

Yoḡa Dog

Yoga Is A Way Of Life...

Liz Morrison
liz@lizwrites.com

Fido Friendly Magazine, Winter 2003/04

619.857.4313

Bruce Van Horn, author, business owner and yoga instructor, knows how to make your dog happy and it doesn't involve food. What it does involve is yoga. Van Horn, a former CPA, found himself tired and burned out from spending too much time on the treadmill to success. Material possessions and ego got in the way of both his good health and ability to live in the moment. And even worse, his pets, Goodboy a seven-year-old Dalmatian and Sarafina a 12-year-old Siamese cat, were being neglected. So he jumped off the road to burnout and into an enlightened state.

"In my career as an accountant I got very busy and I focused on the material things and, my dog and my cat, I ended up putting them last on the totem pole. They got stressed out because I wasn't home and I got stressed out and I wasn't feeling good (because of my hectic schedule). Your physical happiness is related to your pets and they can pick up your energy, too," Van Horn recalled.

Van Horn found that when he practiced yoga, his pets, sensing his calm and relaxed demeanor, enjoyed sitting next to him. He began incorporating Goodboy and Sarafina into his yoga routines by speaking to them and petting them while in different yoga poses. The pets became

more relaxed and the bond between Van Horn and his animals was strengthened. Through yoga, Van Horn discovered a way to help pets deal with behavioral issues and separation anxiety by incorporating breathing exercises and yoga workouts into his animals' daily lives.

"Once you train your pet to stay with you (during yoga), and they'll enjoy the energy sharing, they'll actually sit with you for extended periods of time and you can do a whole hour yoga workout. I find that to be really healing," Van Horn said.

After seeing how relaxed his animals became during his yoga workouts, a light bulb went off in Van Horn's head. Why not create a business around this idea and help both humans and animals improve their quality of life? Van Horn did just that by starting his latest venture, Pet Guru. All pets are gurus, according to Van Horn, in that we can learn from them. And they, in turn, can learn from us as well. Pet Guru uses the practice of yoga to help people deal with stress and health issues, improve their bond with their pets and understand how pets can teach us to be in the moment.

"Animals have a level of emotional intuitive intelligence that really is astounding and I feel that they're genuine, they're in the moment and full of unconditional

love and I feel that when I'm around them I start to develop those traits," Van Horn said.

Van Horn recommends that pet owners get involved in volunteer activities that include their pets, like the Therapy Dog program, a program that brings dogs into hospitals, schools and nursing homes to bring joy to those who are suffering and to teach kids the value of animals. And, if your employer allows it, bring your dog to work with you. For those that can't spend most of the day with their pets, Van Horn suggests specific exercises to help your pet relax while you're away.

"Spend a little time in the morning doing hands on energy work with your animal, centering yourself, doing some breathing exercises. I do a four second inhalation and then a six second exhalation. And if you do that over a two minute period it really starts to relax your physiology and if you're petting your animal it's going to really start affecting their physiology," Van Horn explained.

Van Horn added that calming your pet before you leave will help them with separation anxiety and make them less nervous and irritated while you're away. As an example, he leaves his yoga mat on the floor after he's completed his workout because his scent remains on the mat, which helps to relax Goodboy and Sarafina.

Recording your voice and playing it back to your pet is another suggestion. In fact, Van Horn is currently developing a computer program that records human voices and turns the sounds into music that will relax pets while their owners are away from home. His new book, *Home Alone*, expands on all these ideas to give pet owners several options for alleviating, or at least reducing, separation anxiety for their pets. He has also created a 60-minute video called *Yoga For Healthy Living* that features his dog, Goodboy, participating in a yoga workout.

But pet yoga is just one aspect of the company. Through Pet Guru, Van Horn has also developed a training program for animal shelter workers as well as a program to modify the behavior of animals in shelters making them more attractive to potential pet owners. Animal homelessness is one of Van Horn's primary causes. He feels if pets and owners can develop stronger bonds and if, using his techniques, owners can help pets modify bad behavior, there will be fewer pets in animal shelters.

In October, Van Horn conducted a two-week study at the Bergen County Department of Health Animal Shelter in New Jersey that explored the effects of yoga and meditation on shelter animals and shelter workers. At the time of this writing, the results were not available.

"You have to understand that separation anxiety and homelessness is the greatest form of stress for an animal. They have lost their home, they are in an environment that can be very difficult, in many cases the animals are being euthanized and we

know that animals have a level of intuitive intelligence, they know what's going on. Also the workers feel a lot of compassion fatigue and they feel guilt and shame associated with their jobs," Van Horn explained.

Through this study he hopes to raise awareness and show the importance of relaxing the animals by petting and touching them. One of his goals is to attract more "hands-on" volunteers to shelters to give the animals extra attention, thus calming them down and modifying their behavior. Another goal is to reduce burnout in shelter workers that will, in turn, provide the pets with a less stressful environment.

"The study at the Bergen County Department of Health has the potential to not only capture the attention of the pop culture but to provide visionary programming for volunteers looking to provide hands-on sharing with animals who have experienced the trauma of homelessness and touch deprivation," Van Horn said.

In a way, you could look at Van Horn's old life as a miserably unhappy accountant and compare it to a pet's experience trapped in a shelter. He brought yoga into his life and his health and attitude improved tremendously. And, he was probably a whole lot easier to live with. Using similar techniques, Van Horn has helped to alter the lives of many pets, both at home and living in shelters. He has created methods to help pets and humans create stronger bonds while reducing stress and improving their quality of life.

Van Horn wants to change the way we relate to animals so that our pets at home are happier and fewer pets end up in shelters.

He also hopes to make humans aware of their own stress levels. The calmer we are, the calmer our pets become. Currently, he is working on taking his message to the viewing public by developing a show for the Animal Planet channel based on his Pet Guru concept. He is also working with celebrities and has a yoga class for celebrity pets at the Ritz Canine, an upscale pet boarding facility located in New York City. Van Horn's work with animals has been featured on several television programs and in local as well as national publications. A focused and driven entrepreneur, Van Horn has his fingers in many pies right now and we can expect to hear a lot more about him in the near future.

To find out more about Bruce Van Horn and his businesses go to www.yogaforbusiness.com or www.petguru.com. You can also reach him by phone at (845) 732-7437.