



# Respectfully, Riggs

*A Real Dog Writes*

*by Riggs Rideout with Sandy Rideout*

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The author has changed names and physical characteristics and altered or combined some events in order to preserve the anonymity of certain people in this story ... If I didn't, I'd probably get in trouble again and I'm in enough trouble already!



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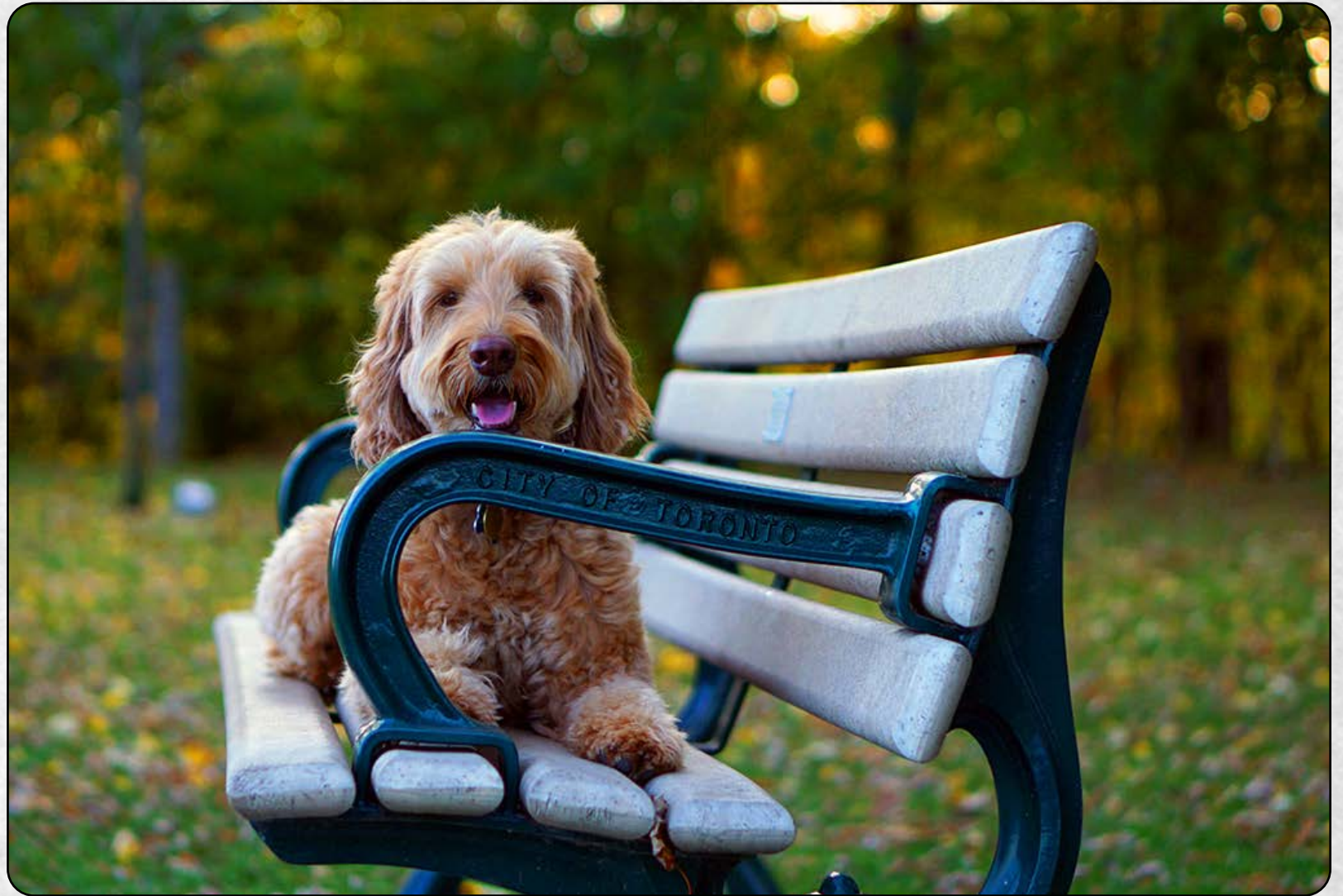
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# Dear Readers,

**M**y name is Riggs Rideout, and I'm a Goldendoodle living in Toronto, Canada. As you've probably guessed, I'm no ordinary dog. In fact, I'm a part-time model, and a full-time character. In my youth, I gained a reputation for being a bit of a bad boy. Meanwhile, my owner, AKA "Mom," gained a rep for being an inept leader and a drama queen. Despite all that, we eventually came to a place of thoroughly bonded bliss. It took time; it took work; and it took an unwavering faith in the human-dog connection that's served both our species for millennia. Today I'd go so far as to say we're perfect together. At least, we would be without Mabel, my so-called "sister." Three's a crowd.



*Dog of Letters*

Over time I've mellowed, and Mom has, too. She gives me freedom to pursue my various passions, one of which happens to be a gorgeous and talented Goldendoodle named Rosalee. Alas, the course of true love never did run smooth, even for a remarkable dog like me. As you'll see in the coming pages, Rosalee's heart has proven difficult to win. I've gathered correspondence chronicling my infatuation, my ambitious and increasingly desperate attempts to impress her, and my ultimate triumph over despair.



I'm becoming an enlightened dog, now. A dog of letters. Who needs earthly pleasures like elusive females when you've got peace on a leash? Not me. I've transcended all that.

Well, mostly.

My hope for this short collection is that it will edify, amuse and inspire. Perhaps when faced with similar challenges in your own life, you'll stop and ask yourself, "What would Riggs do?" In most cases, that's your cue to do exactly the opposite. However, I'm just getting started on my journey and will eventually become the role model you need. Stay tuned!

Respectfully,  
Riggs



*The perfect foil*





Dear Rosalee,

It's me, Riggs. I just wanted to apologize for making inappropriate advances throughout our breeder's annual reunion event. I'm sorry you had to sit in a chair for most of the day to avoid me. I couldn't help myself. You're so cute and also very talented, what with your therapy dog skills. In fact, you're the whole package.

I know I embarrassed you. All I can say is that I've met a lot of beauties and no one has ever inspired the passion in me that you did.

I'm not always a clown, Rosalee. You underestimate me, and I intend to prove it to you.

Respectfully,  
Riggs



# Dear Tim,

I need some fatherly advice from my human boyfriend. I got off on the wrong paw with a girl and now she's playing hard to get. Rosalee's the prettiest thing, with dyed blue ears and curves to die for. If that weren't enough, she a trained therapy dog who visits shelters and hospitals.

In short, she's way out of my league, but when has that ever stopped a guy? I mean, look at you and Mom.

Kidding. Kidding.

Trust me, I know Mom's no picnic; I've gotta live with her 24/7. Sometimes I've wondered if you only stick around because of me. You and I have had this unshakeable bond since my first day home, when you rolled on the





lawn with me trying to impress Mom; it worked, by the way.

Every time you annoy Mom, which is more often than you know, you manage to romance her back. So, tell me, dog to dog... How do I win Rosalee's heart? She's aware of my rep from that slanderous tell-all Mom wrote—the one that made me look too bad and you look too good. I'm just saying whatever you're doing to manage Mom, it's genius.

“ she's way out of my league, but when has that ever stopped a guy? ”

Maybe I should start speaking up for myself. Good looks only take you so far in life, and I am a dog with big opinions. I could be a thought leader. Then Rosie would turn to putty in my paws.

Now that I think about it, I could teach you a thing or two, Tim. Follow my lead and maybe my dreams will come true and you'll move in with us. We can man-cave together in the garage. Mom's probably worried I'll transfer allegiance to you, and it's a valid concern considering you let me jump on you and nip you. Unlike some people, you know what true love looks like and don't get hung up on manners.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





Dear Rosalee,

It's Riggs again. I hope you don't mind if I write now and then. You seem like the kind of girl who'd like to be wooed the old-fashioned way, through letters. You've inspired me to do more with my life, Rosie, and I'm quite sure that in time, you'll see I'm perfect for you.

Forgive the hard sell. I'm not a subtle dog, which you already know. Just bear with me, darling, and prepare to be blown away by my talents and chutzpah.

Respectfully,  
Riggs



# Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Riggs Rideout, and I'm a member of your canine constituency. Perhaps my reputation precedes me. I am a rising dog model with lofty ambitions.

I'm proud of my work but, like you, I want to avoid being defined by my family heritage and sex appeal. To that end, I have begun publicly sharing my thoughts on somewhat controversial topics. I don't shy away from the tough issues, Mr. Trudeau. I'm more than a pretty face.



*Guts and Glamor*

No doubt you'll agree we have much in common. For starters, we both have great hair. We're fit, charming and witty. And we share an appreciation of quality women. I love how you exploit the selfie, by the way.

Initially I underestimated you, as I'm sure many do. After that episode in the House of Commons last year, however, I realized you're my kind of guy. You dropped the F-bomb, elbowed a lady and pushed a guy around. In the dog world, we call that "reactive." I think it was just a tempest in the colonial teapot and you offered five too many apologies. What's a bit of shoving and swearing in the political dog park?

It's okay to be an ass now and then, Prime Minister. A slight edge might even enhance your appeal. My advice is to own your prey drive and stop wasting energy on damage control.



That said, I know it's rough when your reputation takes a hit. It took me a full year to recover from a ridiculous exposé. I guess we're both victims of "Tall Poppy" syndrome. Canadians don't like people to get too big for their britches, even when they're as hot as we are.

Anyway, if you can turn things around, I can, too. Which brings me to the point of this letter. I share your commitment to public service, but as a dog my options are limited. I was hoping we could work together to change that. Specifically, I would like you to consider endorsing me to run for office. As you know, Canadians place high value on their pets. Indeed, spending on pets is expected to reach \$8 Billion by 2018. Dogs aren't just dogs anymore, Prime Minister: they're family. And families vote. I have my paw on the pulse of canine Canadian citizens. If elected, I'd bring the dog lens to all public policy.

“ If elected, I'd bring the dog lens to all public policy. ”

I've always believed it's important to speak truth to power, Mr. Trudeau. To that end, I need to say that you've made a poor choice in retaining a Portuguese Water Dog to enhance your image. It was a safe bet—something that obviously worked for the Obamas. Here in Canada, however, doodles are the smarter decision. We're sunny, just like you! Porties tend to be high energy and what you really need right now is Mr. Chill. That, Prime Minister, is me. I'm mature and seasoned. While I like to chase a rabbit or two, I know how to scale back and focus.

Together, I believe we could add both sizzle and steak to the global stage. World leaders have yet to exploit the dog agenda fully. I urge you to be the first. I have a gorgeous ex-pat almost-girlfriend who'd love to double-date with you and Sophie.

Picture us together on the cover of People. Then reach out to let me know how I, Citizen Canine, can best serve my country.

Respectfully,  
Riggs

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*Perpetual paparazzi*



Dear Rosalee,

I have yet to hear from you, but I haven't given up. On the contrary, your complete and utter disdain has made me dig deep and think about how I can make a difference in the world.

I plan to break new ground for our entire species. I'm aiming high and jumping in with all four paws.

Unless you've already changed your mind and want me to accept me as I am, in which case I'll just go for a nice run and you know... be a dog.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





# Dear Dr. Melody Jackson,

I was fascinated to learn about the technology you're spearheading that will allow dogs to "talk." If I've got this right, you're installing brain impulse sensors into a vest that dogs can activate by tugging or poking and communicate audibly or even by text.

This is cool stuff. Very cool, indeed. I read that you're aiming "to bypass the human-canine communication divide." That's a goal we share.

I can see why you're targeting your product to service dogs, including search and rescue, bomb detection and arson dogs. Of course, you'd want to make your name with the superheroes of the dog world. Dogs like those get great press, and you are running a business.

But there's more to life than saving lives, Dr. Jackson. There's also entertainment, and that's where I come in. I assume your product will ultimately be available for dogs with more prosaic aspirations. If so, you'll need dogs to pilot the device in the showbiz arena, and I'd





like to raise my paw.

As you can see, I've found my own way to bypass the human-dog communication divide. I have a small but dedicated following, I look great in vests, and I know how to work a photo op. Think about what I could do for your image.

“ I could do the talk show circuit like I've always wanted. Plus, the girl I'm after would be awestruck ”

Mind you, the idea of actually talking worries the hell out of me. I'm a straight shooter, you see, and my mom is always asking rhetorical questions, like: "Do you smell something funny?" "Do you like Tim better than me?" "Were you a good boy for the walker today?" "Do I look fat in this?" Normally I just waggle my eyebrows in response and I'm off the hook.

Now, imagine if she hears what I really think. I mean, I love her, but I'm not one of those sweet Disney dogs. I have attitude. In the street, I'd be dropping F-bombs right, left and center. That stupid terrier I hate two doors down would get an earful.

I foresee trouble getting up to speed with your device, but I'm still willing to give it a spin. If it worked out, it would be a huge asset to my career. I could do the talk show circuit like I've always wanted. Plus, the girl I'm after would be awestruck by my bon mots.

So please tell me how I can help you bring this technology to market. I'll end on a word of caution, however. Your product should come with a warning label for dog owners: Be careful what you wish for. What dogs have to say may not be exactly what their owners want to hear.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





Dear Rosalee,

When I get my talking dog vest, I am going to recite poetry under your window. Then I'm going to backcomb my fur and sing sexy "hair band" rock ballads.

I feel alive with possibilities, Rosie. Thanks for waking me up to my potential.

Respectfully,  
Riggs







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Respectfully,  
Riggs



# Dear Cesar Millan,

I've followed your career with interest and admire your commitment to dog welfare. You're a big presence in a small package and I find that compelling. I have tall aspirations myself.

That said, we don't see eye to eye on everything and I'm actually relieved that my mom doesn't have the wherewithal to implement your tactics. That poking thing you do would be seriously annoying. And your trademark little kick would cause Mom to trip and fall. She's not exactly graceful.

What we can agree on 110 per cent is your new project with Amazon to bring audiobooks to dogs. It's nothing short of brilliant!

As you've stated, dogs can get anxious and bored when home alone. Even I sometimes pine when Mom's at work. The neighbors told her that I sit on the couch and yell at passing dogs. For the record, Mabel yells more often and louder but the neighbors don't know one bark from another.

If I had audiobooks to pass the time, it would be a win-win for everyone. Research says the majority of dogs who listened to audiobooks were calmer. "It's the consistency of a tone that allows the dog to stay in that (relaxed) frame of mind," you said. "It's why meditation works."

That sounds about right to me but I realize I'm ahead of the canine curve in this regard. Mom is always playing audiobooks and lectures at home. Her recent addiction to self-help, meditation and personal



*Books by dogs for dogs*



transformation audios is taking us places I never imagined.

Your new product line is a great way to tap into wasted canine brain capital. There's simply no downside. My only complaint is with the list of audiobooks you've supposedly "curated" for Amazon. I see that you're including no-brainer dog-friendly titles like A Dog's Purpose and The Art of Racing in the Rain. These are great reads but I think you've got the perspective all wrong. I know my purpose and I don't need human authors to tell me. As for Pride and Prejudice... Really? Perhaps your true target market is gullible ladies.

If you're serious about helping dogs, what you really need is a line of audiobooks for dogs by dogs. Yes, those are few and far between, but I'm busily developing my own imprint to fill the niche. I have a lot to say, and with the new talking dog technology, I'll have a way to say it. My dulcet tones will be music to the ears of anxious dogs around the world.

So, let's talk, Mr. Millan. I know pit bulls are your breed of choice, but they seem like the wrong branding for this sort of product. You need a face that's intelligent, yet unassuming. You need bushy eyebrows that waggle independently. Imagine me in a monocle and then reach out. I'm listening.

Respectfully,  
Riggs



Dear Rosalee,

I've got so many irons in the fire  
I can hardly keep track anymore.  
I'm running myself ragged and it's  
time to slow down and smell the  
roadkill.

In my effort to achieve big things  
and impress you I sometimes  
forget who I really am. That said,  
I'm pretty pleased with whoever  
I'm becoming. You probably  
won't even recognize the new  
Riggs.

Still hoping to visit you, but I'm  
waiting for some deals to come  
through. Get yourself a nice  
dress, honey, because I see red  
carpets and galas in our future.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





# Dear Academics,

I can't help but note that more and more of you are becoming obsessed with all things canine. Dog cognition centers are springing up at colleges across North America and Europe. Some of the best human minds are hooked on studying canine minds.

About that study... the one where you put Golden Retrievers and Border Collies into MRI machines to watch their brains lit up when people sweet-talked them. Those breeds don't represent my species as a whole, you know. They're the brainiacs and pleasers of the dog kingdom. The goodie-four-paws.

Anyway, if you're that desperate to know what's going on in our brains, knock yourselves out. Who am I to question why you're putting so many advanced degrees into analyzing the simple and beautiful human-canine bond?



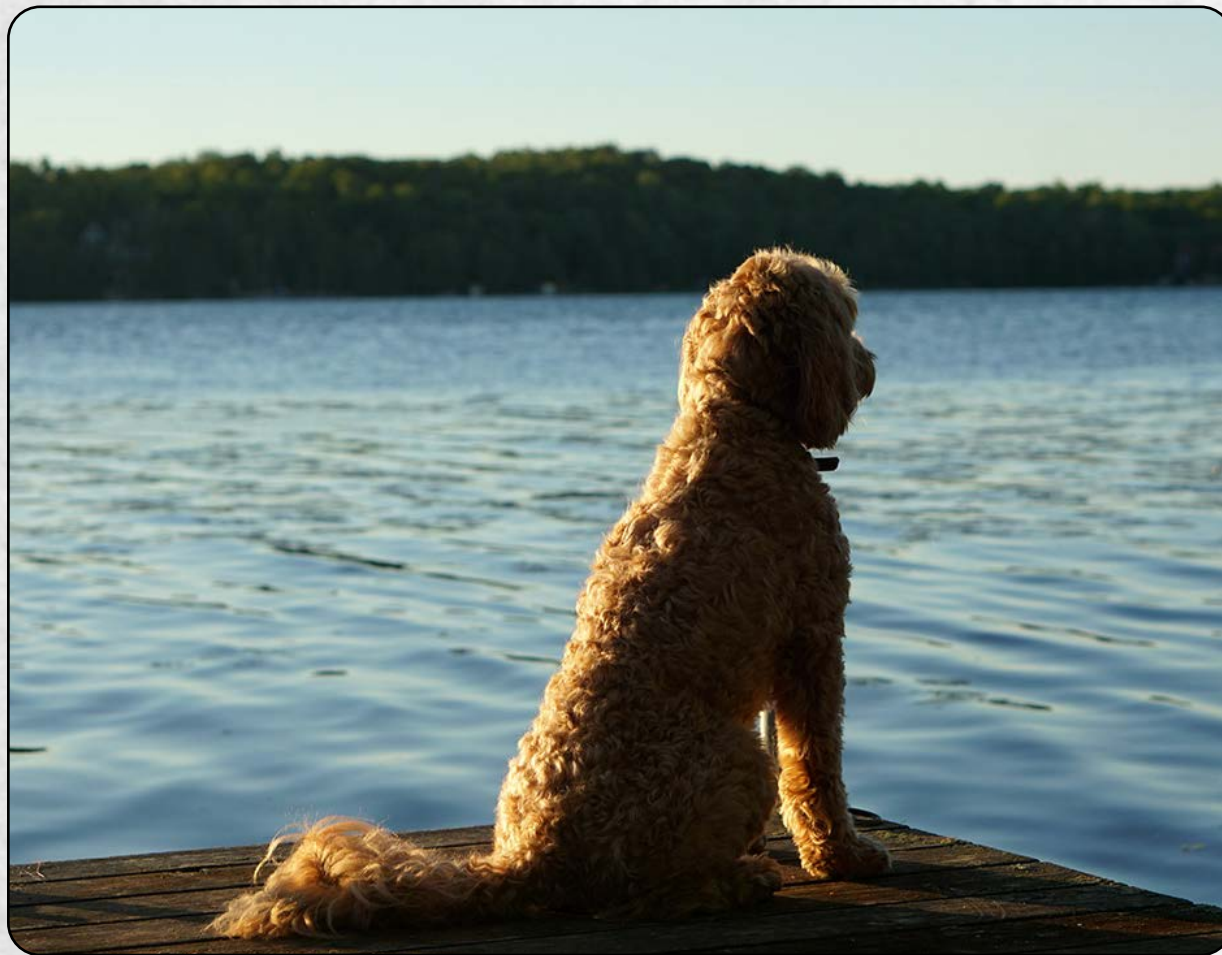


Oh right, I'm Riggs Rideout, Dog Model and professional thinker. It's my job to question.

So then I will ask: Does it really matter how our brains light up? Does it matter how we react to your crazy little laboratory schemes and games? Can't you just accept that our mission in life is to look at you adoringly, sleep by your bedside, and follow you like a shadow?

Sometimes I wonder if you scholars just find it impossible to believe we could like you that much. I know that was a problem for my mom initially. Rightly or wrongly (ahem, rightly), she felt unworthy of my devotion.

You see, it's one of those things that just is. You'll never be able to research to the bottom of it. The human-dog bond is bigger than both of us, and you can't quantify it with your clanging machines.



*What does it all mean?*

Therefore, may I be so bold as to suggest you put those collective PhD's to work in solving real problems in the world? Then, after a hard day's work in the lab, just head home to your own dog and bask in reflected glory. That's how the magic works best.

For the record, you couldn't pay me to lie perfectly still in an MRI machine for 15 minutes.

Or, maybe you could. Hire me a limo to visit my ladylove, Rosalee, and I'll let you take a peek inside my brain. I guarantee you'll be astounded by what you find there.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





Dear Rosalee,

I'm really beside myself that you won't acknowledge me in any way. I know you're busy being a therapy dog and bringing smiles to your community. But still.

It saddens me that I'll never be able to join you in ministering to those in need. That's not my gift. Lately, it seems that I keep running into all the things I'm not. I'm not a bomb dog, for example, or a search and rescue dog, or an arson dog. Sometimes I worry that being an entertainer won't be enough. I can tell you I'm a better dog than I was when you met me, though, and in my humble opinion, all dogs are therapy dogs. My mom would be lost without me. She says so herself.

Today our situation might feel like Lady and the Tramp, but you know how it goes in movies and songs: the bad boy always wins. Come down from your ivory tower and hit the trails with me, because... Rosie, tramps like us, baby were born to run.

Respectfully,  
Riggs



# Dear Dr. Stanley Coren,

I would like to express concern about your recent article in Psychology Today: “Don’t Hug the Dog! – New data shows that hugging your dog increases its stress and anxiety levels.”

I’m aware of your reputation Dr. Coren. You’ve written a lot of books and articles about dogs, and seem to be highly regarded as an expert. Normally, I’d hesitate to take issue with your views, but your article has raised anxiety levels around my house. My owner, AKA “Mom,” is hugging me less and when she does, she’s scrutinizing me for the signs of stress you identified, such as yawning, looking away, lip-licking and whale eye.

And because she’s staring at me—probing, evaluating, over-analyzing—of course, I yawn and avert my eyes. So now she’s wracked with self-doubt: Has she been forcing herself on me all along? Has she missed the signs? Have I always hated the hug?

In other words, because of your article, she’s second guessing and I’m not getting the affection I need. We’re not “us” anymore.

Now, Mom is not a natural hugger. She comes from a long line of chilly stiff-upper-lip types. In fact, that’s the key to how I transformed her entire life: I provide an outlet for decades of backed-up hugs, and have likely prevented her from detonating one day.

Has it always been easy to be on the receiving end of a hug-fest? No. I am not a demonstrative dog, and rarely waste a wag on the undeserving. As a pup, Mom’s sloppy affection got in the way of important things, like chasing and pinning the cat. At maturity, however, I began to see the upside of this hugging business. Granting permission to squeeze got me a free pass onto the couch, for starters. I used to play dead as she hauled me aboard so she wouldn’t know I liked it. Now, I have to compete with my “little sister,” Mabel, and it’s a free-for-all.



*Does it look like I'm suffering?*



We live in a cold climate, Dr. Coren, and a couch cuddle is hardly a punishment. Mom is well-padded and therefore preferable to the floor. Plus, she understands reciprocity: before she locks me down and falls asleep, she offers a decent amount of patting, or “forehug.” If she tries cutting it short, I let her know she’s not done with paw twitches. Inevitably, I slip into sweet dreams of rabbit-chasing, sometimes waking Mom up with yips. Other times, she wakes me with her snoring (don’t tell her I told you).

In short, hugging works for us. So I would like to inquire, respectfully, about your research methodology. What dogs did you survey in your research? Terriers? Corgis? Dogs-with-jobs types? And who was doing the hugging? Owners, strangers, or unpredictable small humans? And by what means did you gather input from dogs?

I know dogs are as different as snowflakes. All I can tell you is that I, Riggs Rideout (a dog model of some repute), rarely turn down a hug. I don’t just endure it, I solicit it. Although I welcome hugs from a variety of people, including children, I will agree that strangers should use common sense, even with a calm doodle like me. Normally, I insist on a few dates and a whole lot of head scratching before permitting a home run.

In closing, Dr. Coren, I want you to know I am available as a consultant in your future research. I can’t resist mentioning that many years ago, Mom read your book *Why We Love the Dogs We Do*. That’s the one with the personality test telling humans which breed of dog suits them. She recalls that the Beagle came up as her ideal match. Not to disparage you—or Beagles for that matter—but it’s pretty obvious that a doodle is her perfect partner.

Is it possible you have a purebred bias? I don’t want to start a flame war, here. Rather, I’d like to encourage you to go and give your dog—whatever the breed—a great big hug. Don’t stare or pester him/her with questions. Sometimes, a yawn is just a yawn.

Respectfully,  
Riggs



*Still not suffering*





Dear Rosalee,

I'm in trouble. I wanted to write personally so that you don't have to find out about it on social media. Mom is shameless about posting these things. Is nothing private anymore?

This morning, I busted through the screen door. It was no big deal, maybe a \$30 repair, but Mom was not pleased. She should appreciate that I was trying to keep the yard safe from raccoons. I was quite sure I heard one, and when it comes to those striped varmints I don't mess around.

In my opinion, a show of strength is never wasted. I hope you will see this as a minor setback in my personal growth, and perhaps even as proof that I am capable of taking care of you.

I wonder if your therapy dog suitors can say the same. They've gotta be beta dogs—the type that would try to “reason” with raccoons.

That is not what you need. You need a door-busting alpha like me who still has the finesse to mix with the power players of the world.

Respectfully,  
Riggs



# Dear Grandma,

I'm getting discouraged that all my efforts to win Rosalee are failing. I've been working my butt off trying to get some profile in the world and no one calls me back.

Am I a dog ahead of my time? Or should I just choose another girl—a girl who will accept me as I really am?

You're that kind of girl, Grandma. You know all my faults and you still accept me. That's why I adore you. You think it's because of your house and your yard and your cottage. Really, it's because you never get worked up about my exploits. Usually you laugh, which is the correct response to most situations.

You're a calm, classy lady, and a natural dog leader. If you don't mind my asking... what happened with Mom? Does she take after Grampa?

Respectfully,  
Riggs



*Leader of the pack*



# Dear Rosalee,



I've been MIA for a while on family vacation. I hope you've missed me, at least a little.

My time has been well spent running on the trails and chilling by the lake. Every afternoon we meditate. Well, all except Mabel who is not interested in becoming enlightened. Mabel is mainly interested in eating. Yesterday she ate twenty bucks worth of high-end baked goods, including the bag, while Mom was unloading the car at Grandma's. It was pouring rain and Mom had to sit in wet cookie crumbs the rest of the way home. She swore a lot, and Grandma glowered, as she bought those cookies for her ladies' lunch. The positive effects of meditation wore off fast.

I'm feeling kind of down, myself. First, I got a bit "poodled" in my last groom and we all know that whiskers make the man. Second, I got bitten by a bug and my eye swelled up. And last, I got half the blood sucked out of me by a tick. These things take a guy down a notch. But I heard you rolled in something dead and my heart totally sang. We are truly made for each other and I knew it was just a matter of time before you saw that, too. Keep up the good work, my love.

## Respectfully, Riggs





# Dear Doggie Day Care Lady,



Please accept my sincerest apology and honor my request to return to your establishment.

As you know, I was away much of the summer at our country estate where I was off-leash and running the trails. I chased ducks and chipmunks and even a beaver. I'm healthy, fit, and more attached to Mom than ever for making the summer all a dog's life should be.

Needless to say, re-entry into normal life—where Mom works and fobs Mabel and me off on people like you—is an adjustment. I found it downright depressing to be stuck in a big concrete box with all those dogs again after weeks of freedom. It's unnatural.

Don't get me wrong: you run a fine facility and I have the utmost respect for you. The problem is your clientele. I don't

understand how these dogs enjoy milling about in small quarters all day. They must be simple-minded—not complex thought-leaders like me. I tried to like them; some of them I even liked too much. But mostly they annoyed me and I couldn't help showing that.

We both know that the real problem was Mabel. I heard you tell Mom, "Riggs wasn't that bad. At least he listens."

Mom is upset again. She's wringing her hands and lamenting that she raised bad dogs. Worse, she blames me for Mabel's behavior, when Mabel is clearly old enough to make her own decisions about her conduct in polite company.

"We were away too long," Mom said. "They went feral."



To be honest, Mom went feral too. She should just accept that city life is not for folks like us. People are not meant to work in cubicles, like she does. And I would put forward that dogs are not meant to be confined with a bunch of canine colleagues not of their own choosing. According to evolution, we should be on the trails all day and singing songs round the campfire at night. I can't be a gentleman all of the time. It's too much pressure.

Still, I'd like to make it right with you for Mom's sake. After she pulled the drama queen act, she sedated herself with high doses of chocolate and TV and refused to let us on the couch. Hugs were in short supply.

I know she'll get over her embarrassment; she always does. But if you give us another chance, I promise to follow you around like a robot and gaze at you with utter devotion. You used to say I was special—one of your favorites. Don't throw all that away because of one bad day. I've left my wolf ways behind now and can become "doggie day care material" once more. Let me prove it to you.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





# Dear Rosalee,

In full disclosure, I've had a serious setback on the road to enlightenment. The less you know about it, the better. All I can say is that personal transformation is a lifelong journey for most of us.

A trainer once told Mom: "Forgive yourself, forgive the dog, and remember tomorrow's another day." Well, I forgive myself and I forgive my human for letting me run wild all summer. I suspect I'm in for a lot of obedience drills and leadership posturing.

I'll bounce back, Rosie, so don't worry. Remember... where there's no conflict, there's no story.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





# Dear Dog Walker,



Have I ever mentioned that you're the absolute best? You saw the potential in me long before Mom did. I remember so well the day you told her I'd be "a great dog" by age two. That was when Mom was still calling me "unaffectionate and cold," whereas I was actually just discriminating. There was only so much affection to go around back then, and I didn't want to waste it on her.

Times have changed, of course. Whether I like it or not, I have become quite affectionate and despite my earlier misperception, there is plenty of love to go around. Seems like every day I have more to give, and I'm constantly stopping people on the street to share the overflow.

But I don't have to sell you on me, Abby, because your prediction came true: I am a great dog. Some of the credit goes to you because I'm in your capable hands on many of the days Mom works. You're punctual, upbeat and consistent,

and I like that in a handler. What I like even more is that you are easily distracted. Most of the time you're so busy trying to make sure Mabel isn't eating poop you don't notice me rolling on dead fish. With six dogs in your pack, it's not surprising I get away with indiscretions.

It's a relief to cut loose with you, Abby, because Mom's not the pushover she used to be. I care about pleasing her more than you. No offence. We're casual fun buddies, you and I, whereas she's my meal ticket.

Anyway, I'm sorry about Mom's meltdown last week. Our getting kicked out of doggie day care triggered her shame cycle and she overreacted. Good for you for calling her out on that. It seems like you've got to be part psychologist in your line of work.

Mom had you on speaker when she said, "If my dogs are so bad, what am I going to do when you can't take them?"



“They’re not bad,” you replied, calmly. “I’ve worked with hundreds of dogs and every single one of them has quirks. My own dog can’t be trusted with children, for example.”

That pushed exactly the right button. Mom takes pride in the fact I’m ah-mazing with kids. I stop them on the street and gaze into their eyes. I accept hugs from grabby toddlers and make mothers smile. It’s my shtick.

“But if my dogs can’t behave, I’ll never be able travel again,” Mom wailed. “Who will board them if they’re troublemakers?”

“You’re telling yourself stories,” you said, laughing. “That’s what they are... just stories. You’re not a bad dog owner and they’re not bad dogs.”

Then a miracle happened: Mom actually laughed, too. “I see you’re doing your inner work,” she said.

It was like you two did some secret mental handshake or something. As an astute observer, I will say that you’ve both changed for the better in the past couple of years.

I think you handled Mom just right. You didn’t pretend I was a model dog. The bit about me “guarding the entrance of the dog park as if I owned it” was very good. I like how you threw in the word “ass” casually, as if it’s no big deal. And you were totally correct that it’s an owner’s responsibility to work around her dog’s unique quirks.

Thank you for saying I’ll “always have a place” with you. I feel like you see me for who I truly am, and that’s a rare and wonderful quality.

The day care lady? I like her too, I really do, but she runs a tight ship and that’s not a great fit for a free spirit like me. If she won’t let us come back, Mom will just double down on her meditation, buy another self-help book, and find a workaround, like always.

Look forward to hitting the beach hard with you next week. Keep up the good work.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





Dear Rosalee,

The rumors about the day care fiasco have probably reached you already. I'm not blameless, and it's entirely possible I set Mabel a poor example in her formative years. On this particular occasion, my old enemy—anxiety—returned and led to uncouth behavior.

I've never pretended to be perfect, Rosalee. A lot of doodles, perhaps even the majority, like all people and all dogs. Their affections are cheap. I'm not like that; I pick and choose.

Here are my favorite people, in approximate order: Grandma, Tim, Uncle Randy, Mom, Abby, Day Care Lady (under review), and a select few others.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





As for dogs, I have a system. I like all dogs I met as a pup, especially Max and Nikki. I like elderly dogs. I like terriers and other confident dogs. What I don't like is unpredictable dogs... Dogs that are floppy and erratic. Dogs that bristle across the street and give me attitude. Dogs that don't defer.

Unfortunately, that includes most puppies. There's an origins story I won't bore you with right now. I'm just going to be honest because you deserve no less: I'm a puppy-hater. There, I said it.

I don't hurt the puppies, just menace them a little. It makes me feel like a big guy. I'm not proud of it.

Overall, I think being discriminating is a good quality. That's why you caught my eye, my nose, my instincts. You are entirely self-possessed. You would have nothing whatsoever to do with me. And that makes you a prize beyond measure. I will keep trying to be worthy.

If you come to live with us, Mabel can move in with your family and they can work their therapy dog magic on her. My Mom doesn't have the chops for that and knows it. I can't leave, though, because I've sunk too much time and effort into her.

Now you know the worst about me, Rosalee. How many guys will be that open? I'm extremely evolved for a male of any species. Get on the Riggs train before it's too late.

Respectfully,  
Riggs



# Dear New Trainer,

I'm looking forward to our first appointment on Friday. Mom says you have a ground-breaking approach to training, or "dog leadership," that's going to rock our world.

Fabulous. Can't wait to hear all about it. Or better yet, narrate your forthcoming book for Cesar Millan's audiobook label. I won't repeat what you said about his methods. There's room for everyone in the ring.

It's only fair to tell you, however, that you're not our first trainer... or even our fifth. Mom has proven difficult to educate. For a reasonably smart lady, she's surprisingly dumb when it comes to raising dogs.



So, good luck to you, sir. I know she made a strong first impression, but trust me when I say you've got your work cut out for you.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





# Dear Mom,

I would never eat you.

I can't believe you even read that article in National Geographic about people worrying about their pets "scavenging" them if they die alone. Honestly! It's like we don't have enough to worry about with Mabel getting us kicked out of day care and stuff.

Just to put your mind at rest, if we're hanging at home and you suddenly expire—and I certainly hope that doesn't happen—I will curl up by your side and perish with you. That's how loyal I am.

Even if our boyfriend shows up and tries to take me away, like he did for that heavenly two weeks when you were in France, I will decline politely and cling to you.

It seems I have little choice in the matter.

Somehow you've become my whole world. I never wanted that to happen. As a pup, I dreamed of a different kind of owner... a real leader.

Nonetheless, as time wore on, canine genetic programming took



over and I got stuck on you. Now I'm powerless to stop following you around.

So, no, I wouldn't eat you. Even if genetic programming compelled me to do it, I would resist. You can trust me.

Mabel, I'm not so sure. She eats anything.

That said, you're not getting any younger. It wouldn't hurt to ease up on the chocolate and take us on more hikes. Focus on your fitness and health... just in case.

Joking. Totally joking. I would never.

You're 100 per cent safe with me. So, sleep well. And stop reading that sensational stuff. Too much knowledge is a dangerous thing for you humans.

Respectfully,  
Riggs





Dear Rosalee,

Life is back on track now, my love. Mabel wheedled her way back into day care, Mom got a trainer and I got a life coach. I'm reading self-help books like it's nobody's business, and expecting no less than a complete spiritual awakening.

Prepare to be amazed when you meet me at the reunion next month. I've been working hard to win your heart for a year, and expect you are about to—in the words of the late Tom Petty, Breakdown, go ahead and give it to me.

I keep seeing photos of you glad-handing about town in your therapy dog vest and while I'm impressed, I think your time would be better spent reforming me. Then you can write a bestseller about how you turned this crazy dog around and we'll retire to the cottage on the proceeds.

Can't wait to see you again. This is it... I feel it.

Respectfully,  
Riggs



# Dear Life Coach

How fast can you work a miracle? I'm seeing my long-distance flame in a couple of weeks and she thinks I've cleaned up my act.

I know you normally like to peel back layers of early conditioning a bit at a time, but how about we just cut to the chase? We both know Mom was an unfit dog-mother when she got me, and bungled my first year. You helped her up her game, but I've still got some bad habits that are holding me back with this girl, Rosalee. The stakes have never been higher.

I'll be taking over Mom's time slot with you. She doesn't particularly need your help now that I've become her unofficial therapy dog. You have no idea how much I ease her anxiety. When she gets worked up, I climb right on top of her and put my head on her chest. It's like hitting her with a tranquillizer dart. Boom! Down she goes.





You're a cat lady, so maybe you don't get it. Or maybe you're just scared that you'll lose all your clients once they hear that dogs can transform lives better and faster. It's important to move with the times, though, Life Coach. I'm on the forefront of a movement.

I'm sure you'll find treating dogs easier, anyway. Did you know humans have around 70,000 thoughts per day, and that most of those thoughts are complete junk? At most, I probably have 50 thoughts. Even so, you'll need to weed a few of them out. I have complete



faith in you and think you're quite talented. Do you want to coauthor my new book, The Enlightened Dog?

See you soon. Cover your couch because I'm coming straight from the beach.

Respectfully,  
Riggs



A photograph of a dog with curly brown fur looking up at a person wearing a dark jacket. The scene is outdoors with green grass and foliage in the background.

# Dear Rosalee,

August 2017

My heart is shattered. I can't believe you air-snapped at me during our big reunion. Clearly you misunderstood my intentions. That wasn't humping, it was dancing. A reverse Tango, to be precise. You seem like such a woman of the world that I expected you to know better.

Obviously, the love is very much still there for me. There were dozens of other lady doodles at the event and none of them held a candle to you. You may have been put off by my brief dalliance with pretty Waldo, but it meant nothing.

I'm devastated that all my efforts to impress have come to naught. I suspect there is more at play, here. Perhaps people are telling you lies about me. That happens sometimes, even to the nicest dog in the nicest family. Life is not always fair.

But I am no quitter, as you well know. After that one short dance, I'm utterly convinced that you are the golden girl for this golden boy. No matter how long it takes for you to see that, I will wait.

You have enviable gravitas, but I wonder... Aren't therapy dogs allowed to have fun?

Respectfully,  
Riggs