

Excerpt from radio interview with Jerry Puffer of KSEN Radio, Shelby Montana, 2013

Jerry Puffer: The book is *Flash's Song* by Kay Pfaltz. Kay, tell us in three sentences or less what this book is about.

Kay Pfaltz: Oh, that's a hard one. Okay... it's a book about love. It's a book about life. And it's a book about the miracles that happen when love guides life. Did I do it?

Jerry: All right audience, I'm going to ask you if you've ever really needed something to happen in your life. Have you ever really needed a miracle? Because in her book, *Flash's Song*, Kay tells you how to make that miracle happen. Right.

Kay: That's right. I show how.

Jerry: You'll tell us about that at the end. Let me ask you something now. We spoke a little about this off the air and we know our own answers, but I'd like for you to share your thoughts with the audience. Can dogs make us better people?

Kay: Oh yes, dogs absolutely make us better. From the obvious physical and physiological examples that have been empirically proven to the somewhat ethereal and spiritual realms that perhaps have yet to be proven scientifically, but that any dog or animal lover knows in his or her heart to be true.

People with dogs live longer. Petting and loving an animal lowers blood pressure and raises endorphins. But please, don't get a pet to improve your health, get a pet because you love animals, you're ready and able to care for a pet its entire life and give it a great life.

There are incredible therapeutic bonds between the two species, dogs and humans, with dogs often bridging the gap between children and parents, or people in authority. Or bridging the gap between the infirmed elderly and the young human world that ignores them.

JP: You've done pet therapy with your dogs, right?

KP: I did. I took Flash to do pet therapy in the local nursing home in Lovington, Virginia. One lady thought he was her long lost cat! She was lying back and he sat up there on her lap and the nurses said they had never before seen her smiling. She lay there smiling and stroking Flash...her long lost cat.

And a nurse screamed that there as a giant rat running rampant down the hall. Rat on a string? Go figure.

JP: Studies show that having pets helps us live longer. Nursing homes, for instance, now regularly employ pet therapy as part of their programs.

KP: Yes. And animals can also help abused kids. Children who have been horribly abused by adults, family members, and often turn to hurting and committing atrocities to animals. Putting cats in microwaves, washing machines, stabbing to death puppies, skinning puppies alive—not saying this to shock but to bring awareness. Because it's been shown that murderers, serial killers and the like almost always begin by torturing and killing animals. But there are programs that use pet therapy with these abused children and the kids begin to see that animals do feel, and the kids develop compassion for the animals and remorse for what they did.

JP: You spoke earlier of prisons.

KP: It's a special area of interest for me. I'm writing a fictional book on prisons.

There are good programs for seeing-eye dogs. I volunteer with a shelter that has a seeing-eye dog program. Give inmates something to work with and love and if the kids come from abusive families might be the first time receive unconditional love.

JP: Can we jump back to how dogs can make us ordinary people—people maybe living outside the walls of prison—better?

KP: So apart from the physical benefits, the emotional and less tangible benefits are huge: Just being around them, we become better. When we try to emulate their lives, we live simpler, yet much richer, lives. What I mean is that the small things become large. Or the petty things cease to count. Only the important things like sitting outside and smelling the air. When I watch my dogs lying outdoors in the sun on a warm winter day, sniffing the air, I think they lead a far richer life than I do rushing around getting “things” done.

I think so often dogs see things in us we’re unable to see. They see the best in us. In my restaurant (which is dog-friendly despite the health inspector) I have a bumper sticker that reads: *Lord help me to be the person my dog thinks I am.* And it’s meant to be funny, but the real funny thing is I really strive for that. I think we all want the respect of others, but the older I get the less I care about what people think of me. I do, however, very much desire the respect of my dogs. I think people rarely see the full picture, but dogs do. I think the biggest thing dogs teach us is love. Both how to receive and how to give.

This may be surprising but I don’t think humans are at the top of the spiritual evolutionary ladder. I believe that animals are complete. I think that’s one reason their lives are so much shorter than ours are. Because they’re complete and don’t need all the time that people need to figure out who they are and to learn to experience love, forgiveness and kindness. People think too much while animals live from their hearts and just are. They accept the world as it is. They spend more time *being* and less time *doing*. I’ve learned from my own life that that’s when the magic begins to happen. When we stop and become still.

Watch your animal. He or she knows instinctively how to do this. There are no self help books on meditation or Ask and Receive or How to Get What you Want. Being involves that Buddhist concept—I think it originated in Buddhism—of learning to be happy with what we have, grateful for what we have, finding great joy in it, not longing for something we don’t have, something bigger and better—like a dog sitting in the back yard in the sun sniffing the air, or chewing a bone—He’s not longing for a bigger yard with a pool and a prettier garden. He’s loving life right there.

I think dogs are pretty much perfect (no accident that God spelled backwards is dog—or maybe it’s dog spelled backwards is God.) There is that old joke about a single person asking God for a soul mate, a person who would be accepting, forgiving, loyal, enthusiastic, heedless of pettiness, faults or mistakes, always happy to see the other, and unconditionally loving. And God says, “Yeah, I’ll send you dog.”

Being around a being like that has just got to make us better. Dogs exemplify forgiveness so much better than humans. Dogs are all accepting. When you come late a dog doesn’t snap, “Where have you been? You’re late?” He’s just happy to see you. While humans get caught up on little things, petty things, animals tend to see the bigger picture and understand what really matters. If humans ever figure it out, it’s often on their death beds.

I think whenever we're in a position where others look up to us (the boss in an office, the captain of a sports team) we try to do better, and live up to our position in the "subordinates" eyes. Well, that's how it is with our dogs. They do look up to us, even though perhaps it is we who should be looking up to them.

JP: Can you give us some concrete examples from your own life?

KP: Silly things. In the morning I watch my dogs stretch. Every morning, just part of their routine, quite naturally. No one tells them to go stretch, or to put in a stretching or yoga tape and work out. They just do it for a few seconds. So, I've started doing it too when they do. And I always feel better. And it takes seconds.

Many people feel their best or feel most in touch with their spiritual selves outdoors, and dogs force us out on walks and into nature, when maybe our tendency would have been to sit in front of the computer!

Dogs make you exercise. But dogs also sleep a lot, and we humans could take a page from a dog's life and take naps and not feel guilty if we are, but just revel in those naps and enjoy them. Naps are good for you!

JP: So you're happier?

KP: Yes. Emphatically. I'm happier. I have more compassion. I'm more aware. I take the time to stop and to try to be more like them. I'm naturally a fast walker having lived in New York City, London and Paris. But Lauren taught me to slow down, to stop and look around me, not only to the beauty of Paris, but to something that couldn't be seen, something that could be felt if I opened my heart up to it. The soul of the universe. Amelia Kindade writes that animals are the keys to our own souls. And I believe this. Nature and animals. In my first book, *Lauren's Story*, I speak of the *pure* love we experience with animals. With animals we experience the most *pure* relationships of which we humans are capable.

JP: You write about it in *Flash's Song* too.

KP: I do.

JP: Go on.

KP: What I mean is that love of an animal, your pet usually, is completely pure. It's unconditional. We can't explain it; there are no reasons. Reason implies a conditional love. "I love you because..." But our love for our dogs depends not upon conditions, but only upon the pet's continued existence, although we know our love for them will exist even when they do not. One of my favorite writers, the French writer Montaigne was asked why he love his friend and he said: "If I were pressed to say why I love him, I feel that my only reply could be: Because it was he. Because it was I." Except he said it in French!

JP: What would you like to see change in the world in regard to humans' relationship with animals?

KP:

More respect towards animals. More compassion. More understanding. If we understand for instance that animals do feel and think and suffer in exactly the same ways as we do, and perhaps are capable of feeling more than we are, then we'll treat them more compassionately. They aren't ours to exploit. It's bad karma anyway. So how do we arrive at understanding? By education. I say go out and talk with everyone you know. Don't be militant or strident. But compassionate. Be willing to see their side too.

JP: Do you believe that dogs can experience emotions? Do they have feelings?

KP: Yes, I think for any animal lover or pet owner, this is obvious. And experiments are being made that show they actually feel more strongly than we do. Just like their sense of smell. Dogs smell 100,000 times better than we do, but we can't perceive of it because we don't. So, same with the emotions. They may even be greater emotional being than we are, and that's why they don't intentionally torture each other or wage war or exploit in quite the same way we humans do.

But if we think about animals having emotions the implications become huge. If you look into your dog's brown eyes, it's obvious he feels. He slinks around when you're going to take him to the vets or give him a bath. He knows when he's been bad. And conversely, he jumps or wags his tail enthusiastically when he's rewarded or when he's about to receive a treat or when you're about to go on a walk. He loves you. You know it. Okay, so if our dogs and cats and llamas and pet rats and pigmy goats all have feelings and can experience hurt, suffering and pain, where does that leave us when we start to think about the 10 billion farm animals in factory farms that live in appalling conditions that are too terrible to discuss here. And yet we *must* discuss if we want to see things change. Where does that leave us when we start to think about the animals used in laboratory testing that are locked up in tiny cages their entire lives, subjected to torture and pain and suffering and never allowed to see or feel the outside air? People think, they're just animals. They're just rats. But if you've ever known a pet rat, you know they are lovable and smart and there is no doubt that they feel and experience pain. Our own animals who we love so much can help us see this and help us help all animals.

If animals have emotions, can think and feel—and we know they suffer and can experience pain—then the ramifications are huge. And the reason most people won't allow themselves to think about it, is just this. It's inconvenient. "I'll have to stop eating chicken McNuggets or BigMacs, or stop using that cosmetic that I love." But it's worth it. . At least educate yourself. Know what goes on and then make your choice. Then it's your choice, your conscience.

JP: I hear you. You're definitely opening up some cans of worms, but you're getting me to think.

KP: Goodie. That's the point.

JP: Alright so why do you think people love dogs so much?

KP: I think they hold all the traits we most admire. If you ask a person to name the traits he most admires he really not going to say, "A mean-spirited, go-getter who makes bundles of money by trampling all over others." I don't think he'll describe the qualities of most politicians. No! He's going to start describing a dog! He's going to say: loyalty, bravery, enthusiasm, optimism, forgiveness, kindness, joy. These are the things we really care about. And unconditional love.

They're so natural. They don't try to impress, put on airs. And hey were the same coat day in and day out!

JP: *What do you say to skeptics who say, "Your dog is only wagging his tail because he wants his dinner?"*

KP: I say it doesn't really matter if dogs are truly good or not. They make *us* better. I think we're better for being around them.

JP: *Are dogs better than people?*

JP: "Better" is a tricky word. I don't know of any dog that has painted the Mona Lisa or composed the equivalent of Mozart's Requiem. But as I said, they live from the heart. Maybe the stomach too, but on some level it's a pure and good and true life lived from the heart. Again, I don't think humans are at the top of the spiritual evolutionary ladder.

JP: *What can dogs teach us about death and dying?*

KP: Animals teach us not to fear death. It's just a part of the journey. Animals are much more accepting of death than we are. Death is a natural process. We humans dwell so much on death (in the form of trying to stay healthy, eating the latest health foods and so on), that we forget to live. Again, the basics of living: a fresh stream of water, sitting out in the sun, the breeze or the sun's warmth. Simple food. A nice pat or hug—love.

Because love of an animal is so pure I don't think any negative stuff hangs around once they've died. We have far fewer regrets about our animals than we do with our human counterparts who we sometimes find it harder to say "I love you" to. Have you ever had a dream, after an animal has died, and he or she comes back, but maybe he looks different in the dream, yet you know it's him, you feel all that love again. That's because it's the soul of the animal you're connecting to.

JP: *You mention telepathy briefly in the book. What are your thoughts on animal communication and psychics? Are they valid practices or just New Age fads?*

KP: I think in ten or twenty years we'll consider telepathy, or communication between animals and humans, completely normal and natural. I hope so. And when we do, I hope it will also signal the need to change atrocious practices like factory farming. More than fifteen years ago I used my first communicator with great skepticism. Now, I take it for granted and forget that not every one does. It's a growing field. There are more animals communicators all the time. I use several and there are some outstanding ones practicing around the country and the world. For me it seems natural and obvious to know that animals have their own thoughts and feelings and opinions. It changes the way I view animals. If you use a communicator or talk with and listen to your animals yourself, your relationship becomes much closer.

JP: *In both of your books, *Lauren's Story* and *Flash's Song*, you deal with cancer quite vividly in the book. What advice do you have for people in the audience who might be struggling with pets with cancer?*

KP: I have lots of advice having gone through it with Lauren and Flash. Lauren had radiation, chemotherapy and surgery. Flash did not. Every dog is different. Every situation is different. I learned a lot and I'm not sure today I would put Lauren through what I did. I was a wiser person with Flash, able to listen to what my heart was saying, not what my head kept urging. I use a lot of holistic remedies today. If someone wants to

email me with specific questions, I'd be happy to try and help. My website is www.kaypfaltz.com.

JP: Do we view people who have dogs differently?

KP: Oh, definitely. Dogs are definitely “Babe magnets.” I will often look twice at someone walking a dog down the street that I wouldn't notice otherwise. When I walk my dogs in the parks in Paris, the Parisians walk right up to me and begin talking. The *Parisians*, mind you. They are not known, in the way that Americans are, for coming up and talking to strangers. But the language of Dog is universal. When you have a dog you don't need language.

JP: I want to ask you some questions about the book.

KP: Sure.

JP: It's a very personal story. You share some very...vulnerable details about yourself.

KP: I guess.... I'm not a fan of the tell-all memoirs, but I think well, when it's a memoir and the story of one's life, or even one's dog, you must be honest. Both *Lauren's Story* and *Flash's Song* are autobiographical but I write about the personal to reach a universal. I think in order to be good book must transcend the personal and reach a sort of universal.

Let me digress and say it's the same way that by noticing or focusing on a flower, say, you touch or access the universe. We look at the details in our lives, the little things, but they bring us or show us the larger picture, because it's the larger picture we need to grasp sometimes in order to make our suffering seem small. Or in order to help make the world better. For instance if you have a dog or cat you love and you look into his eyes and know you'd do anything for him, well, extend that to all animals. We wouldn't want suffering to happen to our loved ones, it's horrible to think about. We can tolerate knowing it happens to millions, billions of animals and people because we don't know them personally. We haven't “tamed” them. “Tamed” in the sense that the Little Prince talks about in *La Petit Prince*, not tame as in train or make wild animals tame.

JP: Tell us why you wrote about a dog. If there is one particular message you'd like to get out to people, what is it? What did you seek to accomplish by writing the book?

KP: I had fun writing about a dog. I think humans basically try and want to be good, but we get bogged down in all kinds of pettiness, that only human emotions can create—really petty and trivial pursuits and problems. We don't look at the big picture. Animals do because they have to. I watch animals and I learn from them. They amaze me. And the more I watch, the more I realize I don't know very much at all.

I wanted to write about the important things in life, love for one thing. Living life, simply yet fully, and never fearing it—even when the worst happens. Life is always—I don't care what has befallen you—a gift. I try to hold onto that and not fret about the things that don't really matter, because I think things work themselves out in the end. Life proves that time and again. And without sounding too Aeschylean or like a good Catholic or something, I do think that suffering offers us our best opportunities for growth. We acquire wisdom and maturity through suffering. I learned this firsthand from all of my dogs. From Lauren and Flash. And now from Chance and Sasha and Olive.

In writing the book, I hoped to accomplish many things, but one of the most important things was to write about the love between animals and human and how strong it is, how powerful, how real and how pure. I didn't want to make excuses. With *Lauren's Story*, I wanted to say Lauren was the love of my life. Yes, Lauren was a dog. Our companion animals are legitimate sources of joy. Feel no guilt that you broke up with your boyfriend or girlfriend, but you're happy because you have a dog. Because I knew there were other people who felt this too. I wrote *Lauren's Story* in 1998, before the current craze of dog stories. People came up to me or wrote to me saying thank you for writing about the depth of the love between a human and a dog. Because there were really not that many books. There was Ackerley's *Tulip* and some classics, but writing about the love was still somewhat...if not taboo, just not done. It all gets down to unconditional love. Whether you love a man, a woman, a dog or a monkey or a canary doesn't matter. What matters is that you *love*.

And with *Flash's Song*, let love guide your life. Because if you do, more miracles than you can imagine await you.

These books are a dog who goes to Paris and dines out in the best restaurant, and a dog who gets cancer, two very dramatic things maybe don't happen to most dogs, but really they are every dog's story because it's about the unconditional love that exists between humans and dogs, and what dogs can teach us. Loyalty, bravery, optimism, enthusiasm, acceptance, kindness and compassion to all. Many passages in books about dogs exist where the dog exhibits the behavior one might attribute to holy people or saints and yet the human falls short.

JP: You said your books are more than just "dog stories."

KP: Of course they are dog stories. But I hope readers will also see I'm trying to write about some universals here, some more obvious than others such as:

The power (or importance) of love.

The power (or importance) of laughter.

The power (or importance) of family.

The power of love to get us through.

And some a little less obvious such as:

The power of memory, or perhaps the fragility of memory
the reader will have to decide.

The enduring power of Art. Actually the last line of
Lauren's Story is a tribute to art.

And finally and perhaps the most important, the *nature* of
unconditional love—

JP: Thank you Kay Pfaltz for taking the time out to discuss your very beautiful books. The book is Flash's Song and we've been talking with Kay Pfaltz, author.

KP: And I'd just like to say profits from my books go to rescue groups that are listed on the Mission Statement on my website. I urge everyone to go to your local shelters and adopt an unwanted dog or cat. Give it love. If every listener would just take into their homes one dog or cat and give love and a life free from suffering that's how we begin to make a difference. I am hoping to see the end of factory farming and animal testing in my lifetime.

JP: Oh and what are you writing now?

KP: I don't usually talk about my work before it's published. But I'm almost finished a novel set in a women's penitentiary that discusses some of the themes I mentioned here. I did my research and went to the penitentiary. Very interesting. But don't have a publisher yet. Let me know if you know of someone. And I think maybe Chance is nudging me to write about her—or I'm nudging myself to write about emotions that are really beyond words.

JP: Tough assignment. Good luck with that one. Questions for aspiring writers in the audience: What advice to you have for would be or first time authors out there?

KP: My advice to first time writers: Write a little bit from your intellect. Write a lot from your heart. And never give up.