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Pets

Pure Gold: Adventures with Six Rescued Golden Retrievers
Holli Pfau
Glad Dog Press
978-0-9836451-0-8
(September 30, 2011)

Since 1985, when the author rescued a three-month-old golden retriever pup named Nicki, this raucous, loveable, and intelligent breed has enriched and shared the lives of Holli and her husband, Walter. The author's love of animals was the most import gift from her parents, claims Pfau: this book recounts how as co-founder of a nationally recognized animal assisted therapy program, she bonded with and trained Nikki, Bodie, Sophie, Tucker, and her current retrievers, Daisy and Chatter.

This reviewer found the first half of the book more interesting, as Pfau describes how she left a successful eighteen-year career in business for a new profession that would allow her to share her love of animals with people in distress: animal-assisted therapy, a modality of recreational therapy. Pfau and three other women developed a successful pilot program and the author shares moving stories of Nikki and Bodie's warm interactions with elderly patients, those with cancer, and children in pediatric units.

Pfau is a good storyteller and she movingly relates the untimely deaths of Bodie, Sophie, and Tucker, and her own encounter with stomach cancer. The special bond the author shares with her dogs enables her to find comfort from the spirits of the dead retrievers who send messages of peace and love to Holli.

Pfau leaves her successful pet-therapy program after ten years and relocates with her husband and dogs to their "Glad Dog Ranch" in Durango, Colorado. This rustic golden retriever paradise had its own dark side as displayed by raging windstorms, blizzards, and the 2002 Missionary Ridge Fire, in which an uncontrollable blaze burned for weeks, sparing the ranch but destroying 71,000 acres, fifty-seven homes, and miraculously, killing only one person. Here again, Pfau's writing grips the reader.

The final chapters describe Pfau's challenges training the boisterous Daisy and Chatter to excel at agility shows and rally obedience. Training these naturally playful dogs into highly

disciplined and successful winners reveals this to be an exhausting process that requires patience and understanding from both humans and their canine counterparts.

The author concludes with considering re-entering the pet therapy profession. Readers will cheer this decision because Pfau shows so vividly the importance of pets for people facing critical illnesses and the last stage of life. (See www.puregoldbook.com for stunning photographs of Pfau's dogs.)

Karl Helicher