

CHAT ROOM



JONI HUBRED

Friend's gift is 'squirrel whispering'

It was a quiet Sunday afternoon at Alice's house. My friend and fellow journalist shares a house in Livonia with her husband, Mike, and three cats: Gus, Bill and Cleo. I visit on occasion to drink coffee or herbal tea, chat about newspapers and to play with the cats. I'm not really a cat person, but for some, I'll make an exception. That sounds as though I have some control over the issue. The truth is, these cats have made an exception for me.

Of the three, I have probably bonded most with Gus. A native of Detroit, he grew up a street cat and still drinks out of running faucets, rather than bowls. While Bill tends to be somewhat anti-social and Cleo fancies herself the Queen of All She Surveys, Gus is Mr. Personality. Defiantly independent as all cats must be, he also thrives on attention and affection.

On Sunday afternoon, I learned something about Gus I didn't know. He likes to hunt.

And he's good at it. Ensnared in Alice's family room, she and I were engrossed in conversation about all sorts of things. Through the open patio glass door, we could see the cats cavorting in the backyard. A gentle breeze wafted in and we laughed at how Miss Cleo seemed to bathe herself in the early spring sunlight.

The actual order of events escapes me now, jarred from my memory by the horror, no doubt. But at some point, Alice told me that Gus had once engaged a baby bunny rabbit, which she ended up chasing around the house.

He doesn't kill things, she explained. He seems to operate under the "catch-and-release" philosophy.

Not 10 minutes later, Gus bolted in from the backyard, a streak of black zooming past my chair. I heard an odd chattering sound that just didn't bode well.

"Gus!" Alice yelled and started after him.

I stayed seated. It seemed like the safest thing to do.

The chase moved into the dining room, and Alice suggested this might be a good time for me to help. As I approached from the kitchen doorway, I still wasn't clear exactly what — besides Gus — we were chasing. "It's a baby squirrel," Alice said. "He's behind the stereo."

I looked behind the stereo, which was in the living room. My guess is I must have misheard, because the poor creature was actually trapped in a corner of the dining room.

It was tiny and brown, with big black eyes and a long, bushy tail. And Gus appeared to be thinking since he'd caught this playmate, he ought to be able to enjoy its company.

Having heard the commotion, Mike bounded up from his basement workshop and strode purposefully toward the scene. Alice was bent over in the corner, trying to keep the squirrel safe.

I was standing a few feet away, trying to keep myself safe. Wild things bite. And they could have rabies.

Mom always said so. "I'll help you, honey," Mike said in a very manly voice.

He grabbed the cat.

Alice allowed as how that might have been the easier course of action. But she remained vigilant, talking in a very calm voice, grabbing the squirrel's tail and holding out her arm stiffly as the thing wriggled and shadow-boxed.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know how else to do this," she told him. "I know this is how you carry a mouse."

I was instantly impressed that she'd even touched a mouse. My daughter and I once trapped a vole in one of those sticky boxes you bait and set down on the floor. The vole was most certainly snarled, but we still called her boyfriend to carry the box to the Dumpster.

He laughed all the way across the parking lot.

Please see HUBRED, C6

Doggone solid lessons

Pet-A-Pet members learn about trained K9s

BY SUB BUCK
STAFF WRITER
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Gucci, Lynn Eggleton's dog, is a Shiloh Shepherd trained to track. He can find human scent in the wilderness and in collapsed buildings.

Her dog can find both the living and dead. The two were activated and on their way to New York for the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, but their trip was canceled.

Eggleton, who is trained with her dog in urban search and rescue, participated in Pet-A-Pet's annual meeting held recently in Farmington Hills. Also appearing was Terry Shoenbach who runs the K9 Academy in Romulus, which trains police canines and their handlers.

Pet-A-Pet Clubs are run by volunteers who bring their pets to health institutions and schools to provide pet therapy. Members gathered earlier this month at the Costick Activities Center to learn more about the different ways pets can provide valuable services to society.

"A dog trained in a live find can also find a dead person," Eggleton said. "If he were out in the wilderness looking for what we thought is a live person and that person is dead, he could still find that person because that is human scent."

He can't differentiate between human beings. "You can't force a dog to use his nose," Eggleton said. "He has to want to do so."

Shoenbach said dogs like Gucci detect scent strength but can't discriminate between the scent of different humans.

Shoenbach brought his new dog, Jury, an explosives detection and patrol dog. His wife has a full-service narcotics patrol dog named Judge.

He joked their next dog will be called "Executioner." Though he also goes after criminals with men who committed serious crimes, Shoenbach said his job isn't as dangerous as walking into a collapsed multi-story building. "The chances of you falling into oblivion are extremely good, not to be heard from again," he said.

"It's not for the faint and light-hearted." Eggleton won't send her dog anywhere she won't go herself. Some people send dogs into the World Trade Center with cameras on their heads to look for people.

"A dog with a camera on his head can get stuck in a crevice and you will never get the dog back," Eggleton said. "They can get into trouble, get lost and get killed."

The public never heard about the many dogs who were severely injured and killed at the World Trade Center, Shoenbach said. "The problem was there were too many dog handlers there who weren't trained properly," he said. "They sent their dogs in with no leashes on, no harnesses on and no long line on."

He, the Jury

There's a difference between dogs trained to find bombs and those who look for narcotics.

Narcotics dogs are trained to do an "active find." When they find an odor they are trained for, they scratch, bark, and bite.

"Obviously we don't want a bomb dog to do that," Shoenbach said. "When he gets into an odor he sits. He has a passive response. That's why we don't cross train bomb dogs and narcotics dogs."

When the dog locates a bomb the handler quietly tells him he is a good dog and both get out quickly, he said.

Jury is trained to pick up on 14 odors. He certified on eight of those. "For security reasons we do not divulge the odors he is trained on," Shoenbach said.

Jury is from Germany; Gucci is not. "The vast majority of times we use nothing but imported German Shepherds," he said.

Foreign countries have strict controls over breeding dogs unlike the United States, where mothers are bred with sons. "There's no restrictions," he said.

In Germany, a dog has to have a working title in its work area before the owner can apply to breed the dog. German dogs come with a full set of x-rays and all their shots.

Jury cost \$4,000 and wasn't trained.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BERNARD

I, the Jury: Terry Shoenbach, who runs the K9 Academy in Romulus, brought his explosives-sniffing dog Jury to the annual Pet-A-Pet meeting.

"You can't touch a dog for under \$3,500," Shoenbach said. "A lot of my dogs are coming from the Czech Republic. I require all of our police dogs to be neutered. We neuter once they are certified. Great reward, huh?" Dogs must be friendly, social and crazy for the toy ball that's used as a reward in training. The Fido company makes the Bowser ball used by handlers in the United States.

Diane Grutta, a Farmington Hills resident and Pet-A-Pet volunteer, was pleased with the presentations. She takes her dog, a Japanese Shiba Inu to several locations, including the McAuley Center, Farmington Hills Inn, Feliciana Sisters, Mercy Marian and the Haworth Center.

"It was excellent and very informative," Grutta said of the program.



STAFF PHOTO BY DEYAN MITCHELL

Teacher: Music teacher Norma Atwood is offering a three-hour seminar "Shower Singing in Public."

Plymouth voice teacher hits high note with students

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI
SPECIAL WRITER

A Plymouth business woman may have just what you need if the sight of a microphone makes your heart flutter and you long for a moment in the spotlight whenever you see a karaoke machine.

Norma Atwood, owner of Village Music, expects to meet a lot of "wannabe" singers who never had the chance to develop their voices in a new class she's offering, *Shower Singing in Public*.

The three-hour seminar is geared toward amateur teenage and adult singers, who will learn technical exercises using playful games in jazz, pop and show music to understand breath control, alignment, resonance, articulation, free breath flow and performance anxiety.

"Maybe they've been singing in choirs or in the shower and they want to learn how to use their voices properly and perform, but they aren't confident enough to call a voice teacher," explained Atwood, who bought the national

■ As a young college student, Atwood thought she would become a doctor. It turned out that all the biology and other "ology" classes, as she refers to them, helps her to better understand the body and how it works to create music. She has spent most of her life sharing that knowledge.

franchise two months ago and will begin classes this summer.

Atwood, who lives in Canton, has taught private voice lessons for more than 15 years in Ohio and Michigan. She has taught Kindermusik, a playful approach to teaching rhythm and basic music skills for newborns to 7-year-olds for 11 years.

Shower Singing in Public is to encourage people to sing and to "have fun," said Atwood, who last year battled two bouts with cancer. During the treatments, she vowed to achieve two goals — develop a singing class and cut a CD, with a mix of musical theater and classical songs, that she hopes to release in September.

Atwood comes to these challenges with what she often refers to as a "passion" experience that began when she was 8 years old and attended the New England Conservatory of Music.

She spent much of her married life raising three daughters with her husband, David, who was forced to relocate the family many times while he was in the Army and later when he accepted transfers with Ford Motor Company.

Miss Norma

While in Michigan, Atwood's students know her as "Miss Norma" for her work as director of music and children's music min-

Please see TEACHER, C6