



Rika Mead and Bindi



I clearly recall my first encounter with a warm, inquisitive nose and a furry nape – and the feeling of connection, well-being and deep joy that I felt upon that meeting. That memory has driven my life-long fascination (some might term it obsession) with dogs. Except for a few periods when I've been traveling or living outside the US, I've been owned by dogs. Here's some background.

Me: I've lived in Denver, CO for the past 25 years. I moved here from Manhattan, NY, which was enough of a culture shock to take the head off a less seasoned human. I do Organizational Effectiveness work, which means strategic planning, cultural change management, process improvement & communications (including conflict management, team building & coaching).

My involvement with dogs is a vital adjunct

to my full life. When I came to Colorado, I became involved with Terrier Rescue by accident, as so many good matches are. I then began fostering, transporting, doing home checks and placing dogs who had been relinquished or rescued from puppy mills (don't even ask ...). At that point, my obsession had a laser focus: Terriers. I've been owned by Airedales, Welshes, Lakelands, Wire Foxes (WFT) and, most recently, a Cairn.

Bindi: After I lost one of my WFTs, Bendel, to cancer that left me with Baxter, almost 15. I asked Baxter to stay with me until I could find another WFT to help heal my broken heart. There were none in the rescue queue. One day, I had lunch with a friend who works at Denver Dumb Friend's League. She arrived excited about a puppy she'd met in the car park on her way to lunch. This dog was being relinquished because she was too active (yep, an 8-month old Cairn puppy – hard to imagine). I told my friend that I was looking for an older male WFT and I'd never had a girl before. She told me to go home, grab





Baxter & come meet this special little girl. So, I did. And am I glad. She has a sweet disposition (even if she did climb all over Baxter, who looked at me and said, "Really???") and was eager to please. Naturally, we brought her home. I have a tradition of naming my dogs "B" names and hers became Bindi (both from the charming and resilient Bindi Irwin, daughter to Steve, the Crocodile Hunter and from the small red powder dot that married Hindi women put on their foreheads in honor of Hindi friends). Baxter taught her the house rules (the importance of the dog door, how to chase squirrels, protect the perimeter and eat popcorn). True to his word, he stayed with us for six months before succumbing to cancer himself.

Us Two: After Baxie died, Bindi & I bonded in a new way. I started noticing how beautifully she interacted with the people, dogs and kids that we met along our walks. I'd always wanted to do therapy work but (this is hard for me to admit) the WFTs I'd had were not suited to that work, with their independent, feisty and protective characters. I began to wonder if I had finally lucked into that most rare of life circumstances: the perfect dog and the leisure to work with her (by that time, I'd retired from full-time work and had my own consulting practice). We started with basic obedience then through intermediate and advanced, culminating in AKC's Good Canine Citizen certification. I was serving on an Advisory Board for the University of Denver's University College, where I was approached about an opportunity to help enhance the volunteer program for Denver Pet Partners. Although the project itself was shelved, I had the great good fortune to meet Diana McQuarrie, who helped me navigate the process to become registered. Bindi passed her tests with hardly a blip, while I struggled to pass my own portion of the written test. Yoicks, was that challenging. I was totally impressed by the dedication, talent and support of the testing group, which confirmed my commitment to DPP, as has being buddied with Susan Horecki, working with Mandy Bell and so many other amazing people. I volunteer whenever I can to contribute, as I've received so much from them. Also through that association, Bindi and I obtained our R.E.A.D. certification, which we use at the Douglas County Library near us. We also work with the Life Care Center of Littleton, where Bindi is a small package of comfort and serenity to her many fans. In December, we were able to work at Denver International Airport through United Airline's pet comfort program – that was fantastic!



Us Three: In October, I was contacted by a friend who knew of a small Terrier mix found running in a park – no identification, very skittish and wild. This kind couple had managed to snag the wee chap and taken him to the Max Fund for assessment. Not only was he intact, but had ribs caved in from a boot kick and healing cigarette burns around his neck. He was matted and miserable. The couple didn't want to put him into the rescue system, so reached



out to my friend. I was in a position to underwrite his rehab, so took him on: neutering, microchipping, grooming, vet treatment, training. It has been a wonderful journey to watch, as he comes into his own style and confidence.

He's healed, although will always walk with a little hop to compensate for the irregular rib fracture mending and is playing with Bindi nicely. We're still working on his manners and overall social interaction, but he's a loving pup and is even warming to men (he wouldn't get near one when he first came to us). Need I say that he is, what we call in rescue, a "failed foster?" He's not going anywhere, as this is his forever home. His name is Baku (it's the capital of Azerbaijan) and he loves hearing it, as its usage is frequently associated with treats.

Us All: I'm still learning about Baku's strengths, so don't yet know what his job is. It's possible that he too, could become a therapy dog, although he'll have to overcome a bunch of obstacles to get there. But Bindi did – and with flair. Isn't that what life is about, anyway?