

Finding the Way to Poodle Town

A California breeder's three-decade love affair with standard poodles continues to promote and raise awareness for this magnificent breed through "friend raising" and fundraising.

by Allison Cain

John Steinbeck, speaking of his standard poodle and constant companion, Charley, said, "A dog is a bond between strangers." This sentiment is likely echoed among most poodle lovers, including breeder Patty Moulthrop of Blue Skies Standard Poodles in Lafayette, California. Patty, a lifelong dog lover, began her relationship with standard poodles in 1980 through a bulletin board notice at her vet's office advertising puppies for sale. Patty says that after living with Ragtime Jazz — one of the puppies from the litter advertised at her vet's office — she couldn't *not* have standard poodles.

By 1983, Patty was on her way to breeding champion and companion poodles that delight anyone who crosses their paths. Patty feels she has been blessed in her breeding program with wonderful temperaments, "pleasing to look at" standard poodles, and the most amazing extended family with which her Blue Skies poodles live. The excitement of ring competition has allowed Patty, throughout the years, to have five multiple all-breed, Best in Show winners as well as the fun and pleasure of more than 100 AKC champions.

Although Patty enjoys raising top-quality litters, she says she couldn't justify breeding poodles when she knew there were poodles in shelters that needed homes. "My passion is poodles — breeding them, raising them, showing them, loving them, and rescuing them." And with that, Patty



Patty Moulthrop spending quality time with friends and her Blue Skies poodle "children and grandchildren" at Poodle Day in Carmel (Courtesy of Lisette and Michael Yamasaki)

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soon found herself passing out cards with her home phone number to animal shelters, veterinarians, groomers, and pet stores. For several years, Patty successfully united countless homeless poodles and poodle mixes with new families, but when the demand began to outweigh her resources, Patty called on a few friends to help out and officially founded NorCal Poodle Rescue in 1985.

Now celebrating its 25th anniversary, NorCal Poodle Rescue continues to be a haven for all poodles and poodle mixes in need in Northern California and Southern Oregon. NorCal’s philosophy is to help poodles while also enriching the lives of the people who adopt them. “It’s such an amazing, win-win situation when you have a really neat poodle and you find a family that really wants this poodle,” says Patty. “When you put them together, you see the happiness on both sides.”

NorCal’s current president, Sue Cooper, attributes the organization’s strong foundation to Patty, its founder and chairperson, and its success to all the dedicated volunteers who have been involved throughout the years. “We have a wonderful group of volunteers who put in so much effort on so many different levels,” Cooper says. “Our critical success factors are the people within the organization, the people who help us. We’ve been blessed with just having wonderful people around us.”

Anyone familiar with a volunteer organization knows about the long hours and hard work necessary to help it reach its goals, but the hours are particularly long and the work hard in breed rescues. Cooper, who is no stranger to long hours spent caring for animals, jokes that she works more now than when she was employed full time. “I may not be at my desk doing poodle things all day, but I’m at



Making a splash at Carmel Beach during Poodle Day

the kennel evaluating, training, and walking, or I'm at the vet, the shelter, or someone's home conducting an adoption interview. It really is a full-time — and extremely fulfilling — job.”

To run as efficiently and smoothly as possible, NorCal implemented a weekly volunteer rotation

schedule in which volunteers take turns managing a telephone hotline and the rescue's website — a repository for available dogs, general poodle information and resources, adoption forms, and workshops and events.

Last year, NorCal found homes for more than 100 poodles, and in July, the organization was presented with a special challenge. Twenty-four miniature and toy poodles, nine of which were less than a year old, were signed over to the Solano County Animal Shelter when a local, elderly breeder passed away. NorCal



Enjoying cocktails and conversation at the Cypress Inn



A princess and her poodle march during the parade at the Crossroads Shopping Center

representatives contacted the shelter and committed to taking all the dogs, regardless of their condition. Volunteers took the poodles into custody and rallied — working throughout the weekend — to provide immediate grooming and medical care to the seriously neglected poodles and begin placing them in temporary homes. The poodles had not been groomed, vaccinated, or spayed or neutered, many of them had

worms, and they were not socialized. “Despite this, the dogs were very sweet,” Cooper says. NorCal partnered with two other local rescues and presently, only two of the twenty-four dogs remain in foster care.

Situations like these demonstrate the importance of resources in breed rescue. Although volunteers are the backbone of NorCal, the organization relies heavily on financial contributions from its supporters and poodle friends to continue caring for poodles until they are placed with loving families. To help with operating expenses, NorCal charges nominal adoption fees, but it also raises funds through special events such as an annual obedience workshop in September and an annual holiday luncheon. This year, however, friends of NorCal Poodle Rescue and owners of two Blue Skies standard poodles, Sue and Don Rose, organized what most surely ranks as NorCal’s major fundraiser to date — Poodle Day.

“When we first moved to Carmel, there were several black standard poodles in the Cypress Inn all the time, so to me, Carmel was kind-of like ‘poodle town,’” says Sue Rose. “And because it’s such a great town and dogs can go almost everywhere, I thought it would be nice if we had just one day for poodles where the whole day focused around the actual breed but wasn’t a show — just a fun day.”

This inaugural event comprised a full day of poodle fun and began at the Crossroads Shopping Center in Carmel, California — magnificent poodle flag flying overhead. The parade was the starting event where 240 poodles and poodle mixes, along with their human companions, were announced. Some poodles came dressed as flowers,

Flying High

During the Poodle Day festivities, Joan, a Carmel resident, passed through the Crossroads Shopping Center during her daily walk. This day, however, Joan made the walk without her beloved toy poodle that had died the week before. Seeing the poodle flag flying at high mast at Crossroads, a curious Joan stopped to admire a beautiful, red toy poodle in the arms of a Norcal Poodle Rescue volunteer. Upon meeting Rosebud — who was, in fact, one of the twenty-four poodles rescued from the Solano County Animal Shelter — Joan fell in love and applied to adopt her. After an interview and home visit with Norcal volunteers, Rosebud went to live with her new companion, and Joan once again strolls the streets of Carmel with her beloved toy poodle.



Norcal Poodle Rescue President Sue Cooper with Rosebud

cowboys, princesses, and ladybugs and sported ascots, karate jackets, Mohawks, and hair dye to compete for prizes and recognition in NorCal's costume and tricks contests, but most showed off their natural

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looks and had great fun marching in the parade. Twenty-six Blue Skies standard poodles, ranging from one to fourteen years old, attended the event and wore blue, sky-printed bandanas as a tribute to Patty Moulthrop.

After the parade, the group headed to Carmel Beach for a wet and fun afternoon during organized play and later dusted off the sand to attend poodle cocktail parties at the Cypress Inn and Forge in the Forest in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California. The poodles lounged as their human companions gathered for drinks and conversation, much like Steinbeck and Charley, along with Henry Miller and Francis Whitaker, did decades ago.

Visit www.poodleday.com for more information about Poodle Day and to secure your reservation for this year's event on October 1. To learn how to help poodles and poodle mixes in need, visit NorCal Poodle Rescue's website (www.norcalpoodlrescue.net) or become a Facebook fan.

Allison Cain is a writer and editor who lives in Oakland, California, with her partner, their sassy, three-year-old standard poodle, Aris Dixie Belle's Orange Blossom, and Dixie's three guinea pigs: Hedwig, Hazel, and Hilde.

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