

Mutt about you

Anyone who's had a dog understands. You love them as much as they love you – and for these unconditionally affectionate pets, that's saying a lot. Josephine Brouard spoke with some pooch-passionate owners.

Photography: Sam McAdam

Amy Tresidder, 23, and her silky terrier cross Grettle, three

WHEN AMY TRESIDDER was a child, her animal-friendly family always had pets – Amy had a particular fondness for rodents. “I used to breed Himalayan and long-haired mice and sell them to pet shops,” the 23-year-old laughs. Amy also had a horse, an Anglo Arab gelding called Valentino, as well as the family cats and dogs she cuddled and cuddled throughout her childhood years. However, it was only three years ago that the pet-lover decided to acquire a dog that she could call her very own.

“I was working at a veterinary surgery and the pound brought in a very sick mongrel that needed a lot of TLC,” the former veterinary nursing student recalls. “I took him home to care for him and began to fall in love. Then one day the pound found a home for him. I cried and cried; I was broken-hearted.”

In an attempt to distract herself and find a new dog to let into her heart, Amy started visiting pet shops. On one of her visits, a puppy took a shine to the toy dog on the end of her key ring.

“She went gambolling around the shop with my key ring and I just knew she was the one,” Amy smiles. The silky terrier cross, later named Grettle, went home with Amy that day.

Today, the two are almost inseparable. Grettle accompanies Amy everywhere, whether it's to parties, beauty salons or on road trips, in true *Thelma and Louise* style. They also sleep together – ‘spooning’, laughs Amy – and go to work together. Amy works at Dogue, a Sydney shop which sells food and accessories for pampered pets, and Grettle is an unofficial member of staff.

“I was always buying Grettle outfits at Dogue and eventually they offered me a job,” says Amy, spooning some of Dogue Deli's Beef au Gratin With Spring Vegies into her pet's appreciative chops. Grettle owns a collection of stylish cable-knit jumpers, including a breathtaking Chanel-style checked number.

“Grettle sometimes sulks when she doesn't feel like wearing an outfit,” Amy confesses, “but I make her wear it anyway.”

Amy says Grettle is a very clever pooch. “She sucks up to people and makes them feel sorry for her! She has managed to wrap every one of my boyfriends around her little finger.”

But in Grettle, Amy has a companion for keeps. “Boyfriends come and go, but Grettle is the one constant in my life.”

Before getting a dog, consider these issues...

Exercise How much exercise is your household prepared to give a dog? Who will exercise it? And do you have access to places where you can walk a dog (preferably off the lead)?

Grooming Are you prepared to spend time grooming a dog? Can you afford to get your dog clipped by a professional (if your dog is a breed that will require this)?

Housing Do you have enough space in your house or garden for a dog? Would you want a dog to live inside or out? Bear in mind that dogs that are restricted to living outside can become bored and destructive, particularly if they are confined to a relatively small area. Where would a dog sleep?

Food & health What would you feed a dog? Who would take on the responsibility of feeding it? Can you afford a dog's food requirements? Would you get your dog de-sexed and can you afford regular veterinary bills?

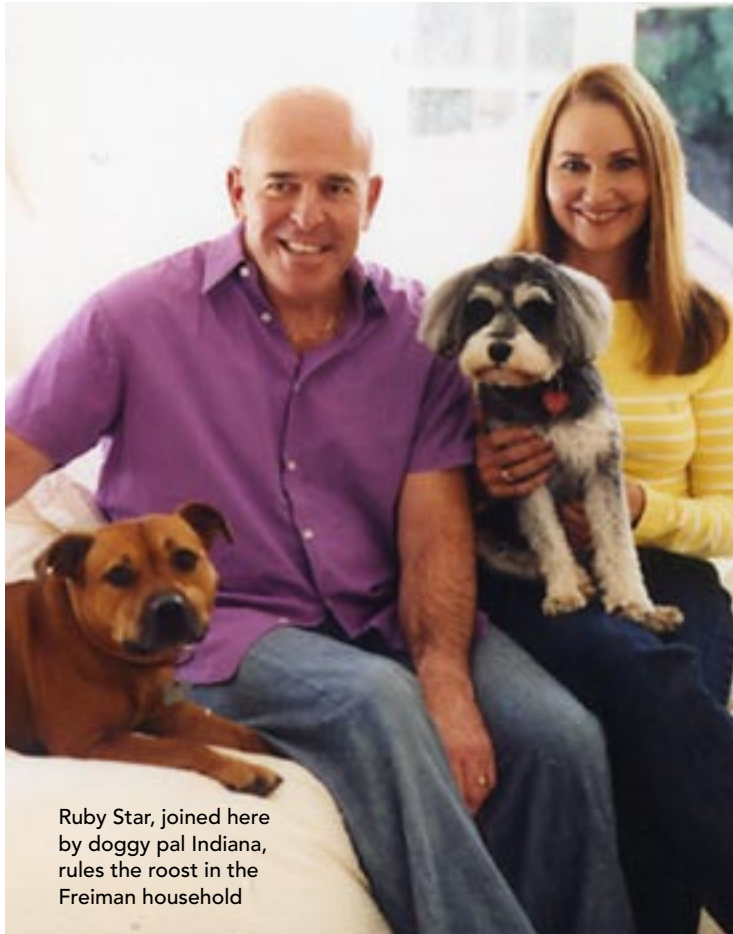
Holidays Would you take a dog with you on holiday? How would this affect the holidays you take? Alternatively, who would look after a dog if you were away? Can you afford a kennel service?

Other Are you prepared for the disruption (chewed carpets and socks, dog-stained rugs, crying at night) a puppy can bring? Would you prefer a dog that doesn't shed hair (if so, consider poodles or schnauzers)? Are you prepared to put in the time to properly train a dog? How do you feel about picking up dog refuse? Is anyone in your family allergic to dog hair?

Visit www.petnet.com.au for help with choosing a breed of dog.

HAIR & MAKE-UP: DAVID NOVAK-PIPER

“Boyfriends come and go, but Grettle is the one constant in my life.”



Ruby Star, joined here by doggy pal Indiana, rules the roost in the Freiman household

Dr Michael and Cyndi Freiman
with their Staffordshire bull terrier Ruby Star, four, and Ruby's friend, miniature schnauzer Indiana, two

SYDNEY ANAESTHETIST Michael Freiman is happy to admit that it only takes a look and a wag of the tail from Ruby Star, his red Staffordshire bull terrier, to melt his heart, instantly dissolving any leftover stress he may be nursing after a long day at work.

Michael's wife, Cyndi, bursts into peals of laughter as she describes the lengthy, 'love-y-dove-y' conversations her husband conducts every evening with Ruby Star. No sooner is Michael home than he's recapping his day for the benefit of a four-legged audience that laps up every word.

"Michael is the alpha dog," says Cyndi. "Ruby won't leave the house if he's around. But she's clever. If she hears Michael in the shower, or sees him putting on his smart shoes, she'll know he's going to work and then she'll agree to go walking with me."

Regardless of the demands of his work schedule, Michael always takes time out each day for a run and a play with his beloved pooch. Such mutual devotion often gives Cyndi pause to ponder over where she fits in the whole relationship dynamic of her home. "Sometimes I think I should grow a warm and furry chest so that I can get some of the love and attention that Ruby gets from Michael," she teases.

The bubbly author, who is now studying art, recalls how adamant she was when Ruby Star first joined the family that there would be no room for dogs in hers and Michael's bed. For a full 18 months, the dog slept downstairs in the kitchen.

Then Cyndi made the mistake of going away on a book tour. When she returned, it was a *fait accompli* – Michael and his dog were sleeping together and there was no turning back.

"Ruby insists on sleeping between the two of us," says Cyndi. "If I try to cuddle Michael, she pushes me away with her chest."

And now there's yet another intruder in the Freimans' bed – two-and-a-half-year-old Indiana, Ruby's miniature schnauzer friend. Indiana, who belongs to a good friend of Cyndi's, sleeps over at the Freimans' house most Friday nights and loves hanging out with her best friend's family.

"We all sleep together and there's a flurry of kisses every morning when we wake up," says Cyndi. "The cutest thing is seeing Indiana and Ruby kiss each other good morning. Indiana's very affectionate while Ruby is more like the older, wiser sister."

Cyndi shakes her head with bemusement. "I cannot believe how much we love Ruby Star and how much we've humanised her. I get quite relieved, actually, when I see her and Indy tussling together and doing normal doggy things like burying bones, rolling in smelly grass, or rushing to the window and growling when they hear mysterious noises."

For Michael, it's simple to explain why he loves Ruby so much: she allows him to express his more playful, affectionate self.

"We run together, we exercise together, we go everywhere and do everything together. It's true what they say: a dog really is your best friend," he smiles.

Marc Schamburg, 38,
and his standard poodle Audrey, three

WHEN MARC SCHAMBURG decided to get a dog for the first time in his life he went to a breeder's kennels, only to discover that he was one of 19 people 'auditioning' for eight puppies.

"I didn't choose Audrey, she chose me," says Marc, who originally had his heart set on an all-black standard poodle. But once he arrived at the kennels he met a little bundle of black fur with a white patch at her throat, who kept tugging at his clothes before coiling herself, uninvited, into his lap.

Marc later went to collect this same pup and a friend remarked that the poodle was as springy on her paws as Holly Golightly (Audrey Hepburn's character in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's*).

"That's when I decided to call her Audrey," says Marc. "I liked that the name Audrey is a bit old-fashioned, too. It suits her."

While Marc had envisaged that getting a dog would ensure him of constant companionship, he says he wasn't prepared for the depth of feeling Audrey has inspired.

"I had no idea how much I would fall in love with Audrey, nor how much she would get under my skin," he admits. "She was, and still is, a very naughty and spirited dog. She loves people, she's curious, she's always on the move and she loves to play."

A self-employed furniture designer, Marc takes three-year-old Audrey to work with him every day. He says he couldn't bear to leave her at home alone as she loves people so much, and it helps that she's also very good for Marc's business.

"When I'm feeling down or blue, Audrey will sense it, place a paw on my knee, and be especially loving. She's my special little mate, and also my greatest fan."



"She's a great tension reliever. Clients come into our offices, Audrey bounds up to meet them and the ice is immediately broken," Marc says, rebuking Audrey as she races up to a stranger in the street, eager to sniff the baby in the woman's arms. Fortunately, the strollers are animal lovers and find Audrey adorable; the poodle and the baby are swiftly introduced.

For her first birthday, Marc bought Audrey a faux pearl necklace, as well as arranging for his favourite bakery to make a 'downward dog' icing sculpture to place atop her cake. "When she turns 10, she'll get diamantés," he laughs.

Marc admits he was initially so besotted with Audrey that his friends would roll their eyes and tell him to shut up. "It was just like having a baby," he says ruefully. "Those first couple of days after Audrey moved in, I couldn't sleep because I was listening to her tossing and turning all night. All she would do is eat and sleep and poo." He shudders at the memory. Audrey has since been trained at puppy school and will now sit, lie and shake hands on command, often earning herself a biscuit treat.

At mealtimes, Marc insists on providing nothing but fresh food for his precious poodle, often rustling up a stew or risotto for her. He does insist that she eats outside though, as her table manners aren't the best. But Audrey's other qualities more than compensate for her culinary shortcomings.

"When I'm feeling down or blue, Audrey will sense it, place a paw on my knee, and be especially loving," says Marc. "She's my special little mate, and also my greatest fan."

Marc Schamburg went to select a puppy only to find that he was the chosen one. Audrey appears very happy with her choice

The Calder family and their border collie Ziggy, two

ANYONE WHO'S EVER had a dog – and loved his or her pet to bits – will know the desperate longing one feels when separated from the canine member of the family for too long. For the Calder family of Clareville on Sydney's northern beaches, holidays have become tinged with trauma now that two-year-old Ziggy, their energetic border collie, is part of the family unit.

"We went away in April to the Whitsundays for a week and all we could talk about was what Ziggy might be doing," says Michele Calder, a fervent animal-lover. She laughs at how dependent on Ziggy her family has become.

Michele's husband Clive derives pleasure from grooming and taking care of Ziggy. Jamie, 11, loves cuddling up with Ziggy on the sofa in front of television. And nine-year-old Gemma likes to get the family favourite out of the house to chase balls or sticks.

For her part, Michele is the top dog in the family, providing Ziggy with food, plenty of walks and almost constant company.

"It's got to the point where I don't like to leave the house for longer than four hours," the stay-at-home mum confesses. "I worry that Ziggy may be lonely."

Michele confesses that the highlight of this year's Calder family holiday was arriving home to find Ziggy waiting for them.

"When Ziggy saw us, she went nuts," she says. "She jumped all over us to welcome us home. We were all crying and laughing. That's when we realised how much she loves us too!"

Loved as she is now, Michele admits that Ziggy as a puppy drove the family to distraction. "We were renting a house at the time and she used to chew bits of carpet and any spare wood she could find," Michele recalls. "She cost us a fortune because

"It's got to the point where I don't like to leave the house for longer than four hours. I worry that Ziggy may be lonely."

we had to fix the house before we moved out."

Nowadays, Ziggy has calmed down and Michele says the family tries to ensure that she stays relatively well-behaved. Although when Clive isn't looking, Ziggy has been known to sneak up on the family's pristine cream-coloured sofa for a quick nap. This is supposed to be a no-go area but, like all clever dogs, Ziggy knows when she can push her luck.

One of the things the Calders enjoy most about their pet and her love for them is the 'good morning' lick each of them receives when Ziggy opens her eyes and realises it's another day of walks, cuddles and treats. As far as Ziggy is concerned, it seems every day is a good day. And her enthusiasm is infectious.

"She jumps out of her basket and licks me first all over the face," says Michele. "Then she runs around the other side of the bed to Clive, then she pads off to wake up the children."

What about doggy breath? "Oh, we don't care," says Michele, her blue eyes gleaming. "All dog lovers will understand."

It's no wonder they call heaven on earth 'a dog's life'. ■

Death of a pet

Dog owners are sometimes taken by surprise by the depth of grief they feel when their dog dies. Others are very much aware of how much they loved their pets while they were alive. Either way, dog owners should be prepared to go through a period of mourning when their pet chases its last stick to doggy heaven. So says veterinary Dr Paul McMurtry, who also recommends that owners take a breather before getting another pet. "A doggy death is a bit like a relationship break-up; you've got to grieve the last one before you seriously start on the next," he notes. He also recommends that you surround yourself with dog-lovers as they will understand that Coco or Rusty was not 'just a dog'. As with most things, how you grieve is a personal matter. You can keep a photo of your pet around the house as a fond memory; you may like to perform a gravesite ritual. Whatever helps you to move on is good. Some people find that getting a new animal does help them, while others won't want to try to 'replace' their pet.

Visit www.paws.com.au to commemorate your dog's life on the Paws at Peace site.

