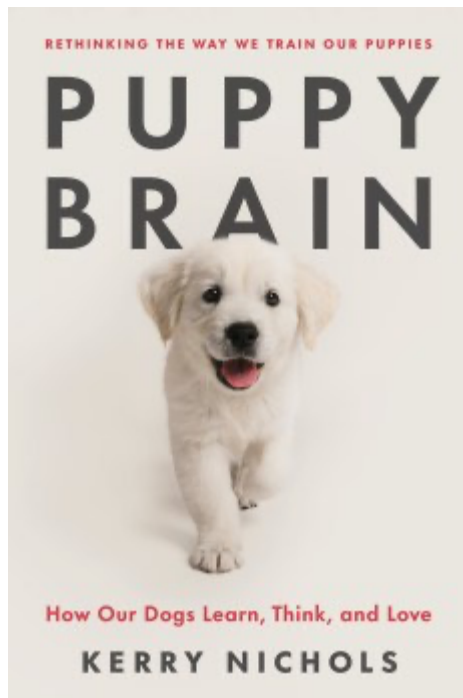


Books: Developing the puppy brain into a dog



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PUBLISHED: April 7, 2024 at 9:09 a.m. | UPDATED: April 7, 2024 at 9:12 a.m.

On the afternoon of March 23, scores of dogs came cavorting across Carmel Beach, chasing one another, grabbing sticks, sniffing seaweed, and splashing in the surf as it surged upon the sand. To them, it may have seemed like a typical Saturday at the shore in the self-proclaimed “Canine Capital of the Country.” Yet there is nothing typical about Dr. Jane Goodall coming to Carmel to celebrate her 90th birthday among animals she loves nearly as much as chimps.

Despite the rain, Goodall patiently greeted dog after dog, many of them rolling on their backs to receive a belly rub from the legendary animal advocate. To their people, it seemed like a blessing. As devoted as she has been to chimpanzees, it was Jane Goodall’s first dog, Rusty, she said, who taught her how to understand the personality, emotions, and intelligence of dogs — and chimps.

In a community renowned for its devotion to dogs, it only makes sense that Kerry Nichols, a writer, educator, and advocate for people and their puppies, who has been raising golden retrievers for 15 years, would come to Carmel, on April 29, to debut her book, “Puppy Brain: How Our Dogs Learn, Think, and Love.”

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Author Kerry Nichols.

It says a lot about the demand for a book that is quickly becoming a best seller some 20 days before publication.

Carmelites and members of neighboring communities throughout the Monterey Peninsula are known for being devoted to their dogs. In fact, one resident, in planning to move cross country to the city by the sea said, “Well we can’t come to Carmel without a dog. It wouldn’t be right.”

Yet love and devotion are only part of the equation required in raising happy, healthy, well-adjusted dogs. We also need to learn how to understand and maximize the puppy brain, says Nichols, recognizing that our dogs have thousands of years of programming behind their decision-making and what fulfills them.

“The heart of the book is changing the way we think about dogs,” she said. “It’s understanding they are a different species, sentient but different. Instead of voicing what we think they might think or want, from a human perspective, we really have to raise them from the perspective of dogs.”

Discovering passion, purpose from a dog

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Nichols was born to a family who never had fewer than three dogs, the first of whom was a golden retriever named “Pancake.” Any time her parents saw a dog on the loose, she says, they pulled over their car, collected the canine and, after a valiant search, either kept the dog or returned him to his people.

Although she grew up devoted to dogs, Nichols didn’t have a vision for raising puppies or for educating and advocating for pups and their people. Enrolled at UCLA, she thought she wanted to be a doctor, until she turned her attention to classes that fascinated her, instead.

When she told her parents she thought she might major in philosophy, they told her they’d support her path to a law degree, which resulted in her becoming one of many lawyers in her family. Nichols commenced from UCLA with a degree in political science.

“I love school, I love learning,” she said. “I have a real heart for people who are discriminated against, particularly on the basis of race. So, I went to Loyola Law School in Los Angeles and imagined I’d work in the nonprofit world, perhaps with a focus on race relations.”

Yet Nichols knew, by the time she graduated from law school, she had the knowledge but not the heart for law. In honor of her degree, she pursued it, for a while.

“After completing an internship at the district attorney’s office,” she said, “I knew I didn’t want to give my life to this field. Even so, I passed the Bar and spent a few years working for a business litigation firm.”

Three years later, Nichols moved to the Central Valley on behalf of her husband’s work, into a house on 3 acres, where she housed many different animals, including horses she dreamed of raising. Yet, it was in losing her 8-year-old golden retriever, Daisy, to cancer, in struggling mightily to find a healthy, ethically bred golden retriever puppy to fill the hole in her heart, that Nichols’ life purpose came into focus.

“A slumbering interest in breeding blossomed into resolve. I grew invigorated with the idea,” she wrote, “of raising healthy, emotionally balanced puppies, of helping others avoid the kind of heartache we had experienced in saying goodbye to Daisy when she should have had many years left.”

Nichols makes it quite clear, in the first sentence of her book, “There is no linear path that one takes from being a lawyer living in Los Angeles to being a dog breeder living in California’s agricultural belt.”

It has been 15 years since Nichols established “Nicholberry Goldens,” a name borrowed from her in-laws’ “Nicholberry Jam,” through which she has raised hundreds of puppies, each of

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which, paired with more research than required by law school, has taught Nichols essential truths that have transformed her perspective on living with dogs.

“The first,” she wrote, “is about myself. I no longer expect myself to know everything or have all the answers. I recognize that new research or my own experiential knowledge will likely affect how I do things in the future. Having said that, there is one thing I don’t see changing, and that’s the need to honor our dogs as dogs.”

Perhaps another, she says, is to “have patience for the dog and grace for yourself.”

On April 29, Kerry Nichols will be in town to present an author talk on “Puppy Brain: How Our Dogs Learn, Think, and Love,” at Lady Somm, Sommelier Roxanne Langer’s destination for wine education and tasting experiences at The Barnyard, Carmel. With a ticket price of \$45 per guest, the event, a fundraiser for Peace of Mind Dog Rescue in Pacific Grove, features winetasting courtesy of Talbott Winery, paired with charcuterie provided by Ami Carmel, and a signed copy of “Puppy Brain,” from Pilgrim’s Way bookstore in Carmel. It also will be available at River House Books in Carmel, at Bookworks in Pacific Grove, and wherever fine books are sold.

If you go

What: “Puppy Brain” Author Event and Fundraiser

Where: Lady Somm at The Barnyard Carmel

When: Monday, April 29, from 5:30 to 8pm

Cost: \$45; to purchase tickets, go to <https://amicarmel.com/events-store/p/set-sail-on-a-literary-voyage-with-puppy-brain>