

Last modified Saturday, March 25, 2006 6:09 PM PST

The straight poop: Rancho Santa Fe woman pens 'book on holistic dog care

By: GARY WARTH - Staff Writer

Having owned pets formost of her life, Jan Rasmussen was so confident in her experience that she wrote the first chapter of her dog-care book without doing research or interviewing experts.

After some research, she tore up the chapter and started over.

"When I got my dogs, I presumed I just understood everything," the Rancho Santa Fe resident said. "I figured I'd just write it, and then do my research."



Author Jan Rasmussen laughs with her dogs Chicklet and Jiggy, the former of which gets tongue-in-cheek credit for writing 'Scared Poopless.'

Courtesy Photo

Like many dog owners, Rasmussen said she believed she knew the best way to care for her pets. After her own research and discussions with holistic veterinarians, she now said much of what she thought she knew was wrong.

A book that scolds dog owners for feeding their beloved pets unhealthy food, overmedicating them and generally putting their lives and health in danger can make for a dull and even dull book, Rasmussen realized, so she did what any clever author might: She asked her dog to write it.

"Scared Poopless, the Straight Scoop on Dog Care," (\$29.95, Dogs4Dogs.com), is credited to Chicklet T. Dog and Rasmussen, and is written in the first person, with Chicklet as the narrator.

"The subjects in essence are pretty boring," Rasmussen said about why she chose the canine-centric approach. "I tried to make it fun, but not saccharin. When you hear a four-pound dog has written it, your first reaction might be to get ill. But I tried to make Chicklet such a wise-cracking, fun, opinionated dog that it would be fun, and she could say things I couldn't say."

By having her message delivered by a four-pound white Maltese, Rasmusen can be a bit assertive in making a point without readers taking offense.

"Humans buckle up themselves and their loved ones, but leave us to fly around the car like some sack of groceries," Chiclet wrote in a chapter on car safety. "I take that back. They even secure their groceries. Heaven forbid some oranges should get bruised during a sudden stop. Why aren't dogs as important as citrus?"

Throughout the book, Chiclet chides owners for what they feed their dogs, how they medicate them and other issues. Along the way, Rasmusen shares dog-care information she learned from a two-year quest that began when caring for her own dogs, including Chiclet, who has had three surgeries, and her other Maltese, Jiggy, who has had four and has autoimmune hepatitis.

"My dog was going through two knee surgeries in a row," Rasmusen said about Jiggy. "That's a tough thing to go through."

On a hunch, Rasmusen visited a holistic veterinarian.

"I thought that she would have different information, like ways to heal the animal faster," she said. After holistic treatment, Rasmusen said her dog made it through the surgery twice as easily and healed twice as fast as the first surgery.

"One of the first things she asked was what was I feeding my dogs," said Rasmusen, who had been feeding her dogs "the best possible commercial food I could find."

"She said, Throw that stuff away and start feeding them really wholesome, regular food," Rasmusen said. "I thought that was nuts, that they'd fall over dead in a couple of weeks. I had been brainwashed that we had to feed them scientifically designed formulas."

Rasmusen, who worked as a computer executive in Manhattan in the 1980s before turning to writing, said holistic veterinarians have told her that dogs are similar to people, including in what they should eat.

"If we need fresh wholesome foods with lots of variety, they also need fresh wholesome foods with lots of variety," she said. "If I ate canned Spam every day for every meal, I'd probably end up with lots of nutritional problems. The same thing applies for dogs."

Or, as Chiclet explained: "Our ancestors were either opportunistic carnivores or scavenging omnivores (experts disagree). They ate meat, game, poultry and fish, plus whatever veggies and fruits they could score inside or outside their prey's tummies. People are always surprised to see Jiggy and me doing tricks for steamed broccoli or green beans or apples. Humans surprise easily."

There are exceptions, however.

"You can't just go out and think, Oh, my dog is just like me," she said. "But it's surprisingly easy to learn. You don't feed dogs onions or raisins or grapes. They're very harmful to dogs. They can be very toxic. Even a small amount of onion powder can be very harmful to dogs or dogs."

Most people already know that chocolate is harmful to dogs, she said, and the darker the chocolate and smaller the dog, the more harmful it is.

Rasmussen suspects the no-people-food rule began as a way of keeping dogs from begging, and said she has no problem with her dogs bothering her at the table because she never gives them scraps from her plate.

Besides poor diets, Rasmussen said unnecessary vaccinations are another problem.

"It was just assumed that vaccines were safe," she said. "Now we know vaccines have a bit of side effects and can be harmful."

Rasmussen said she has found varying opinions on vaccines in her research, which involved dozens of interviews with veterinarians.

Still, her book begins with a disclaimer that the book is not a substitute for professional care, and she urges people to consult with qualified veterinarians or pet health-care providers themselves.

"Scared Poopless" also addresses pet insurance, pet-proofing homes, how to choose the right veterinarian, what to do if a dog is a lost or stolen and other pet-safety issues.

The book is available online at Dogs4Dogs.com, where visitors can sign up for a free newsletter on dog care and read Rasmussen's updates.

Rasmussen also has sold copies of her books at cost to the Humane Society, rescue groups and other animal-care organizations to sell as fund-raisers.

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Related links:

Visit Jan Rasmussen's Website at <http://www.Dogs4Dogs.com>.

