feet, so to speak. In the following pages, you'll meet three individuals who realized just that: their love for animals helped them find that elusive balance they were lacking. Let their stories warm your heart, tickle your balance bone and, once again, underscore the power of pets to transform lives.

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~ Patti Lawson

HEALTHIER HABITS VIA A DOG

In 2002, Patti Lawson’s life was spinning out of control. Her heart broken from a romance gone bad and her career as a lawyer at a standstill, she sought comfort in ice cream, pizza and chocolate. “Life seemed bleak,” says Patti, who lives in Charleston, West Virginia. “I was also tired of being alone.”

Those, experts say, are red flags that life has slipped out of balance. “Being out of balance is inhibiting because you may find yourself burning out, losing focus and feeling unmotivated to continue,” says Stacia Pierce, life coach and CEO of Ultimate Lifestyle Enterprises in Orlando, Florida. As a result, it becomes difficult to achieve dreams and goals, and as Patti learned, your health can nose-dive.

People had often asked Patti if she had considered adopting a dog, but her answer was always no. As a child, she did have a horse, but a dog? Not only did she work long hours and travel frequently, she was also scared of dogs, having been bitten by one when she was a kid.

Until, that is, she was shopping near a pet store that featured adoptable dogs, and she got the crazy idea to walk inside and look. One of the employees had an adoptee in her arms, and she was so busy that when she saw



Patti, she asked her to hold the dog. “I didn’t know how to hold a baby, let alone a dog,” Patti says. But she acquiesced. However, when Patti attempted to snuggle, the dog pushed Patti away. Ironically, that rebuff resonated with Patti, who notes, “That dog was just like me.”

The staffer encouraged Patti to take the dog home for the night. And before she knew it, Patti found herself driving home with a dog and a crate. The sleepover didn’t go well, as the dog barked and whined all night, so Patti marched her back to the store the next morning. Yet one day later, after not being able to get the dog off her mind, Patti returned to adopt her, naming her Sadie.

That was March of 2003, and after that, Patti’s life did a one-eighty. Although she knew little about dogs, she did know that Sadie required her full-time attention, so she scaled back on work and travel. Eventually, she took almost three years off work and wrote a book called *The Dog Diet*, with Sadie as the impetus for Patti’s newfound passion not only for writing, but for healthier living as well.

She began walking Sadie daily, clocking four miles by day’s end, and revamping her eating habits, mainly ditching the junk food. Instead, Patti began cooking healthy meals, resulting in a 30-pound weight loss, and then became Sadie’s personal chef. Today, Sadie eats Patti’s homemade cooking one week a month and human-grade food that’s delivered frozen to the house the other three weeks.

When Patti looks back at the life she once led, she almost doesn’t recognize herself. “When you take the focus off yourself and have somebody who relies on you 24/7, your outlook changes,” she says. That, by the way, includes her new focus on living in the moment. “Through Sadie, I’ve become profoundly aware of the passing of time,” she says, “and rather than worry about it, I enjoy it.” Although she’s back at work as a lawyer, Patti is currently also working on her next two books.



FINDING EMOTIONAL STABILITY

Building a healthier body is only one facet of finding balance, and among the definitions of balance in Merriam-Webster, you'll find this: "Mental and emotional steadiness." That's no surprise to Kathy. "This steadiness sets the stage for cultivating consciousness around all realms of balance," she says. "As a result, we make better choices for ourselves, our community and environment and are more likely to think through situations."

For George Little of Lake Worth, Florida, that steadiness had eluded him for several years, thanks to a career as a sergeant in the Marine Corps. He had been deployed overseas several times, often in Iraq, and although he retired in 2009, he was — and still is — haunted by the things he saw. "Some days, it's hard to do the little things in life everybody takes for granted, like just getting out of bed," he says.

Dogs had always played a role in George's life, first when he was a kid and later during a marriage when he had a husky whom he adored. But a divorce took the husky away from him, creating a void in his heart.

In June 2012, a friend, who had been secretly looking for a husky for George, called to say she had found one at PetSmart. When George saw the five-year-old husky for the first time, he ran toward him. "I don't know why, but I couldn't get there quick enough," he says. "I knew Dodge was the dog for me." (As an aside, Dodge was the five millionth adopted pet for PetSmart Charities®.)

What George didn't know, though, was how much Dodge would help him find peace. "I was just excited to be getting a husky," he says. "I knew that dogs were therapeutic, but I never expected it from Dodge."

On George's bad days, for instance, when just functioning is tough and his mood is low, Dodge is there to comfort him. "It's like he can sense when I'm having a bad day because he comes up to me, nudges me and stays by my side," George says. "I can then work through the bad feelings and wrap my head around the situation. Without Dodge, life would be 100 times harder."

In fact, George has been so moved by Dodge that he has enrolled Dodge in classes in hopes of training him to be a therapy dog. His ultimate goal? "I want to take Dodge to the V.A. hospital and give the guys there the same happiness he's given me," he says.



● "Without Dodge, life would be 100 times harder."

~ George Little



TOP LEFT: Mike talks to a customer at Green Dog Pet Supply.
BOTTOM RIGHT: Christine wanted the store to offer holistic support for pets' behavioral and nutritional issues.

PLANNING IS KEY

So why do people get out of balance? In Stacia's opinion, because they often don't take time to plan. "Plans bring balance because you have a road map to accomplishing all that you want to get done," she says.

You don't need to tell that to Christine and Mike Mallar, who took a leap of faith in 2004 by opening the first "green" pet store in Portland, Oregon, if not the country. Throughout the years, they had talked about owning a retail store together, as they were unhappy in their current jobs. Christine was working as a dog trainer at a big box store, which eventually prompted them to consider a pet supply store. But what would they sell?

The answer came from Christine's training clients. "I knew there was a demand for safe, sustainable pet supplies and holistic support for behavior and nutritional issues, especially since so many pets are nutritionally out of balance," she says.

Christine and Mike spent long hours researching sustainable, eco-friendly products for pets, amassing a list of green products, until they finally had a workable plan. They crafted the name — Green Dog Pet Supply — and went full speed ahead.

The store opened in August of 2004, and not only does it sell green products for dogs and cats, the physical structure of the store was created from reclaimed and scavenged materials. The business has even allowed the couple to commit more deeply to a greener life. "Because of Green Dog, we've learned how to be even more sustainable in our own lives," Christine says.

Their clients are learning, too, which has been rewarding. "We're not preachy about being green, but we do believe in educating our clients," Christine says. Products in the store, for instance, have signs with information about their green features and about how they benefit both pets and the planet.



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~ Christine Mallar

The biggest bonus, though, has come from the nutritional counseling they do. "When people come to us, their pets are already so physically out of balance," Christine says. Poor nutrition, after all, can start with small problems, such as itchy skin, and then build to bigger issues, such as inflamed feet and serious gastrointestinal problems, making pets and their parents miserable.

More often than not, Green Dog has a solution. "The by-product of helping pets restore balance in their bodies is that their people restore balance in their own lives, which is a beautiful thing to witness," Christine says. "In the end, it's what the store is all about — holistic health for pets, people and the planet."

All of this, of course, probably comes as no surprise to anybody whose life has been touched by an animal. Moral of the story? When life feels like it's spiraling out of control, giving your pet a little extra focus — or adopting one, if you're in the right position — could help you reclaim control and instill calmness in these crazy times. 🐾

