

Unleashed: Climbing Canines, Hiking Hounds, Fishing Fidos, and Other Daring Dogs

By Lisa Wogan

Introduction

When Wrigley sprints down the dock near her Mercer Island home, resting ducks and geese flutter off in every direction. At full speed, she leaps off the end and—stretched like a smile, the wind whistling through webbed paws—she snatches a T-ball in mid-air before splashing down and swimming it back to her right-hand man Todd Butson. It is a display of beauty and athleticism that could move Greg Louganis to share some of his four gold medals.

But the seven-year-old chocolate Labrador retriever (on the cover) is no pro. She's never competed in diving or agility competitions. Her elegant belly flops are all just a day in the park—where she runs, retrieves, and swims, with her Lab buddy Roanoke, until she's exhausted. Thanks to a mix of DNA, training, and pleasure, Wrigley transforms a simple walk along the shore into something delightful.

Our dogs can't tell us why they are thrilled by certain things, why gnarly sticks, mud puddles or big waves rock their world. We speculate about predator drive and genetics and training, but all we really know from watching them is how much there is out there to be enjoyed. Like a translator or a guide, they shed light on the outdoors. It's an ideal arrangement. When we bring our dogs along for our favorite adventures and theirs, they get the big-time fun and exercise they need and we get the prancing, splashing and snorting that paints the world in Technicolor.

Of course, it's not always easy. We have to make space for our dogs on a bike, board, or boat. Buy tennis balls by the gross. Stock up on booties. Plan vacations with our dogs' special passions in mind. Drive when we could fly. Pack extra water and coats. Stop when they seem hot or tired. We even modify our vocabulary only using words like surf, fish, swim or Frisbee when we are absolutely, just-that-moment going to surf, fish, swim or play Frisbee. If we're making plans, we resort to spelling words or using just the first letter—all of which our dogs fully understand. We do everything we can to protect them, and know if they get hurt out there, we'll do everything we can to fix them up.

In exchange, they coax us out of our armchairs. They prod us to run a little a faster, hike a little longer, and play a little wilder. When they refuse to drop an unmanageable log or decide to retrieve rocks from the bottom of a river, they make us laugh. When they jam down a mountain in a wheelchair or scale boulders on six-inch legs, they inspire us. They help us to feel safe in unfamiliar places and give us courage to tackle new experiences. They remind us that there is soul-quenching, full-body-rolling pleasure to be had from the most basic natural elements such as grass, mud, snow, water and sun.

Unleashed celebrates the hiking hounds, climbing canines, fishing Fidos, and other daring dogs who know how to have a good time—a really good time—in the outdoors, in a way helps us to do the same.