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THE ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ADULTS AND  
THEIR CANINE COMPANIONS:  
THE IMPACT ON PERSONAL GROWTH AND WELL-BEING

A Dissertation in

Adult Education

by

Lorie Renee Kramer

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The dissertation of Lorie Renee Kramer was reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Patricia A. Cranton  
Visiting Professor of Adult Education  
Dissertation Advisor  
Co-chair of Committee

Elizabeth J. Tisdell  
Professor of Adult Education  
Co-chair of Committee

Ann L. Swartz  
Affiliate Professor of Adult Education

Richard J. Fiene  
Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Studies

Gary Kuhne  
Associate Professor of Education  
In Charge of Graduate Program in Adult Education

\*Signatures on file in the Graduate School

## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study used narrative analysis to explore the role of relationships between adults and their canine companions and the role of this relationship in personal growth and well-being. The theoretical frameworks to inform the study consisted of attachment theory and a blend of relational theory and connected knowing. The study focused on understanding adults' relationships with their canine companions and, specifically, how this particular relationship contributes to personal growth and well-being in adulthood. Data consisted of participant narratives shared during interviews. In addition, participants showed a favorite photograph of their canine companion(s) and shared the story behind the photograph. Through their own stories, ten participants descriptively shared how the relationships with their canine companions have fostered their personal growth and promoted their well-being. The narratives were individually and collectively analyzed.

The findings revealed commonalities across the narratives. First, participants considered their canine companions to be family members and for some participants the canine companions filled a void in their lives. Several participants shared how personally rewarding it was to rescue a canine in need of a home. Second, the canine companions taught the participants about unconditional love, patience, and responsibility/accountability. Third, spending time with the canine companions, the intuitiveness within the relationship, and the differences in canines' personalities contributed to the promotion of well-being.

The study concludes with implications for theory and practice. The findings have implications for the adult education field as growth and learning is not limited to connections and relationships with other humans, but also occurs through relationships with canine companions.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, pets have played an integral role in people's lives for many centuries. Dogs, in particular, found a special place in human society. Known affectionately as "man's best friend," dogs are theorized to have been domesticated from Old World gray wolves approximately 15,000 years ago in Europe or Asia. One theory of domestication is that as humans began transitioning from hunter-gathers to hunter-farmers and settling into villages, wolves took advantage of scavenging for food in closer proximity to humans. Eventually becoming less fearful and timid, wolves began to coexist and socialize with humans. Thus, was the beginning of the human-canine relationship, one forged on mutual needs for food, herding, hunting, and, protection. In time, dogs began traveling around the world with their human companions (Case, 2008).

History and cultures worldwide demonstrate the importance of this companionship from prehistoric cave drawings of dogs and humans, to Pharaohs buried in pyramids with their pets, to Greek literature involving dogs. One of the earliest documentations of man and canine was discovered more than 12,000 years ago in Egypt when the fossilized remains of a man and a puppy were found together in a grave in a hugging position. At ancient burial sites in Peru, archeologists have unearthed humans buried next to their dogs with blankets and food (Lange, 2007). It is evident that canines have a valued history in human lives.

### **Animal Companionship**

In the present day with an estimated 77.5 million households in the United States owning at least one dog (Humane Society of the United States, 2010), pets have undeniably become an increasingly important part of human lives. For this reason, pets are commonly referred to as

companion animals, demonstrating the bond of the human-animal relationship. The fields of animal welfare, human-animal interaction, and veterinary medicine prefer the term *companion animal* to signify the “psychological bond and a mutual relationship” (Walsh, 2009, p. 465) that exists between humans and animals.

The concept of a human-animal bond was formally introduced by Konrad Lorenz, and research in this area gained momentum thanks to veterinary medicine (Hines, 2003). Lorenz stated: “The wish to keep an animal usually arises from a general longing for a bond with nature... This bond is analogous with those human functions that go hand and hand with the emotions of love and friendship in the purest and noblest forms” (as cited in Hines, 2003, p. 8).

The human-animal bond is expressed by households considering their pets as family members. In Providence, Rhode Island, 87% of urban pet owners rated and perceived their pets as members of the family. Given the changing demographics of the United States, it was hypothesized in 1988 that pets would continue to gain importance and meaningfulness to people in the future (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988).

Presently in 2010, Albert and Bulcroft’s (1988) prediction may well be on target. Despite the current recession impacting nearly every segment of the business world, the pet industry is the single fastest-growing retail with spending expected to rise in 2010 by nearly 5% to \$47.74 billion. Interestingly, this reflects that people are spending money on their pets, even in a time of recession (Warren, 2010). This information combined with the dramatic statistics that in 2006, 72 million dogs and 82 million cats lived in households in the United States (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007), and currently in 2010, the numbers have jumped to 77.5 million owned dogs and 93.6 million owned cats (Humane Society of the United States, 2010), lends support to pets becoming increasingly important companions to humans.

Another demonstration of pets increasing importance to humans is in the paradigm shift of how humans view their companion animals. Dr. Gregory S. Hammer, president of the American Veterinary Medical Association (2008), pointed out that just thirty years ago most dogs lived out in yards and cats lived in barns. He attributes the growth of the human-animal bond with pets moving indoors and even sleeping in the same beds as their owners. Fewer and fewer companion animals are living outside. The welcoming of pets into homes shows a shift in the relationship between humans and animals.

Companion animals play a significant role in the lives of humans and there is evidence this relationship benefits the health and mental health of humans (Wells, 2009). Companion animals provide positive physiological effects for humans in regards to illness prevention and wellness (Beck & Katcher, 2003); lowering blood pressure and increasing the immune system (Charnetsky, Riggers, & Brennan, 2004); decreasing cardiovascular stress (Allen, Blascovich, & Mendes, 2002); and easing cancer treatments (Johnson, Meadows, Haubner, & Sevedge, 2003). Animals bring a sense of normalcy and a feeling of home to those who are hospitalized or in long-term healthcare facilities (Cangelosi & Embrey, 2006) and ease suffering for individuals within hospice settings (Geisler, 2004).

Companion animals also play an important role within the family system as well (Walsh, 2009). Companion animals increase family interaction and communication (Cain, 1983); decrease family stress (Allen, 1995); reflect family stress (Cain, 1983); and are triangled into spousal relationship tension (Cain, 1983). “Companion animals are highly attuned to the family emotional climate and are very sensitive to highly charged affective states of members...” (Walsh, 2009, p. 484).

Relationships with companion animals provide psychological and physiological benefits

to humans, as well as serve a role within the family system. One thing seems certain, historically and culturally companion animals have found a place in human lives. What is less certain is how the relationship with a companion animal promotes personal growth, particularly in adulthood. There is a need to understand this relationship that began forming thousands of years ago and one that has evolved into a commitment of emotions, energy, financial resources, and time. As more and more people welcome companion animals into their homes, it may benefit humans and animals to more fully understand how this relationship contributes to personal growth and well-being, which may have implications for adult learning and development. A beginning point is to further explore the literature involving humans and companion animals.

### **Adult Growth and Well-Being in Relationships with Canine Companions**

Companionship with animals offers experiences, interactions, and a connectedness with nature from which humans have the opportunity for personal growth and well-being. Opportunities to develop relationships with companion animals are all around us. First, an individual who adopts or owns a companion animal, opening his/her heart and home to this animal, has a tremendous personal opportunity to learn about him/herself in areas of compassion, loyalty, parenting, playfulness, responsibility, spirituality, etc. Second, individuals learn with their pets through obedience training at pet stores, at dog parks, and other venues. Third, professions, such as police, humane educators and officers, military personnel, service dog handlers and trainers, and veterinarians have a great opportunity to grow and learn in their relationships with animals.

Relationships with animals speak to all aspects of human experience- emotional- intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual. For this reason, personal growth with companion animals may likely take place through an integrative approach.

While there is evidence of the health and mental health benefits of adults interacting and bonding with animals (Stasi et al., 2004; Odendaal, 2000; Katcher, 1982), there has been little research conducted concerning the influence of companion animals on personal growth and well-being in adulthood. Much of the research involving companion animals focuses on children, adolescents, and the elderly. The period of adulthood not being represented is a significant gap in the lifespan literature. Given that adulthood is a large time period in the human life, it is important to explore this period of the lifespan involving relationships with companion animals.

While studies have been conducted of families with pets and involved adults (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Heath & Champion, 1996), little research is available specifically regarding adults and companion animals. To date, in the context of adulthood, research is lacking concerning the particular role relationships with canine companions play in personal growth and well-being. Based on research conducted by scholars in the fields of elementary education, psychology, and the health professions, potential areas of growth with companion animals include attachment and socioemotional development. Both themes will be further addressed.

### **Attachment/ Relationships**

Research on attachment has shown that emotional health is affected by a variety of personal relationships, not simply during childhood, but throughout the lifespan (Ainsworth, 1989; Main, et. al., 1985). Individuals vary on the intensity of attachment to companion animals and this intensity of attachment is dependent on the type of relationship with the animals (Keil, 1990). For example, given a spectrum of attachment, individuals may view pets as beloved, close friends on one end of the spectrum while on the other end of the spectrum individuals may view their pets as simply animals - void of any deep emotional connection. Individuals with working

pets (police dogs, herding dogs, etc.) may fall across the spectrum of attachment given the specific type of relationship with the animal.

Attachment to companion animals is likely to begin when owners form identities related to the relationships shared with their animals. The owners' identities initially begin to develop with naming the animal/pet. This action acknowledges the animal's own identity and establishes credibility to the human-animal relationship (Sanders, 2003). In Keil's (1990) conceptual framework of human-animal interaction, relations between humans and their animals at the companion animal level would reflect the highest level of attachment and perception of the animal as a close friend and equal member of the family. The human-animal friendship has been described as highly emotional and included: spending time together, sharing routines, mutual play, sustained eye contact, and "face gazing" (Sanders, 2003, p. 416). The friendship may be enhanced by owners giving voice to their pets and believing that their pets feel and read emotion (Sanders, 2003).

A friendship with a companion animal alleviates loneliness and/or provides benefit to individuals in particular life circumstances. This may explain why the highest rate of attachment to pets has been found among those individuals who were divorced, never married, remarried, widowed, childless couples, and empty-nesters (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). Widowed women who had pets, particularly dogs, experienced significantly less loneliness following the loss of their spouses (Sable, 1989, 1991). The lowest rate of pet attachment was found in families with infants, elementary-aged children, and adolescents (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988).

Attachment to companion animals is evident by 93% of animal owners saying they would risk their own life for their pet and 50% reporting they would choose their dog as their single companion if stranded on a deserted island (American Animal Hospital Association, 2004).

Interestingly, a higher attachment to dogs over other animals has been reported. Individuals who chose a dog as their favorite pet have rated higher attachment to the animal than individuals whose favorite pets were cats or other animals. This preference for dogs and the reported higher attachment may be a result of the greater affection canines display toward their owners and the manner in which dogs and owners interact and spend time doing things together (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). Elderly pet owners have reported a higher affectional attachment to dogs. These pet owners more often described the love and security canine companions provided to them compared to owners of other types of pets (Siegel, 1990).

Whether a pet is viewed as a family member or friend, people have the ability to form meaningful attachments and bonds with their companion animals. The relationship itself seems significant to attachment. Although research has been carried out in the area of attachment with animals, several questions remain: What is the subjective meaning and significance of attached relationships to companion animals for adults? What about these relationships promote adult growth and well-being?

### **Socioemotional Development**

From a developmental standpoint, attachment to companion animals can promote social and emotional development of humans. Pets have the potential to build an individual's self-esteem/ self-confidence, compassion, empathy, nurturance, responsibility, communication skills, and social skills. Pets are often talked to and confided in, particularly in situations where an individual may be in need of support or encouragement (Bryant, 1985; Mallon, 1994). Dog ownership is associated with lower rates of depression in single individuals and in women (Cline, 2010) and following the acquisition of a service dog for people with hearing impairments (Guest, Collis, & McNicholas, 2006).

Companion animals not only promote intrapersonal development, but also instinctively attract attention and serve as catalysts for humans to interact with one another. Animals can serve as ‘social lubricants’ (Hunt, Hart, & Gomulkiewicz, 1992) and increase the likelihood of interactions with others. People walking dogs are much more likely to be attended to and have conversations started with as compared to those without dogs (McNicholas & Collins, 2000; Messent, 1983).

The presence of companion animals has increased social interactions among humans in nursing homes (Bernstein, Friedmann, & Malaspina, 2000; Crowley-Robinson, Fenwick, & Blackshaw, 1996); in assisted living facilities (Cangelosi & Embrey, 2006); in prisons (Fournier, Geller, & Fortney, 2007; Strimple, 2003); in hospital settings (Johnson, Meadows, Haubner, & Sevedge, 2003), and in workplace settings (Wells & Perrine, 2001). This research speaks to the ability, power, and value in companion animals increasing social interactions among people in a variety of situations and with diverse populations.

Experiences with companion animals provide opportunities for individuals to learn about themselves and their relationships with others. The experience of loving and losing a canine companion can also be an opportunity for personal growth and development.

Given that a pet’s lifespan is often much shorter than a human’s lifespan, individuals will likely witness the pet’s life span through various stages such as youth, adulthood, senior years, decline, and death. Given all companion animals provide to humans, it is understandable how the death of a beloved pet can be heartbreaking. The mourning associated with losing a companion animal can be as difficult as losing a close human family member (Quackenbush, 1984). Secondary losses may also result when the pet owner experiences disruptions in daily routines, activities, and other events previously shared and enjoyed with the deceased companion (Lagoni,

Butler, & Hetts, 1994).

Witnessing the stages of a pet's life can offer lessons in aging, life, death, and spirituality. As a pet and pet owner share these stages together, it may offer insight for the owner into his/her own personal feelings of aging, life, and death. An individual may also experience spiritual growth through the relationship with the pet (Bekoff, 2002; McDaniel, 2006). From these experiences, the opportunity for adults to learn and grow about themselves and about their world exists. Many pet owners find participating in a ceremony helpful to bring closure to the grieving process (Quackenbush, 1982; Stewart, 1983). Pet owners are also increasingly seeking to take part in ritual blessings with companion animals who are "aging, experiencing some infirmity, or sick" (Holak, 2008, p. 539).

### **Problem Statement**

As shown above, it is evident that research has been conducted on the attachment and bond between humans and companion animals. Human growth involving companion animals has been studied in a number of different contexts including with children, with adolescents, with the elderly, and within families. However, very little is written about the role companion animals play in the context of adulthood. This study sought to fill that gap.

Humans are relational beings and seek closeness, comfort, and security through relationships. It is evident humans experience a unique relationship with companion animals through the vast number of books written, movies produced, conversations engaged in, and stories shared by humans about their companion animals. This relationship deserves closer attention. It is important to investigate the relationship between adults and companion animals as the number of households owning companion animals continues to rise in the United States. Therefore, this study sought to understand the relationship between adults and canine

companions in particular, and how the relationship contributes to growth and well-being in adults. Canine companions were chosen for the reported higher levels of attachment to this companion animal over other animals (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Sable, 1989, 1991).

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of relationships between adults and their canine companions and the role of this relationship in personal growth and well-being. The study of the role of relationships with canine companions was guided by the following questions:

1. How do relationships between adults and canine companions foster personal growth and well-being?
2. What are the areas, outcomes, or ways in which adults grow as a result of the relationships with their canine companions?
3. What are the growth-fostering components or indicators in the relationships between adults and canine companions that promote well-being?

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical frameworks to inform this study are relational theory, especially in relation to the notion of connected knowing, and attachment theory. Originating from a feminist perspective, relational theory is a theory of human psychological development which views healthy development to involve connections and relationships with others. Relational theory seeks to understand how individuals grow and develop through relationships which are defined as “the set of interactions that occur over a length of time” (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 26). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) found that the women in their study of how women come to know and develop made use of what they termed connected knowing, which obviously connotes relational learning.

The reason for utilizing a relational theoretical framework for this study is that it allows the opportunity to view relationships through a developmental lens. As a developmental lens, this framework provides a means to explore the relationships between adults and canine companions as growth-fostering relationships; thus, offering insight into personal growth within this relational context. Relational theory provides a discourse to make sense of the connections between adults and their canine companions as relationships.

Humans are not in isolation or alone when interacting with their canine companions. The interaction between humans and canine companions take place between two living, breathing, functioning beings; therefore, it could be argued a relationship exists. Most relational studies have looked at human-human relationships. This study allowed relational theory to be extended to human-non-human relationships and specifically, to human-canine companion relationships.

Traditional developmental theories of the past called for individuation, independence, and separation from others (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1978). Human development was viewed as being achieved if an individual became self-sufficient and could function in isolation from others. Dependence or the need for others in one's life was viewed as a weakness or pathology in the Western culture. Reliance on relationships or connections with others was discouraged in favor of independence and self-reliance (Stiver, 1991).

In working with individuals within relationships of differing capacities, new theories and insights began to emerge concerning the significance of connections and relationships with others (Miller, 1976; Gilligan, 1982). These theories took into "account human interconnection" and recognized "relatedness as the central plot of development" (Josselson, 1996, p. 1-2).

Whereas other theories would place relationships on the peripheral, relational theory

situates relationships at the center of development. Relationships are viewed as the central and most significant element in human growth and development. Instead of focusing on developing the self or person, emphasis is placed on developing relationships (Covington, 2007).

Relationships are dynamic, flowing, and continually experiencing movement. Therefore, the basic goal of development is considered to be “the deepening capacity for relationship and relational competence” (Schultheiss, 2003, p. 303).

It has been proposed that relationships are not only between people, but relationships could also be between human beings and objects and/or experiences. Other relationships may include: a Higher Power, pets, plants, houses, cars (objects) or exercise, gambling, and drug/alcohol addiction (experiences) (Byington, 1997).

With seeking to fully understand adult growth and well-being with canine companions, it is helpful to explore the relationship or the dyad, as well as the individual’s inner development and reasons for fostering and maintaining the connections and relationships with canine companions. For this reason, attachment theory provided a framework to represent the “internal organization of the individual person” (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 711). Attachment theory served as a framework to further interpret the relationship between humans and canine companions while emphasizing the human’s internal development and perspective of the relationship.

Attachment theory is a theory of adjustment and development of emotional bonds in enduring relationships. In forming attachments, individuals develop a sense of security and trust which contributes to healthy development (Bowlby, 1982). Attachment theory has been extended beyond infancy (Ainsworth, 1989) and consistent with relational theory, posits human development to take place through continued, active participation within significant relationships throughout the lifespan (Lopez, 1995).

Attachment theory has been utilized in studies with humans and companion animals (Sable, 1995; Nagasawa, Mogi, & Kikusui, 2009; Kurdek, 2009). This framework provides a means to understand the emotional bond that develops between humans and canine companions and how this bond promotes a sense of security and psychological well-being, thereby strengthening the relationship and fostering personal growth and well-being.

Emotional bonds are a focus in attachment. The stories shared by people of their pets are not simply told on a cognitive or rational level, but extend well beyond into an extrarational level, which may be an extension of what Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) discussed on women's learning, and then discussed by Flannery (2002) as well. Dirkx's (1997, p. 85) "learning through soul" seems most appropriate to describe the relationship between a human and animal. Dirkx (1997) explains soul through experiences, such as art, music, dance, nature, etc. "It is that magic moment, defining moment, that transcends rationality and gives depth, power, mystery, and deep meaning to the connection between the self and the world" (Cranton, 2006, p. 50-51). When an individual is willing, relationships with dogs and other animals may nurture the soul.

### **Methodology Overview**

A qualitative methodology is most appropriate for seeking to understand the role of relationships with canine companions in personal growth and well-being. This methodology is most appropriate for the study because understanding adults' subjective experiences and interpretations of the relationships with their canine companions are central to the study's purpose. Qualitative research is a "systematic, purposeful, and disciplined process of discovering reality structured from human experience" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 5). Qualitative research assumes there are multiple meanings and realities of human experiences and seeks to

understand and interpret these meanings and realities. With the emphasis on subjective experiences and multiple meanings and realities, the qualitative research kind served the study's purpose.

With constructivism being an underlying assumption of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009), narrative inquiry was chosen as the research type to inform this study. Narrative inquiry is rooted in a constructivist, interpretative epistemology (Rossiter, 1999) and "embraces narrative as both the method and phenomena of study" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5).

Narrative inquiry presents a way of understanding personal growth through the "storied nature" of human experience and by considering a "story as a metaphor for human life" (Rossiter, 1999, p. 77). An assumption of a narrative perspective to development is that individuals organize and make meaning of their experiences by constructing personal stories and developmental change occurs by telling the stories, revising the stories, and expanding the stories over time (Rossiter, 1999). The nature of the information is subjective rather than objective with attempting "to describe development from the inside as it is lived rather than from the outside as it is observed" (Rossiter, 1999, p. 78). It emphasizes description and interpretation rather than explanation.

In order to understand the role of relationships between adults and their canine companions, data must be collected that is not constrained by predetermined classifications or preconceived ideas. The data must be free to emerge and unfold in rich and descriptive ways. For this reason, the research type of narrative inquiry was most appropriate for the purpose of this study.

Purposeful sampling is utilized in qualitative research. "Information-rich" and "illuminative" (Patton, 2002, p. 40) cases help to provide an in-depth understanding of the

phenomena under study. These information-rich cases are “those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Hence, the term purposeful sample. The strategy of purposeful sampling, particularly snowball sampling, was used for this study to recruit participants who met the pre-established criteria for inclusion: 25 years old or older, has a canine companion or companions presently, identified as having a relationship with the canine companion for a minimum of three years, and identified as having an attachment to the canine companion.

The main method of data collection for this study was in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews related to the open-ended questions proposed earlier in this chapter. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to have flexibility and shape a conversation with participants while utilizing predetermined questions or issues to be investigated (Patton, 2002). Interviewing permits a researcher “to enter into the other person’s perspective” in order to “find out what is in or on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

This method best matches how to obtain the necessary information to understand the relationship between humans and their canine companions. During the interviews and congruent with a narrative approach, participants were asked to share personal stories concerning the relationships with their canine companions. Participants were also asked to provide detailed examples of their growth and development in adulthood through the experiences and relationships with their canine companions. The methodology of the study is further discussed in Chapter 3.

### **Significance of the Study**

As previously mentioned, there is a gap in the literature concerning the role of human-animal relationships in the context of adulthood. The gap in the research speaks to the

significance that this study will bring to the fields of adult education and human-animal interaction. Given the great impact animals have in human lives, it is hoped this study begins to answer questions and spark further interest in understanding this relationship.

As more societies welcome pets into their homes and lives, this study may shed light on the paradigm shift that has been occurring and continues to occur in countries across the world. It offers deeper insight into the human-animal bond and may help amplify the importance of relationships with animals, particularly in societies where this has been less accepted. It is hoped this study will encourage humane treatment of animals and an understanding of the unique relationship between humans and canines which has evolved over 15,000 years (International Fund for Animal Welfare, 2010; Animal Kind International, 2010; & World Society for the Protection of Animals).

The significance for the field of anthrozoology is to offer insight into the growth-fostering relationships between humans and their canine companions. By understanding in what ways humans benefit from attachment, attunement, and connection with their canine companions may help to enhance the relationship for both parties.

The significance for the field of adult education is to contribute to the growing body of literature that promotes growth through connections and relationships. By understanding what individuals gain in the relationship with canine companions, it may open new dimensions of connected knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) and relational learning (Hayes & Flannery, 2002) in and through connections with another being. Overall, feminist theory and pedagogy literature within the adult education field talks about the importance of connections and relationships. The study may stimulate conversations about the role of relationships with companion animals and how interspecies connections may contribute to adult

growth and learning.

In discussing the ecological self, O'Sullivan and Taylor (2004) wrote about an interspecies awareness that allows for a more open and wider world. "This wider sense of connection with all powers of the world is a primary matrix for all our subsequent development. Our personal world is not simply connected to the human community. We are creatures of the wider earth community and the very universe itself" (p.13). Fox (1990) believed an ecological self is the result of a complex process of identifications, including personal identification which includes friends, parents, family, pets, and so on.

O'Sullivan and Taylor (2004) described the purpose of their book, *Learning toward an Ecological Consciousness*, as "illuminating the connectedness of our world, our belonging within it, and relational ways of being and acting" (p. 25). The editors claim each section of the book "creates opportunities for comprehending how relationships and consciousness interweave in the search for understanding" (p. 25).

Adults construct meaning and make sense of the world through the relationships with their dogs. As Tisdell (1999, p. 93) explained, "... adult educators might want to note that a search for or an acknowledgment of the spiritual in the lives of adult learners is connected to the search for meaning that gives our lives coherence. For adults, this is connected to how we create meaning in our relationships with others." Quite possibly, 'others' may extend to animals and pets as well.

This study reaches across disciplines where relationships with animals exist and offers implications for practice. Within the humane education field, the study informs practices in curriculum development by highlighting the role of relationships and benefits between humans and animals. As an example in past years, humane education basically involved teaching

children and new pet owners about the responsibilities of owning and caring for a companion animal. This remains important; however, with the changing times, humane education has expanded “to encompass all animal issues, as well as environmental and human rights issues... and teaches about our relationships with each other, other species, and the Earth itself, ...”(Weil, 1998, p. 19). The essence of humane education is to develop ways to understand and relate “to nature, to non-human animals and to each other that are nurturing, supportive and positive” (Caine, 2009, p. 9).

Within the psychology field, the study informs practices and techniques in therapeutic and counseling settings for individuals owning pets and for grief/loss of pets. Within police and military canine units, the study informs training and development for the canine handlers by providing an understanding of the relationship that may develop between the human and canine work partners. Within the veterinary medical education field, the study may inform soon-to-be veterinarians about the owner/patient relationships they will encounter in practice.

In addition, this study seeks to contribute to the limited amount of qualitative research in the human-animal interaction/ relationship literature. A majority of the studies have utilized quantitative methods. It has been suggested that future research was needed with qualitative methods and in the development of quantitative assessment tools in order to move the field forward (Walsh, 2009). Qualitative methodology provides a rich and descriptive view of the relationship between humans and canine companions, one that is often missing in quantitative research.

Finally, this study has personal significance. I own and have lost canine companions and share a deep connection with each of them and with animals, in general. In my adult years, I have personally grown in the relationships with my canines. I have read a number of books

written by others about the special relationships with their canine companions or other pets. I am continually astounded how similar the stories are. These individuals speak of the connections and bonds with the animals and how deeply the animals and the relationships impact their lives. I can always relate to their experiences. This study offered an opportunity for me to contribute to the field of adult education, while also exploring a topic that is near and dear to my heart.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

The following assumptions are embedded in this research:

1. Adults form bonds and relationships with their canine companions.
2. Personal growth takes place within relationships with canine companions.
3. Adults can identify and articulate their experiences of growth and development in the relationships with canine companions.
4. Adults' attachment to companion animals influences the relationship.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Some of the limitations of this study were:

1. The study was limited to exploring the relationship with canine companions only and cannot be generalized to the relationships with other pets and animals.
2. Although the relationships between adults and their canine companions may be reciprocal, growth and development in the canine companions were not studied.
3. My personal views of relationships with canine companions may have influenced how I interpret the findings of the study.

### **Definitions of Terms**

1. **Anthrozoology** is the research and study involving connections, interactions, and bonds with animals (Anderson, 2008).

2. **Attachment** is an enduring affectional bond to an attachment figure which provides comfort, security, and influences healthy development (Ainsworth, 1989).
3. **Attunement** is an experienced awareness of self, other, and their connection and is viewed as an intersubjective system (Lasher, 1998).
4. **Companion animal** is a “domesticated or domestic-bred animal whose physical, emotional, behavioral, and social needs can be readily met as companions in the home, or in close daily relationships with humans” (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals website, 2010).
5. **Connection** is “an interaction that engenders a sense of being in tune with self and others, of being understood and valued” (Byington, 1997, p. 35).
6. **Growth-fostering relationship** is a mutual connection and interaction that promotes psychological development of all involved (Miller & Stiver, 1997).
7. **Human-animal bond** is “the dynamic relationship between people and animals in that each influences the psychological and physiological state of the other” (Purdue University School of Veterinary Medicine website, 2000).
8. **Relationship** is “the set of interactions that occur over a length of time” (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 26).
9. **Well-being** is the subjective, general evaluation of one’s quality of life, conceptualized with three components: cognitive appraisal, experiencing positive emotions; and experiencing few negative emotions (Deiner, 2009).

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an introduction to the remaining chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the literature concerning the theoretical frameworks, the emotional and social

growth of humans in relationships with companion animals, the well-being of humans in relationships with companion animals, and past/present animal companionship. Chapter 3 details the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 consists of the ten participants' narratives. Chapter 5 describes the individual and collective findings of the study and concludes the dissertation.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of relationships between adults and their canine companions and the role of these relationships in personal growth and well-being. This chapter begins by discussing the theoretical frameworks that inform the study. Relational theory and connected knowing serve as a theoretical framework to understand the relationship between adults and their canine companions; while attachment theory serves as a theoretical framework to understand the personal growth adults may experience in relationships with their canine companions.

This discussion of the theoretical frameworks is followed by a discussion of the literature concerning the emotional and social benefits of human-canine companion relationships to humans. Following this is a discussion of the literature concerning the well-being of humans in relationships with companion animals. This is followed by overviews of past and present animal companionship and the perceptual and cognitive abilities of canines. The chapter concludes with a summary for how this literature provided a foundation upon which to build this research study.

#### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Relational theory and attachment theory inform the study. Relational theory provides a discourse to make sense of the connections between adults and their canine companions as relationships. Attachment theory provides a developmental lens to view how adults grow in the relationships with their canine companions. The two frameworks, one grounded in relations and one in growth and development, complement one another and serve to meet the purpose of the study. The marrying of these two frameworks assists in grounding the questions: How do relationships between adults and canine companions foster personal growth and development?

What are the areas, outcomes, or ways in which adults grow as a result of the relationships with their canine companions? What are the growth-fostering components or indicators in the relationships between adults and canine companions that promote well-being? In order to investigate such questions, it is important to explore relational theory, connected knowing and attachment theory in depth.

### **Relational Theory and Connected Knowing**

Early in the field, developmental psychology recognized the need for relationships during a particular period of the human life span. Relationships were viewed as essential for the healthy growth and development of infants and children (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). Despite emphasizing this need early in life, many prominent psychological theories (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1978) advocated for separation of the self and independence from relationships beyond the infancy and childhood timeframes. “Separation, independence, and autonomy were the goals of the human adult in psychological theory ...” (Lasher, 1998, p. 130). These ideas have long been embraced by Western culture.

Historically, around the same time in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, the first relational theories (Winnicott, 1965; Kohut, 1971) were being developed. Early relational theories focused on the relational context of the self, proposing a healthy balance between separating from others and connecting with others throughout the life span. The self was viewed as an independent entity interacting or not interacting with other entities, while retaining a rather narcissistic quality. Early relational theories lacked the idea that there was mutual benefit for all parties within a relationship and also the idea that connections with others were essential for human growth.

Several years later and drawing from the work of Jean Baker Miller (1976) and Carol

Gilligan (1982), relational, or self-in-relation, theory was developed and termed relational-cultural theory. The primary assumption in relational theory is that connecting with others is a basic human need (Jordan et. al., 1991). The core ideas of relational theory are that development and growth occur through connections, that all humans long for connections, and that growth-fostering relationships are built through mutual empathy and mutual empowerment (Jordan & Hartling, 2002). Many people within relationships turn to others for their sense of self. In relational theory, development does not occur apart from others, but with and through others.

Relational theory recognizes the universal need for connection that is common to all humans throughout the lifespan. From this need for connection, development and growth unfolds through relationships and promotes the building of additional relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1997). “People create their lives within a web of connections to others” (Josselson, 1996, p. 1).

Relational theory posits that in any relationship connections and disconnections occur, and serve to strengthen or weaken the relationship respectively. A connection is “an interaction that engenders a sense of being in tune with self and others, of being understood and valued” (Byington, 1997, p. 35) and leads to growth-fostering relationships. Connections serve to establish the relationship and strengthen the relationship. Characteristics of connections include: mutuality, empathy, and empowerment. Mutuality and empathy lead to empowerment (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Defining these terms further, *mutuality* involves all parties contributing, participating, and sharing as fully as possible (Miller & Stiver, 1997). *Empathy* is the ability to unite with another at a similar cognitive and affective level (Covington, 2007) while *empowerment* is an inner ability to act and impact self and others (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

These terms describe the characteristics of connections which help to build growth-fostering relationships. In growth-fostering relationships, five positive outcomes may result and

include: increased zest and vitality, action, knowledge of self and others, increased self-worth, and a desire for more connections (Miller, 1986). These outcomes represent a means to enhance and further develop growth-fostering relationships which, in turn, leads to healthy psychological development.

Relational theory emphasizes ‘attunement,’ which is an experienced awareness of self, other, and their connection and is viewed as an intersubjective system. Attunement is a perceptual ability of humans and animals to mutually connect with each other through nonverbal communication. It involves sensing information from the environment, tuning into the subjective experiences of another, and responding to the experience (Lasher, 1998). “The primary mode of communication between human and animal is attunement, the mutual picking up of, and responding to, the subjective state of another creature” (Lasher, 1998, p. 130).

Sheldrake (1999) described attunement as real literal connections between two species within a social field. Sheldrake’s theory holds that social fields are composed of collective memories from ancestors and influence present behaviors in conscious and unconscious ways, such as passing down beliefs, customs, and habits. Individual animals are also connected through their social fields. Sheldrake believed that attunement was the result of humans and companion animals sharing a social field. According to Anderson (2008), “Dogs especially are tuned in to us and are, if you accept his theory, able to pick up on our intentions and know when we need comforting, healing, and protecting. Sheldrake’s theory is a possible explanation for the miraculous, almost telepathic behavior of companion animals” (p.41).

A similar theme on the importance of connections and relationships is expressed in the work of Josselson (1996). In exploring relationships, Josselson focuses on the importance of needing others in one’s life. Eight dimensions of relatedness describe how humans touch others

and progress developmentally through holding; attachment; passionate experience; eye-eye validation; idealization and identification; mutuality and resonance; embeddedness; and tending and caring. Although the eight dimensions of relatedness describe human-human relationships, the dimensions could also appropriately describe a relationship between a human and their canine companion. Attachment, one of the dimensions, is discussed in greater detail later in the literature review. Reference is also made to studies involving the dimensions of holding, eye-eye validation, and tending and caring between humans and their canine companions. According to Josselson (1996), "... we cannot have a viable theory of human development unless we can schematize development that takes place within, through, and for relatedness" (p. 2).

Connection of oneself with others entails learning through interactions and relationships and connected knowing. In studying the development of women, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) extended a relational approach to women's thinking and learning. The study demonstrated different ways of knowing for women, termed *connected knowing*. Connected knowing further enhanced an appreciation of women's abilities to know and learn through connections and relationships with others.

In discussing connection, Flannery (2002) distinguishes between connection with/in the self and connection of oneself with others. Connection to oneself involves knowing in relation to one's personal inner world and includes the aspects of global processing, subjective knowing, and intuition. Global processing, a kind of cognition, deals with patterns and structures, metaphorical relationships, and perceives information in a subjective way connecting the new information to past personal experiences. Subjective knowing, proposed by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), is a personal feeling and knowing from within based on experience and described as "a way of knowing based on intuition and/or feeling states rather

than on thought and articulated ideas that are defended with evidence” (p. 34). Subjective knowing is the foundation for connected knowing. Intuition is associated with feelings rather than with rational thought.

In further studying connected knowers, Clinchy (1996) discovered they possess sophisticated abilities to trust and understand others. Connected knowers are described as collaborative, empathetic, trusting, and understanding of others’ personal experiences (Flannery, 2002). “Connected knowers are aware that they cannot accurately know another’s world because the experiences belong to that particular person. At the same time, connected knowers use their own experiences to understand the other person. Connected knowers feel viscerally the connection with others” (Flannery, 2002, p. 126).

This connection may be similar to Dirkx’s (1997) notion of nurturing and learning through soul. Dirkx speaks of the connections and relationships between an individual and the broader world. “Our emotions and feelings are a kind of language for helping us learn about these relationships. Viewing our experiences through soul draws our attention to the quality of experiencing life and ourselves” (p. 82-83). Dirkx described learning as both coming to know oneself in the world and making sense of others within the world. “The ‘other’ is anything, anyone, or any group we perceive as apart or separate from our individual natures” (p. 83). Dirkx recommended that soul can be nourished “within our lives through story, song, myth, poetry, and the concreteness of our everyday experiences” (p. 83).

Although relational theory helps to understand relatedness and development in relationships, there are several critiques of it. Relationships are complex and there is limited recognition of this complexity in human lives. In addition, relational theory lacks a solid tie between one’s social world and one’s personal, internal world (Enns, 1991). Relational theory is

about human- human relationships – not about human relationships with animals or the natural world. Given the complexity of relationships, it could be argued that interactions with canine companions involve both the relationship with the animal and the emotional bonds to the animal.

Based on the relational approach and the premise that human growth takes place within the context of relationships, Schaefer (2002) advised that, “... the human-animal relationship or bond can provide an opportunity for enhancing our self-knowledge, our ability to fully experience life and our emotions, and provide us with the opportunity to trust another being” (p. 6). Relational theory, while typically more about human-human relationships, is a framework that can also be used to explore the human-canine companion relationship or the dyad, and attachment theory serves as a lens to view the growth and well-being that may result in this context. Attachment theory is discussed in the next section.

### **Attachment Theory**

Humans experience growth and development throughout the lifespan. One particular way humans grow and develop is through being an active participant in relationships with others. In discussing relationships, a beginning point is to review the literature on attachment and attachment theory. The forming of attachments promotes healthy human development and helps to establish additional attachments to others throughout the lifespan. For this reason, attachment is as important in the adult years, as it is during the period of infancy. This section highlights human-human relationships and human-companion animal relationships. A discussion of how human-human relationships offer insight into relationships with other beings, such as companion animals, is incorporated throughout the discussion, and then human-companion animal relationships are discussed directly.

### **Human-Human Relationships**

In 1950, the World Health Organization requested consultation and advisement from John Bowlby concerning the mental health needs of homeless children. Bowlby (1951) concluded that for ultimate mental health, infants and young children should experience a warm and continuous relationship with the mother or mother-figure. Maternal deprivation could have devastating consequences for a child's mental health. Bowlby outlined measures in how to limit these consequences for homeless children.

Although Bowlby's work identified the effects of maternal deprivation and offered practical measures, it offered little to explain the origination or the process of development of consequences for mental health. This was the launch into what would become attachment research and theory (Bowlby, 1982).

Influenced by Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud, Bowlby's theoretical framework was a blend of ethology (behavioral biology) and psychoanalysis. Whereas Darwin and Freud focused theoretically more on adults (although not exclusively), Bowlby argued for attention to be on "still developing organisms" (Schore, in Bowlby, 1982, p. xii). For this reason, Bowlby studied the relationships between children and mothers /caregivers.

Drawing from Konrad Lorenz's (as cited in Bowlby, 1982) work with imprinting in newborn goslings, Bowlby believed a similar innate behavioral system was involved in child/parent relationships where a child would develop a deep bond for the primary caregiver. Out of this belief, attachment theory was devised. Research into the attachment behaviors of animals in nature (Goodall, 1965; Harlow, 1958) contributed greatly to the development of attachment theory in humans.

Attachment theory is a theory in which enduring, emotional bonds develop toward a specific attachment figure. For protection and security there is a need to keep the attachment

figure in close proximity. When separation occurs, distress and attempting to regain contact with the attachment figure is very likely to occur. Joy and pleasure are experienced and demonstrated upon reunion with the attachment figure. Permanent loss of the attachment figure would result in grief. The attachment bond persists over time and space (Bowlby, 1982).

Individuals form attachments that can be categorized as secure or insecure. Bowlby (1982) proposed the concept of an internal working model of attachment to explain the development of attachment. The internal working model of attachment is the “underlying representation of the infant’s experience of attachment affect and the caregiver’s reactions to the infant’s attachment needs” (Fish, 1996, p. 240). This working model will reflect the security or insecurity of the interactions experienced between the infant and caregiver and establishes a set of personal expectations about self and others concerning attachment (Fish, 1996). An infant with secure attachment, knowing his/her needs will be met, will signal the caregiver when upset and expect a response to his/her needs. On the other hand, an infant with insecure attachment, having little expectation or confidence his/her needs will be met, will become distressed when upset and demonstrate little expectation the caregiver will meet his/her needs.

Attachment is dependent on the developmental stage of the infant. Around the middle of the first year of life, infants develop object permanence, establish directed grasping and reaching, and begin to develop locomotion skills. As this development unfolds, the forming of attachments is possible, as well as, the onset of separation anxiety when apart from the attached figure (Ainsworth, 1989). “At this point, the baby is capable of attachment and is very likely to become attached not only to his or her mother figure, but to one or a few other familiar persons as well” (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 710).

Ainsworth (1991) described attachment figures as having four distinct characteristics.

Attachment figures' physical presence and accessibility are enjoyable (proximity maintenance); they are missed when not present (separation distress); they are dependable sources for comfort and security (secure base); and they are needed in times of worry and stress (safe haven).

An important methodological approach for studying attachment was designed by Ainsworth in 1969. Known as the Strange Situation Test, the now-classic laboratory approach was utilized to study the attachment behaviors of 12-18 month old children under conditions of low and high stress (Topal, Miklosi, Csanyi, & Doka, 1998). The Strange Situation Test involves closely observing the infant in eight 3-minute-long episodes which consists of the infant being with the parent/caregiver, with a stranger, with both the parent/caregiver and stranger, or alone. The first episode entails the parent/caregiver and infant alone in a play room and the child explores the room without parental participation. Following the initial episode, every three minutes the infant is exposed to either the parent/caregiver or the stranger entering or leaving the playroom (Berger, 2001).

By separating and reuniting the parent/caregiver with the child, the pattern of attachment can be observed. Four patterns have been identified:

- a) *secure attachment* (Type B)- the infant may or may not show signs of missing the parent/caregiver upon separation, greets the parent/caregiver upon reunion, and returns to playing and exploring (Goldberg et al., 1995).
- b) *insecure avoidant attachment* (Type A)- the infant shows little interest in the parent/caregiver, shows minimal to no distress at separation from the parent/caregiver, and avoids or ignores the parent/caregiver when reunited (Goldberg et al., 1995).
- c) *insecure-resistant attachment* (Type C)- the infant demonstrates little interest in exploring the playroom, shows high stress during separation, seeks contact with the

parent/caregiver when reunited, and is unable to be calmed by the parent/caregiver (Goldberg et al., 1995).

- d) *disorganized-insecure attachment* (Type D)- the infant shows disorganized, disoriented, and/or undirected behaviors such as freezing, rocking, and looking dazed (Main & Solomon, 1990).

The forming of attachments can promote healthy human development throughout the lifespan. For example, a child who has an attachment to his/her mother may also become attached to a teacher, a coach, or to a friend's parent. As the child transitions into adolescence, a shift in attachment from the mother to other significant relationships takes place. In adulthood, the individual most likely will establish new principal attachment figures to those he/she is romantically and sexually involved with (Ainsworth, 1989). This shifting or developing new attachments is important as attachment seems a significant aspect to relationships throughout the lifespan and one not simply developed solely between a mother and child nor only during childhood.

Moving attachment research into adulthood, Main and Associates (1985) studied adult narratives from parents whose children had participated in a study five years earlier using the Strange Situation Test. The primary objective of the research was to investigate the adults' narratives for content and structure in reflecting an underlying internal working model of attachment. The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) was utilized and consists of fifteen structured questions that encourage adults to tell stories of their personal attachment relationships, including their history of attachment and how it may have impacted their development. Interestingly, the adult stories were similar to the way the infants behaved in the Strange Situation Test. Four adult attachment classifications were described:

- a) *secure/ autonomous*- balanced, clear, coherent, and reflected upon narratives; the adult values attachment relationships and views the relationships as influential on their development; can integrate difficult experiences into the narratives; easily recalls attachment experiences (Fish, 1996).
- b) *dismissing/ detached*- narratives lack coherence and attachment affect; the adult dismisses attachment and denies attachment relationships had any influence; has little memory for attachment experiences (Fish, 1996).
- c) *preoccupied*- narratives lack coherence, often contradictory and confusing; the adult seems unable to unite memories and present a clear story for their attachment relationships (Fish, 1996).
- d) *unresolved*- narratives are disorganized and disoriented; the adult exhibits lack of resolution to painful or traumatic experiences (Fish, 1996).

Weiss (1991) pointed out similarities and differences between adult attachment and childhood attachment. Children and adults “seek closeness and security from attachment figures at times of stress; attaining and maintaining proximity reduces fear and insecurity. Also, any threat to accessibility of the attachment figure evokes protest, distress, and other measures to ward off separation or loss” (p. 336).

The differences between children and adult attachment include the ability of adults to have more flexibility to alternate between being cared for and being the caregiver; “the inner sense of security is a more prominent property of adult attachment because of an adult’s more sophisticated way of thinking, greater self-reliance, and ability to tolerate separations for longer periods of time” (p. 336). After exploring attachment in human-human relationships, the literature review will now consider how this attachment theory may relate to human-companion

animal relationships.

### **Human-Companion Animal Relationships**

Attachment is also not reserved solely for humans. The Strange Situation Test has been adapted and used in research with animals as well. Attachment behaviors were observed between primates and their cagemates (Bard, 1983; Miller, Bard, Juno, & Nadler, 1986); between primates and humans (Miller, Bard, Juno, & Nadler, 1990); and between canines and humans (Topal, Miklosi, Csanyi, & Doka, 1998). When separated and reunited, the attachment reactions of the animals were similar to the reactions observed in children. The study by Topal, Miklosi, Csanyi, and Doka (1998) was ground breaking research in the attachment of canines and humans. The adult dogs showed patterns of attachment behaviors toward their owners. Reciprocally, research has been conducted on human attachment to canine companions with findings similar to human-human relationships and attachment.

Gacsi, Topal, Miklosi, Doka, and Csanyi (2001) found attachment behaviors to humans in rescue/ shelter dogs as well. Adult dogs that were handled briefly during three different times showed attachment to these handlers. The researchers reasoned that “dogs living in rescue centers have a remarkable need for social contact with humans, which can lead to a relatively rapid formation of attachment to a potential attachment figure” (p. 429). The study demonstrated adult dogs with low or restricted contact with humans may retain an ability to form new attachments. This continued ability to form attachments may assist shelters in adopting healthy, unwanted, adult pets. Adult animals are the population most abandoned and found in shelters with 80% not finding permanent homes (Irvine, 2003). Animals well into their adult years have the ability to form attachments and develop relationships to humans.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) demonstrated the usefulness of the attachment framework for

studying adult relationships and suggested romantic relationships share similar features with infant attachment, such as touching, gazing, and baby talk. Interestingly, similar findings were discovered in relationships with animals. Sanders (2003) described the human-animal relationship as highly emotional and included: spending time together, sharing routines, mutual play, sustained eye contact, and “face gazing” (p. 416).

Ainsworth (1989) discussed attachment beyond infancy and identified enduring emotional bonds were likely to occur with parents bonding to a child or children, between romantic and sexual pair bonds, between friends and companions, and between siblings and other kin. Sable (1995) argued that family pets could qualify as friends and companions and have “potential to provide an emotional attachment that promotes a sense of well-being and security” (p. 336). Margolies (1999), taking the same position, has claimed that in any relationship attachment can occur if the relationship fulfills needs for safety and security.

It has been hypothesized that humans develop positive emotions and behaviors while caring for canine companions because a bond very similar to that in human mother-child relationships can develop between humans and canines (Serpell, 2003). Attachment theory provides a place to begin to understand the relationship between humans and animal companions. Studies have been conducted using attachment theory as a theoretical framework to research human-companion animal relationships. Similarities exist between attachment in human-human relationships and attachment in human-companion animal relationships.

Extending attachment theory to relationships with companion animals, Beck and Madresh (2008) compared relationships with romantic partners and relationships with companion animals (cats and dogs were included) through a web-based survey taken by 192 participants. Surprisingly, the findings revealed relationships with companion animals were

more secure on every measure as compared to relationships with romantic partners. The results suggest that companion animals are a consistent source of attachment security. Beck and Madresh (2008) write, “We speculate that pets are not merely substitutes for human interaction, but fill a specific role by providing a consistent, and relatively controllable, sense of relationship security. A dependable source of security may help cushion the uncertainty of more complex relationships with humans, making it easier for pet owners to cope with the ups and downs of daily life” (p. 53). Within the study, relationship security was characterized by emotional security, trust, comfort, and low anxiety.

In studying safe haven, a feature of attachment figures described by Ainsworth (1991) in which attachment figures are sought to help alleviate distress, Kurdek (2009) found that on average 975 participants who completed an online survey were more likely to turn to their canine companions when they experienced emotional stress than they were to turn to their “mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, best friends, and children” (p. 444). Only romantic partners were rated higher than canine companions in the safe haven feature. Kurdek conjectured that the unconditional love and support provided by canine companions may be a factor in humans considering canines as a dependable source of emotional comfort.

Other features of attachment figures as described by Ainsworth (1991) have been studied as well. In attachment bonds, Bonas, McNichols, and Collis (2000) found canine owners enjoyed the companionship the canines provided (proximity maintenance) and Stallones (1994) found canine owners miss their canine companions when they are away from them (separation distress).

In surveying 120 adults at a park, Serpell (1981) found that having a pet during childhood resulted in higher levels of attachment and attitudes towards pets in adulthood. It was also found

that adults favored the animal species they had as a child. Likewise, adults who grew up without companion animals were significantly less likely to have a companion animal in adulthood. Kidd and Kidd (1989) found similar results when studying a larger sample of 900 adults.

Katcher, Friedmann, Goodman, and Goodman (1983) developed a 10-item questionnaire of statements that would indicate positive attachment to a companion dog, such as carrying the dog's photo, letting the dog sleep on the bed, and defining the pet as a family member. The questionnaire was administered to 80 veterinary clients and found 48% defined their dog as a family member, 67% had a photo of the dog, and 73% let the companion sleep in the bed.

Lago, Kafer, Delaney, and Connell (1998) developed a pet relationship scale that was based on features of attachment. Endenburg (1995) used a single measure to estimate the strength of attachment to pets and Serpell (1996) utilized a single-item rating scale of attachment to pets and found most participants were very attached to their pets.

Many studies have looked at the psychological perspective of attachment. In wanting to understand attachment between humans and canines from a biological perspective, Nagasawa, Mogi, and Kikusui (2009) studied physiological and neuroendocrinological changes in humans and canines when the two are interacting. Comparing heart rate variability, the findings revealed that canines autonomically differentiate between their owners and strangers and displayed emotional responses when reunited with their owners. On the human side, it was found that the gaze from a canine companion has a particularly strong effect on the owners' neuroendocrine system, specifically increasing oxytocin. Gazing is thought to be a powerful, visual communication tool that can promote social bonding.

Another area in which evidence of attachment appears is in the grief and loss of a companion animal. The loss and heartbreak of losing a companion animal can be quite difficult.

The mourning associated with losing a pet can be as difficult as losing a human family member. Quackenbush (1984) compared grief related to the death of a pet to that experienced when losing a spouse or close family member. Lagoni, Butler, and Hetts (1994) concluded that secondary losses may also occur when pet owners experience disruptions in daily routines and activities once shared with the deceased pet.

Through surveys, Wrobel and Dye (2003) found that grief over the loss of a pet can last from six months to one year, with ten months being the average length of grieving. In the same study, differences in grieving were found between males and females on six of twelve symptoms. In contrast, Gosse and Barnes (1994) found one significant difference between grieving males and females, that being females reporting higher levels of despair.

McCutcheon and Fleming (2001-2002) found that females reported significantly more attachment to their pets than males, but no significant difference in grief was found between the genders. Research from this study also revealed individuals who had their pet euthanized by a veterinarian reported significantly less grief than owners who had lost their pet to natural causes. This finding was in contrast to past research that reported owners who euthanized their pet experienced more grief (Quackenbush & Glickman, 1984). Gerwolls and Labott (1994) found no significant differences in grief among the different causes of death.

Archer and Winchester (1994) studied bereavement following the loss of a pet and found significant positive correlations with the degree of attachment to the pet, the suddenness of the pet's death, and whether the individual lived alone or with others. No significant correlations were found with the type of pet, the amount of time since the pet had died, or how long the interaction/relationship had been between the owner and pet. Through factor analysis, emotional distress was discovered to account for approximately one third of the variance with two lesser

factors: personal importance of the loss and a continued feeling of attachment to the deceased pet. In speaking of the results, Archer and Winchester (1994, p.259) stated. "Overall, these findings indicate a parallel reaction to that following a human bereavement."

Similarities between attachment in human-human relationships and attachment in human-companion animal relationships include: development of a bond, security, proximity maintenance, safe haven, secure base, separation distress, and intense grief with the permanent loss of the animal. Attachment provides a means to understand the emotional bond that develops between humans and canine companions and how this bond promotes a sense of security and psychological well-being. Attachment serves as a way to interpret the relationship between humans and canine companions emphasizing the individual's internal development.

Attachment theory is not without critiques. MacDonald (1992) believed the concept of attachment is broadly interpreted and too often confused with love and warmth. Harris (1998) criticized attachment theory for the assumption that nurturing by parents influences children's development. Harris believed a child's peers may have more influence on shaping personality and character than parents. Kobak (2009) commented that although dog owners form affectionate bonds with their pets, he cautioned of using attachment theory. He described the bonds between canines and their owners as more likely to meet criteria for caregiving than for attachment. Kurdek (2009) countered that studies involving owners and their canine companions have documented critical features of attachment, such as safe haven.

### **Emotional and Social Growth of Humans in Relationships with Companion Animals**

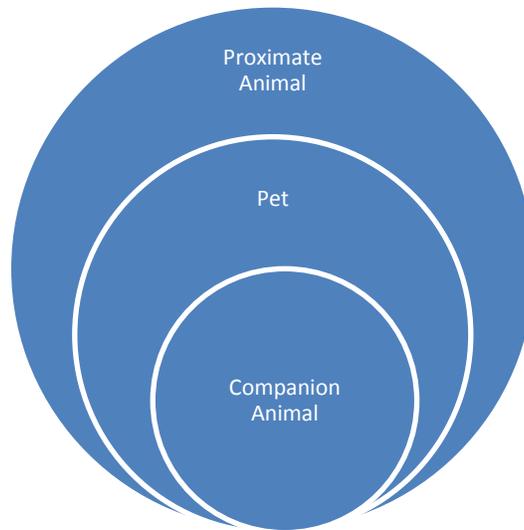
Research on attachment has shown that emotional health is affected by a variety of personal relationships throughout the lifespan. Individuals vary on the intensity of attachment to companion animals and this intensity of attachment is dependent on the type of relationship with

the animal (Keil, 1990). For example, given a spectrum of attachment, individuals may view their animals as beloved, close friends on one end of the spectrum while on the other end of the spectrum individuals may view their pets as simply animals and void of any deep emotional connection. Individuals with working pets (police dogs, herding dogs, etc.) may fall across the spectrum of attachment given the specific type of relationship with the animal.

### **Emotional Growth**

Keil (1990) developed and empirically examined a conceptual framework of human-animal interaction, which described the relationship with companion animals as a friendship and as the least common, but highest level of attachment for humans. Following the study, the conceptual framework was revised and consisted of three components: antecedents to human-animal relationships, hierarchy of human-animal attachments, and outcomes of the relationships. Antecedents included repeated interaction, reciprocal sensory response, appeal of animal's appearance, loneliness, and stress. Outcomes included increase in grief if the animal dies, increase in self-esteem, increase in relaxation, decrease in blood pressure, and decrease in depression.

The diagram below is the hierarchy of attachment (Keil, 1990, p. 154). The level of attachment of a human to an animal symbolizes the type of relationship and the emotional connection. The level of attachment would also affect outcomes of the relationship.



Human-animal interaction at the proximate level which is characterized only by proximity and would reflect little to no attachment to the animal. Interaction at the pet level would include the characteristics of the proximate level, but would reflect some attachment and perception of the animal as a pet. At the highest level of attachment, the companion animal level would reflect perception of the animal as a close friend and equal member of the family.

Albert and Bulcroft (1988) studied pet attachment within the family structure and discovered five variables that affected feelings of attachment to companion animals: marital status, family life cycle, number of children, presence of children, and type of pet. Under the marital status variable, participants of the study who were never married, divorced, widowed, or remarried rated the highest attachment to their pets. Albert and Bulcroft discussed this finding may indicate “that pets can be emotional substitutes for family members such as children or spouses” (1988, p. 550).

Interestingly under the type of pet variable, participants who chose a dog as their favorite pet rated higher attachment to the animal than participants whose favorite pets were cats or other animals. Albert and Bulcroft (1988) speculated that the preference for dogs and higher attachment may be a result of the greater affection canines display toward their owners and the

manner in which dogs and owners interact and spend time doing things together. Siegel (1990) measuring affectional attachment of elderly pet owners also found that the most reported attachment was to dogs. In addition, the dog owners more often described the love and security the pets provided to them compared to owners of other types of pets.

Under the family life cycle variable and in support of family development theory, it was found that owning a pet, as well as the roles and functions of a pet varies over the life cycle and by type of family. Specifically, findings revealed that pet ownership is lowest in families with infants, possibility due to the responsibility and stress associated with caring for infants. Pet attachment was highest among newlyweds, empty-nesters, never married, and widowed people (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988).

An interesting finding with families in the middle stages of the family life cycle was that pet ownership is particularly high among families with elementary-aged children and adolescents, yet attachment to the pets was rated as low by the adults. Albert and Bulcroft (1988, p. 550) found through interview data that parents' motivation for having pets was the deep rooted "belief that pets perform beneficial function for children." In addition to providing companionship, parents believed caring for pets taught children independence and responsibility.

Finally, the number of children variable demonstrated that families with two or more children present in the household had less attachment than one-child families. Homes where there were no children or the children were no longer living in the house had higher attachment to pets (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). Albert and Bulcroft's (1988) research revealed that people view their pets as family members and pets play significant emotional, psychological, and social roles within the changing stages of families.

With American families having fewer children and with an increasing number of grown

children relocating away from their parents, it has been rationalized that companion animals will fill an emotional void for adults (Dresser, 2000). During a 1995 Blessing of the Animals, Dresser (2000, p. 104) reported interviewing attendees who admitted “their animals brought them *greater* pleasure than their children” because “they offer what children do not: obedience, loyalty, unconditional love.”

Companion animals may alleviate loneliness or benefit an individual who has difficulty interacting with other people. Sable (1989, 1991) found widowed women who had pets, particularly dogs, reported significant less loneliness following the loss of their spouses. Sable discussed the warmth and affection in the women’s comments “attests to the fondness the women felt for their pets and also shows how pets are felt to allay loneliness” (p. 337).

Warmth and affection would also describe how homeless youth viewed their animal companions. Rew (2000) researched the loneliness felt by homeless youth and the strategies they used to cope with the loneliness. Although the adolescents acknowledged human friends were helpful in having someone to talk, dogs were identified as valued companions who provided “safety, unconditional love, and a reason to keep going because they needed care in return” (p. 128). The youth described how the pets awakened a need within them to act responsibly and to make better choices. Rew discussed how through caring for the dogs, the youth coped with homelessness “in ways that enable them not merely to survive, but to develop in healthy ways that may mitigate the circumstances that otherwise make them vulnerable to unhealthy development and emotional distress” (p. 131). Rew called for further community-based interventions that can assist in promoting health and social development in this population.

A different population was recently studied, and it was found that entering residential college freshmen would like a pet therapy program in university-owned and/or operated resident

housing (Adamle, Riley, & Carlson, 2009). The students identified that pets could serve as a support, assist in the transition to college, and adjustment to changes in daily family attachments. The students reported that many had left pets behind at home and were missing them. The researchers advocated that a pet therapy program in the residential housing may help students establish new social relationships at college and “provide a bridge in attachment from their previous supportive network” (p. 547).

Pre-service teachers in California used a three-part art lesson with students in grades 3-5 to provide an opportunity for the students to share about their pets and learn about attachment. Following the lessons, the art work was displayed within the community. Parents of the children whose artwork were displayed reported the children were excited about the project “because it was such a personal part of their family” (Turner, 2009, p. 46). In addition, the parents were moved by the children’s attachment with their pets and with having the responsibility for their pets. Turner (2009) wrote, “This art lesson had an emotional and artistic impact on both the children and the viewers who came to see the exhibition. Children and adults alike expressed appreciation for their pets, and the value they hold in their everyday lives” (p. 46).

In light of the strong attachments that form, the loss of a companion animal can be emotionally devastating. Many who lose a companion animal are unsure how to appropriately grieve and may not receive the proper support and sympathy from family members and friends. Donohue (2005) advocated for social workers to assess clients for pet grief and loss; to help veterinary personnel understand the importance of offering support before and after a decision to euthanize a pet; to assist veterinary clinics and hospitals in providing grief counseling services; and to educate the public concerning pet loss and bereavement. Toray (2004) proposed mental health counselors become educated in human-animal interaction, the human-animal bond, and

pet loss in order to provide effective assessment and counseling for grieving pet owners. Cowles (1985) found that the loss of a companion animal reminded adults in the study of earlier losses in their lives. Feelings and emotions associated with the death of a pet may be an entry into other unresolved feelings and personal issues as well.

Pet owners report that participating in a ceremony helps to bring closure to the grieving process (Quackenbush, 1982; Stewart, 1983). “Ceremonies memorializing companion animals, service animals, or animals in laboratory/research settings take place throughout the world at universities, research centers, military posts, and drug laboratories” (Iloff, 2002, as cited in Holak, 2008, p. 536). Using ethnographic research, Holak (2008) found in studying ritual blessings with companion animals that pet owners have a need to take part in blessings with pets who are “aging, experiencing some infirmity, or sick” (p. 539). She goes on to discuss how animal blessings are a shared experience between humans and animals that reveal a belief in animal spirituality. Holak also commented that blessings of this nature are gaining popularity in many religious denominations.

Through observing and interviewing participants at a Celebration of Animals ceremony, Holak (2008) related the results to Holbrook et al. (2001) themes in the consumption experiences between humans and animals: the opportunity to appreciate nature and experience wildlife; the opportunity for inspiration and learning; the opportunity to be childlike and playful; the opportunity to be altruistic and nurturant; the opportunity for companionship, caring, comfort, and/or calmness; the opportunity to parent; and the opportunity to strengthen bonds with other humans. Holbrook et al. (2001) believed these opportunities between animals and humans would qualify as sacred experiences.

Dresser (2000) viewed human-animal celebrations as a means to “affirm life” (p. 106).

The author went on to state, “... the human construct of reality is not limited only to things human, and that we include animals in celebrations as an act of love for our earthly companions. These actions illustrate how meaningful animals are to us as a bridge to both the natural and supernatural worlds” (p. 105-106).

According to Bekoff (2003) animals are sacred and should be viewed as kin, rather than as entities entirely different from humans. He believed in an interconnectedness of all living things, including animals. Bekoff, a vegetarian for ethical reasons, believed a vegetarian world would be a more compassionate world. He believed that “what we eat sometimes redefines cruelty” (2007, p. 149). According to Bekoff (2007), “In 1998 in the United States alone, more than 26.8 billion animals were killed for food- that translates to about 73,424,657 animals per day, 3,059,361 animals per hour, 50,989 animals per minute, and 850 animals per second. It’s hard to conceptualize that much death occurring in a single afternoon...” (p. 149).

Bekoff (2003) called for humans to respect animals, appreciate animals’ lives, and take animals’ feelings and thoughts into consideration. This caring and compassion towards animals McDaniel (2006) referred to as a “spirituality of animal connection” (p. 33) and advised that “a spirituality of animal connection will need to show how human beings can become more whole, more complete as human beings, by entering into rich relations with other animals” (p.34).

Bekoff (2002) advised that animals can contribute much to humans’ spirituality and believed that learning about animals was vital for gaining a full appreciation of human spirituality. He also believed the decision to euthanize a pet could be a lesson in spirituality. McDaniel (2006) commented on Bekoff’s writings of play and wonder with animals, “...certain kinds of bonds can emerge between humans and other animals in which there is mutual benefit and spiritual enrichment. Even as we are different from other animals, there can be forms of

communication, or at least shared feelings, creature to creature” (p. 35).

### **Social Growth**

Companion animals not only promote intrapersonal growth, but may also promote interpersonal growth. Companion animals instinctively attract attention and often serve as catalysts for humans to interact with one another. Messent (1982) reported that people walking with dogs were much more likely to be attended to than those without dogs. Veevers (1985) asserted that the presence of a pet increases a person’s social visibility and functions to increase the chances for initial contact with others. She further explained how animals can serve as a subject for casual conversation. “Indeed, next to the weather, a pet may be almost the most neutral subject of conversation” (p. 16).

Animals of all kinds can serve as “social lubricants” (Hunt, Hart, & Gomulkiewicz, 1992) and increase the likelihood of interactions with others. Through observations and audio-recorded conversations, Hunt, Hart, and Gomulkiewicz (1992) conducted a quantitative study and findings revealed a female confederate in a community park setting accompanied by a rabbit and turtle attracted both unfamiliar adults and children. The attraction to the animals resulted in social interaction and conversations which included questions, personal revelations, and teaching statements. Animals have the unique ability to attract attention and to promote interaction among humans.

Companion animals may facilitate social interaction as a ‘go-between’ for humans as well. Rather than talking directly to one another, humans may speak to or on behalf of an animal to communicate with other humans. Researching the function of utterances to pets, Roberts (2004), observed and videotaped interactions between staff and pet owners in a veterinary teaching clinic. The research concluded that the utterances were not related to veterinary medical

activities, but served to facilitate social interaction and manage professional relations among the humans. Observations included the veterinary staff using utterances to discuss indirectly the pet owners' caretaking abilities, reduce owner complaints, alleviate owner concerns, avoid confrontations, and maintain professional positions. In this way, the staff used the animals as resources to manage their own interpersonal interactions with the owners.

In addition to conversation starters, Veevers (1985) acknowledged that pets serve the role as entertainer and humans of all ages will engage in play with animals. Play is a form of human-animal communication. Wells and Perrine (2001) found in a workplace study that participants who brought their pets to work reported their pets entertained and relaxed the customers. In addition, the participants reported that the pets provided companionship at work, made the work environment more comfortable, and provided a pleasant diversion and distraction. When humans interact with animals through play or other means, this interaction is a distraction, if just for a short period of time. The role of animals as a therapeutic distraction is well documented (Beck & Katcher, 2003).

Cangelosi and Embrey (2006) discussed the therapeutic role of a dog named Cocoa who volunteers her services through the Loudon Volunteer Caregivers Pet Therapy Program located in Loudon County, Virginia. The assisted-care facility residents often become more active and responsive during and after Cocoa's visits. "Dogs are unconcerned with age or physical ability; they accept people as they are. This alone causes many to reach out and interact with dogs" (p. 20).

This reaching out interaction with a dog was also explored by Johnson, Meadows, Haubner, and Sevedge (2003). The pilot study investigated the benefit of a visit from a dog as a complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) technique for patients hospitalized with cancer.

The researchers reported that “human-animal interaction meets the National Institute of Health definition of Mind-Body Intervention CAM techniques, as a process that may facilitate the mind’s capacity to affect bodily function and symptoms” (p. 59-60). In a quasi-experimental design, thirty patients were assigned one of three conditions: a visit from a dog, a visit from a friendly human, or time spent alone reading selected magazines.

Findings revealed participants responded more positively to the dog visit than to the human visit about feeling better and helping to make their cancer therapy/treatment easier. Participants also described the dog as a confidante and friend. More participants in the dog group reported telling someone of the visit, looked forward to another visit, and would remember the interaction after leaving the hospital (Johnson, Meadows, Haubner, & Sevedge, 2003). The visit promoted social interaction and facilitated future conversation. The visit from the dog may have also served as a distraction from the cancer treatment and symbolized some deeply needed normalcy in the patients’ lives.

Turning to a different population, Fournier, Geller, and Fortney (2007) conducted a quasi-experimental field study to assess the psychosocial impact of a human-animal interaction program on the criminal behavior of prison inmates. The findings revealed positive effects for the participants engaged in the program with increased therapeutic treatment progress, decreased institutional infractions, and improved social skills and social sensitivity. Participants in the study “anecdotally reported increased social interaction with both inmates and staff interested in interacting with the dogs” (p. 100).

Turner (2007) qualitatively studied the experiences of prison inmates participating in a canine program. Using unstructured interviews and cross-case analysis, seven themes emerged from the data: patience, parenting skills, helping others, increased self-esteem, social skills,

normalizing effect, and calming effect on the environment. The inmates reported these positive effects from participating in the program. As Kevin, an inmate, shared,

We have guys that have transferred from different facilities and some of them have been incarcerated for 15 or 20 years and seeing a dog, even though they're not really considered pets, that's the closest thing to home that they've seen in years. Being able to spend five or ten minutes of their day, getting on the floor and playing with a dog is, that's the highlight of their day. (Turner, 2007, p. 41).

The development of humane attitudes may be a result of relationships with companion animals. A link appears to exist between childhood companion animal ownership and the development of humane attitudes toward animals and nature. Paul and Serpell (1993) empirically examined and found statistical correlations between humane attitudes of animals in adulthood and positive relationships with companion animals in childhood. It has been hypothesized that sympathetic and empathic feelings which may develop for companion animals during childhood have potential to generalize to other animals and nature during adulthood (Serpell & Paul, 1994). "Pets, so the argument goes, are able to fulfill this ambassadorial role because of their ambiguous, intermediate position on the boundary between human and animal, culture and nature" (Serpell, 2000, p. 110).

Cavanaugh, Leonard, and Scammon (2008) explored how canine companions' personality traits shaped and impacted the human-animal relationship and well-being of adults. The research found adults reported having a higher degree of relationship satisfaction when the dogs possessed the characteristics of openness and agreeableness. Cavanaugh, Leonard, and Scammon (2008) wrote "Humans may take advantage of certain animal personalities to cultivate,

complement, or fill voids in their own sense of identity” (p. 477). As an individual becomes more comfortable with his/her own identity through a relationship with a pet, this in turn may give the individual more confidence in traversing relationships with other humans.

Pet owners form identities related to the special relationships and interactions shared with their companion animals. The owners’ identities initially begin to develop with naming the animal/pet. This action acknowledges the animal’s own identity and establishes credibility to the human-animal relationship (Sanders, 2003). According to Veevers (1985), the human-animal interaction can have a “projective function” (p. 12), in which the selection of a pet can be interpreted as making a statement about the owner. Veevers (1985) pointed out that when animals and their owners make public appearances, it makes a symbolic statement of the owners’ personality and self-image. “The presence of a pet and the way it is treated become factors which are taken into account in the assessment of the social self” (Veevers, 1985, p. 13). Some animal owners will openly identify themselves as “Buddy’s dad” or “Princess’ mom.”

The connections between companion animals and their caretakers are evident in social situations. Companion animals play a significant role in socially defining the owners. Pet owners are viewed by others as compassionate, nurturing, and sociable. Lockwood (1983) found that research participants rated people pictured with animals as more sociable, happier, and less tense than people who were not pictured with animals. Aylesworth, Chapman, and Doscha (1999) pointed out that companion animals represent the caretaker’s lifestyles and recreational interests.

The identity of caretakers and their animals as a “couple” is shaped and strengthened by encountering individuals in public who treat them as a pair or unit. Animal owners recognize their animals are a reflection of them and their identity. For example, when a companion animal is uncontrolled by the owner or if the animal acted inappropriately in public, the owner will take

steps to “remedy the negative identity effects precipitated by the (animal’s) misbehavior” (Sanders, 2003, p. 413). Likewise, if a pet behaves well in public, the caretaker takes credit for this behavior and sees this as a reflection on their own identity.

In a similar way and in discussing identity, the appreciation of an animal’s experience can symbolize that of a humans’ experience. A human may relate to the experience of an animal and see his/her self reflected in the animal’s experience. For example, The Humane Education by Alternative Learning (HEAL) Program in Maryland provides young at-risk males residing in a juvenile detention center with the responsibility to care for two or three abandoned dogs’ physical and emotional needs. For many residents, the program provides a glimpse of the link between their lives and the animals’ lives. One resident at the Center described how the residents and dogs had similar lives, but came to the conclusion after witnessing the dogs’ behavioral and emotional changes that ... “there’s no such thing as a throwaway dog, just like there’s no throwaway children...” (Detweiler, 2000, p. 29). The interaction with the dogs assisted the resident to symbolize his own life and served as a learning experience fostering hope and positive change.

### **Emotional and Social Growth and the Development of Identity**

In considering the ongoing nature of identity, Tennant (2005) described conceptions of the self and “the technologies” in transforming selves (p.102). Conceptions of the self were theorized as a way to categorize the relationship between a person and society and included: authentic or real self; repressed self; autonomous self; storied self; and entangled self. In the proposed study, the authentic or real self and the storied self may serve as self-conceptions in companion animal owners’ views of their life stories with their dogs. The authentic or real self is “the originary, unique, “true” self that can be discovered once one sheds the distorting and

distracting influences of one's social roles and aspirations (p. 104).

According to Tennant (2005), the storied self has two opposing views. In one view, the emphasis is placed on the self over time and how individuals narrate the past, present, future. McAdams' (1996) life story is an example of this version of the storied self. One function of the life story is to integrate different elements of the self. McAdams believed that during adulthood life stories are continuously under construction but prominent themes emerge at various ages with periods of intense and less intense identity work. In the second view, the self is seen as relational and more fluid and open to change. Gergen and Kaye (1992) argued that the storied self changes according to the relationship in which an individual is involved. "This illustrates a shift in focus from individual selves coming together to form a relationship to one where the relationship is central, with selves being realized only as a by-product of relatedness" (Tennant, 2005, p. 106).

Technologies of the self represent ways for potential transformative change. Knowing oneself and caring for oneself are explained as "basic ways in which participants are invited to act upon themselves" (p. 108). For this study, these may serve as pathways for canine owners' self-knowledge and meaning making of the interactions and relationships with their dogs. As Bateson (1994) wrote, "the self fluctuates through a lifetime and even through the day, altered from without by changing relationships and from within by spiritual and even biochemical changes. Clarity about the self dims and brightens like a lamp in a thunderstorm... but all our learning and adapting is devoted to keeping it alight" (p. 66).

Cranton (2001) discussed the importance of first understanding our Self in relation to authenticity. An important step to authenticity is the process of individuation and involves separating the sense of Self from the community and society, which leads to empowerment.

Empowerment leads to authenticity. “Personal development is, at least in part, a process of individuation, of separating the Self from the collective of humanity and learning to express that Self authentically” (p. 101).

This section highlighted research concerning the emotional and social benefits for humans in relationships with companion animals. The next section discusses the well-being of humans in relationships with companion animals.

### **Well-being of Humans in Relationships with Companion Animals**

As research has shown, companion animals can provide an opportunity for adults to grow both emotionally and socially. Literature also exists that demonstrates the power of companion animals to promote well-being in humans. Many individuals who identify having a relationship with their companion animals would likely feel the companion animals are good for them. This has become known as the “pet effect” and is the belief that having a companion animal can improve one’s physical health, psychological well-being and longevity (Allen, 2003). According to Becker (2002), “The bond forged between people and pets contributes to our health, well-being and daily lives more than most people realize. And our society is changing to maximize the benefits of pet ownership” (p. 42). In this section of the chapter, the literature on well-being with companion animals is reviewed and divided into physical well-being and psychological well-being.

#### **Physical Well-being**

The often cited study of Friedmann, Katcher, Lynch, and Thomas (1980) is one of the first associating companion animals with health and well-being. In this study, it was found that out of a sample of 92 heart-attack patients, the one year survival rate was 94% for those owning a companion animal versus 72% for those without a companion animal. The difference in

survival rate remained significant regardless of the kind of companion animal.

The study was replicated by Friedmann and Thomas (1995) with a larger number of participants and with improved measurement techniques. Differences were discovered between dog owners and cat owners. The findings revealed that individuals who owned dogs were 8.6 times more likely to survive one year after a heart attack compared to those individuals who did not have a canine companion. Interestingly, it was found that individuals owning cats were more likely to have died within one year of suffering a heart attack than individuals without companion felines. This study demonstrated that different species may have different health benefits for humans.

Canine companions seem to play a significantly unique role in humans' physical well-being. Kingwell, Lomdahl, and Anderson's (2001) research revealed that canine owners find the presence of even an unfamiliar dog as relaxing. Adults who rescued dogs and cats from a shelter reported a significant reduction in minor physical ailments at one month after adopting their companion animals. However, at ten months the canine owners maintained their decrease in health-related problems in contrast to the cat owners (Serpell, 1991).

Comparing recently widowed elderly companion animal owners with non-owners, it was found that non-owners reported more headaches, constipation, difficulty swallowing, cold sores, fears, and feelings of panic. In addition, those not owning companion animals reported significantly greater use of psychotropic medications during their grieving period (Akiyama, Holtzman, & Britz, 1986-87). Allen, Shykoff, and Izzo (2001) demonstrated in a clinical study that hypertensive stockbrokers from New York City were randomly assigned to an experimental pet group showed lower stress levels, lower blood pressure, and almost half in the group managed to discontinue their hypertension medication. Owning canine companions have been

contributed to a lower coronary risk for males (Anderson, Reid, & Jennings, 1992) and associated with lower serum triglyceride levels in senior citizens (Dembicki & Anderson, 1996).

Siegal (1990) discovered that owning a companion animal has stress-reducing effects as the animals serve as a social resource that can ease the impact of stressful situations. Siegal (1993) also found that senior citizens who have companion animals required fewer doctor visits within a one year timeframe than senior citizens not owning companion animals. All participants had a prepaid health insurance plan so that the financial cost of visiting a doctor would not have been a factor in deciding to seek an appointment or not. According to Siegal (1990) "... circumstances that promote well-being or alleviate distress tend to reduce the need for doctor visits" (p. 163). In addition it was found that companion animals seemed to serve as a buffer for the participants against stress. "The continued pairing of the pet with good feelings then leads the owner to view the animal as a source of comfort. Thus, it is not surprising that humans often turn to companion animals in times of stress" (p. 163).

Epidemiological studies indicate that German and Australian companion animal owning adults are in better physical health and made 15% fewer doctor visits than adults without companion animals. Additionally, a study researching Chinese women found that pet owners exercised more, reported feeling more physically fit, reported getting more adequate rest and sleep, and missed fewer days of work than Chinese women without companion animals (Headey & Grabka, 2011).

It should be noted that canines have been trained to be early health warning systems for humans with seizures (Strong, Brown, Huyton, & Coyle, 2002; Brown & Strong, 2001; Strong & Brown, 2000; Strong, Brown, & Walker, 1999) and with cancer (Willis, Church, Guest, Cook, & McCarthy, 2004). According to Wells (2007), "tumors typically produce odorous compounds

that are released into the air through routes including breath and sweat” (p. 147) and given their exceptional olfactory senses, it is not surprising that canines may possess the ability to detect these compounds.

Willis, Church, Guest, Cook, and McCarthy (2004) trained six mixed-breed canines to detect bladder cancer in humans. The canines in the study were able to correctly identify urine samples from patients with bladder cancer 22 out of 54 times. In another study, two canines sniffed out melanoma nearly every single time (Williams & Pembroke, 1989), as well as canines have been trained and studied to detect early-stage and late-stage lung and breast cancers (McCulloch, Jezierski, Broffman, Hubbard, Turner, & Janecki, 2006).

Canines may also be useful in detecting hypoglycaemic episodes in their human owners. One-third of canines living with their diabetic owners demonstrated behavioral changes during their owners’ hypoglycaemic episodes. (Lim, Wilcox, Fisher, Burns-Cox, 1992). Although it remains unclear how canines are able to detect these episodes, the odor produced through the sweat of hypoglycaemic individuals may be a plausible explanation (Chen, Daly, Natt, & Williams, 2000; McAulay, Deary, & Frier, 2001).

Companion animals seem a likely source to promote physical health and well-being in humans. Canine companions, in particular, have been found to serve humans in this capacity. After exploring the research between domestic canines and humans, Wells (2007) concluded that “...this particular companion animal can contribute a significant degree to our well-being and quality of lives” (p. 152). The next section discusses the role companion animals play in the psychological health and well-being of humans

### **Psychological Well-being**

Companion animals may not only contribute to the physical well-being of adults, but may

facilitate psychological well-being as well. Research has been conducted that documents the powerful effect companion animals can have on humans' psychological well-being. This section highlights that literature.

Kidd and Kidd (1980) showed that companion animal owners have higher self-esteem, more self-confidence, and a more positive and optimistic outlook on life. Elderly who have companion animals were found to have more positive moods, greater ambition, and higher levels of perceived self-competence (Kidd & Feldman, 1981).

Studying elderly women in Washington County, Maryland, Ory and Goldberg (1983) found women who were highly attached to their companion animals reported to be very happy. In contrast, women who were not attached to their companion animals reported to be unhappy. Siegel, Angulo, Detels, Wesch, and Mullen (1999) determined that individuals with AIDS reported a lower incidence of depression when owning a companion animal. Similarly, males involved in a Veteran's hospital home-based care program who were living with a companion animal were discovered to have significantly higher morale than males without a companion animal (Robb, 1983). Serpell (1989) stated that a companion animal's company "enhances self-esteem and a sense of personal worth" (p. 127) for humans.

El-Alayli, Lystad, Webb, Hollingsworth, and Ciolli (2006) studied pet attachment, pet-self similarity, self-enhancement, and well-being. "Just as similarity to one's spouse is associated with greater psychological well-being (Arrindell & Luteijn, 2000), similarity to one's pet is associated with less negative affect, more life satisfaction, and a tendency toward greater happiness" (p. 139). It was also found that the relationship between pet-enhancement and well-being was stronger for the participants who reported they would not trade their companion animal for any amount of money than for the participants who named a price to sell their

companion animal.

In an extended and replicated study (Staats, Wallace, & Anderson, 2008) , students, faculty, and community members identified the number one reason for sharing their lives with companion animals was to help avoid loneliness and the second reason was to help keep active. Older females conveyed a greater belief in the health-providing benefits of owning companion animals compared to a younger population or to males. The results are “consistent with the view that animals provide social support and companionship to humans at various stages of the life cycle” (Staats, Wallace, & Anderson, 2008, p. 279).

Wood, Giles-Corti, Bulsara, and Bosch (2007) researched the effects of companion animals on neighborhoods and communities. Findings revealed that companion animals were positively associated with “social interactions, favor exchanges, civic engagement, perceptions of neighborhood friendliness, and sense of community” (p. 43). Companion animals were found to alleviate loneliness for their human owners. Non-owners were twice as likely to report feeling lonely. Also, the owners of companion animals were more likely to answer “rarely or never” when asked if they find it difficult to get to know people. The researchers suggested that companion animals may have a “... ripple effect extending beyond their guardians (owners) to non-pet owners and the broader community” (p. 43). “Juxtaposed against growing global concerns about the prevalence of mental health issues and the erosion of community; and accumulating evidence of the impact of social and psychosocial factors on health and well being, pets emerge as a valuable and positive feature of community and neighborhood life” (p. 54).

Similarly, Dickstein (1998) found that canine owners had lower cortisol levels, an increase in positive affective displays, and an increase in establishing rapport in conversations when their canine companion was present. Cortisol is a steroid hormone produced by the adrenal

gland in response to stress. The researcher postulated that owning a canine companion and having the companion present seemed to be associated with greater physical, psychological, and social well-being.

In attempting to understand the metaphoric relationship people have with their companion animals, Belk (1996) found predominant metaphors that emerged included: companion animals were viewed as pleasures, as problems, as parts of self, as members of the family, and as toys. Belk commented, “For many of the highly involved pet owners interviewed for this study, having a pet has changed their lives. They report feeling better because of their pets and are willing to change their lives and schedules to accommodate their pets” (p. 139).

Recognizing that canines can promote psychological well-being has resulted in canine companions being utilized in a variety of therapeutic settings. This power to influence and impact individuals and groups physically, psychologically, and socially is just beginning to be understood. With companion animals being an integral part of human lives and our society, it is important to continue exploring this special relationship. The next section discusses animal companionship, with an emphasis on the history of domestication and the present role of canine companions.

### **Animal Companionship: Past and Present**

Historically and culturally, animals have played a significant role in the lives of humans worldwide. “The practice of keeping animals as pets is neither a modern phenomenon nor a predominately Western one” (Serpell, 2011, p. 11). This section reviews literature concerning animal companionship in the past and animal companionship in the present.

#### **Past**

History and science have demonstrated that the dog was the first animal to be

domesticated. The word *domesticated* “grew from the root form meaning *belonging to the house*” (Horowitz, 2009, p. 33). Dogs are classified to the *Canidae* family whose members include coyotes, foxes, jackals, and wolves and are referred to as *canids*. According to Weiss (2002), the dog is a direct descendent of the Gray Wolf. Interestingly, it has been suggested that all dogs may be descended from just one or two wolves (Weiss, 2002). The precise timing of domestication remains unknown; however, it seems likely to have occurred at the end of the last Ice Age (Schaefer, 2002).

Horowitz (2009) described the flexibility of wolves to leave and join other packs and the ability to adjust their behaviors in different settings. This flexibility assisted wolves in dealing with a new social unit that included humans. The flexibility and openness of the early wolf-dogs “allowed them to adjust to a new pack: one that would include animals of an entirely different species” (p. 41).

According to Horowitz (2009), dogs seem to have inherited “sociality” (p.59) from wolves. Sociality refers to an interest in being around others and being attuned to the actions and behaviors of others. Horowitz argued that packs of wolves are very different from domesticated dogs living within homes. For example, canine companions typically live out their lives with their human families compared to wolf packs that fluctuate both in size and membership with changing seasons. Also, domesticated dogs no longer have to hunt for their food nor are they pushed out of the den in the spring time. Horowitz disagreed with the notion of human families serving as packs for canine companions and advised the word “gang” may be more suited. A benign gang shares habits, preferences, homes, activities, shares fundamental behaviors, and works to maintain the gang (Horowitz, 2009).

The domestication of the dog was a result of a symbolic relationship forged with humans

on “a shared need for shelter, food, and protection” (Walsh, 2009, p. 463). This relationship was formed when humans recognized the dog’s keen sense of smell for hunting, tracking, and guarding. Likewise, the dog recognized that humans provided a consistent source of food, warm fires, and shelter. Although dogs were domesticated for their working abilities to serve humans, “their main role in the last 100 years has been to be a friend, and nonjudgmental confidant, not a worker” (Horowitz, 2009, p. 41).

As evidence of the human-animal bond and attachment, archeological remains have revealed domestic wolf-like dogs buried with humans dating back to the Upper Paleolithic period around 11,000- 15,000 years ago (Morey, 2006). Similar graves have been unearthed from Amerindian sites in North America dating back approximately 8,000 years ago (Morey, 1992). Evidence further exists in cave paintings, other pictorial support, and documents that animals have a lengthy history within human society (Serpell, 2011).

Ancient civilizations in Egypt, Greece, and Rome treated both dogs and cats with great respect and admired their pets as loyal, beloved companions. Because of their loyalty during life, dogs were “revered as guides in the afterlife” (Walsh, 2009, p. 463). According to Ikram (2005), following the death of a canine companion in Egypt, the owner would shave off his or her eyebrows, smear mud in his or her hair, and mourn aloud for days. Even individuals considered as commoners would gather enough money to properly embalm, mummify, and bury their dogs in one of the animal necropolises.

Since the middle ages, China and Japan have also valued and welcomed dogs into their homes. Lap dogs were particularly popular in China and one breed, the Pekinese, was bred small enough to fit into a sleeve in order for it to be carried around. Royal families in Japan allowed dogs to sleep in their private quarters to guard against intruders and to keep them warm in the

winter (Walsh, 2009).

In European counties and the American colonies, companionship with animals did not become widely accepted until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Most likely this was due to the religion doctrines at the time discouraging closeness and any type of companionship with animals (Serpell, 2011). As a result, animal companionship “remained chiefly the province of the upper classes and ruling elite until the end of the early modern period, when the emergence of both enlightenment attitudes and an urban middle class saw the gradual spread of pets into all sectors of Western society” (Serpell, 2011, p. 12). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “Queen Victoria, who was especially fond of dogs, had nearly 90 different pets during her life” (Walsh, 2009, p. 464).

The affectionate bonds developing between humans and canine companions can be seen in early legislation. During the sixth century, fines were established for the theft or murder of dogs, according to dogs’ classification system of hunting dogs, pets, or shepherd dogs. Other laws assessed the value of dogs according to their age, breed, and training/function often dependent on the owners’ social status (Menache, 2000).

By the end of the thirteenth century, hunting had lost its primary role of subsistence and was viewed as a sport rather than a survival function, but canines retained their faithful place next to humans. According to Menache (2000), “The hunting treatises of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries provide a vivid reflection of changing attitudes towards dogs. They hint at a meeting point where dogs were divorced from the animal kingdom to be allowed a respectable entry into the apex of human society ...” (p. 56). In addition, during the Bronze Age, most European countries stopped eating dog meat (Menache, 2000).

Many spiritual traditions place emphasis on the special relationship between humans and animals as part of the interconnectedness of the natural world (Serpell, 2006). For example,

individuals seek guidance and support from animal guardian spirits (Serpell, 2000) and tribes or cultures seek assistance and direction from animal totems (Levinson, 1969). Animals have served as guides in shamanic practice and “Asian cultures, Amerindians, and other indigenous peoples continue to draw symbolic meaning and important teachings from animals” (Walsh, 2009, p. 463).

Over the centuries, companion animals have become increasingly important in the lives of individuals and have become central to family life. Looking from the past into the future, the next section highlights contemporary life with companion animals.

### **Present**

Serpell and Paul (1994, p. 133) referred to the keeping of companion animals as ‘treating individual animals with indulgence and fondness.’ This fondness and devotion to an animal is demonstrated by the multi-billion dollar pet food industry; the increasing number of pet stores, dog parks, dog-sitting services, doggie daycares, and other pet/animal services. The American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA), founded in 1958, is the nation's top not-for-profit trade organization serving the interests of the pet product industry and educating the public on the health and personal benefits associated with pet ownership. In 2010, it was estimated that \$47.7 billion will be spent on our pets in the United States with \$18.28 billion spent on food; \$11.01 billion on supplies and over-the-counter medicine; and \$3.45 billion pet services such as grooming and boarding (APPMA, 2008).

Due to the medical advances in veterinary care and the rapidly expanding healthcare options for pets, many more companion animal owners are choosing to spend large amounts of money to save their companion animal during a health emergency (Dale, 2003). According to a survey conducted by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (2008), pet owners

spend approximately \$11 billion each year on veterinary care and that figure was estimated to increase in 2010 to \$12.79 billion.

One of the biggest business developments supporting the relationships between humans and canine companions has been in the travel industry. In 2005, the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association's survey revealed that 15 million people traveled with their animal companions on a trip and 29 million Americans reported traveling 50 miles or more with a companion animal. Of the 29 million, 80% were with a canine companion and 15% were with a feline companion. The remaining 5% were with birds, ferrets, rabbits, or fish (Anderson, 2008).

Many hotels and other overnight accommodations now welcome pets. Websites such [www.petfriendly.com](http://www.petfriendly.com) and [www.petswelcome.com](http://www.petswelcome.com) were developed and are devoted to assisting travelers with finding accommodations that allow pets to stay with their humans (Anderson, 2008).

In a marketing study, women, baby-boomers, and higher income households were found to report significant lifestyle changes for their canine companions (Dotson & Hyatt, 2003) and points to "people's heightened involvement with their dogs" (Dotson & Hyatt, 2008). According to Selbert (2002), people are more willing to quit smoking cigarettes due to the potential effects of second-hand smoke to their pets than to quit smoking for their personal health. "The meanings people attach, the money they spend, and the effort they make to maintain relationships with their animal companions underscore the importance these relationships play in human lives" (Cavanaugh, Leonard, & Scammon, 2008, p. 470).

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the plight of abandoned and rescued companion animals gained national attention:

The story of Snowball, the little dog taken from a crying child's arms during

the evacuation of New Orleans, became an iconographic representation of the incompatibility of evacuation policy and the reality of the relationships between companion animal guardians and companion animals. (Zottarelli, 2009)

The tragedy of Hurricane Katrina resulted in the signing into law of the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act (PETS). In order to qualify for federal funding, the PETS law requires companion and service animals be included in state and local emergency planning (Irvine, 2007). This was a first step including companion animals in emergency planning. However, it is important to keep in mind this law was written “to address the risk exposure that lack of support for companion and service animals poses for people during disasters. It is still an approach that prioritizes humans over nonhuman animals but it does not continue a blanket disregard for pets” (Zottarelli, 2009, p. 120).

In studying seventeen families who lived through a devastating tornado, Heath and Champion (1996) found that people failed to evacuate because they were unable to evacuate with their companion animals and that people entered unauthorized areas and zones in order to save their companion animals. They concluded that the human-animal bond presented a significant challenge to the health and safety of humans and animals. Heath et al. (2000) found that 80% of the unauthorized entries into an evacuation area were to rescue pets.

In addition, Heath et al. (2001a, 2001b) discovered that individuals with companion animals were more likely to have a failed evacuation and that the greater number of dogs in a household, the presence of an outdoor dog, and the absence of an available cat carrier all increased the likelihood of a failed evacuation.

In exploring the human factors associated with animal companion loss during Hurricane Katrina, Zottarelli (2009) found that women, younger adults, and those who evacuated were more likely to have experienced pet loss during the hurricane. Additionally, it was found that individuals who lost pets were statistically more likely to experience other traumatic events, such as being separated from other human family members, staying in an emergency shelter, and/or being hurt or injured.

As the research has pointed out, companion animal owners may have greater vulnerability and be in more risk when faced with a crisis or disaster situation. As Irvine (2006) pointed out, “the primary lesson to be drawn from Hurricane Katrina’s animal response is that animals are part of the human family. They cannot simply be left behind with promises of rescue sometime in the future” (p. 4). The Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act will hopefully assist humans to remain with their companion animals during evacuation situations.

From domestication 15,000 years ago to the present day in which new laws recognize the need to protect the human-animal bond, the relationships between humans and canine companions have endured through time. Canines possess unique cognitive and perceptual abilities which may have played a role in why this particular species of animal was domesticated and continues to form relationships with humans. The next section discusses these unique cognitive and perceptual abilities in greater detail.

### **The Cognitive and Perceptual Abilities of Canine Companions**

Canine companions possess cognitive and perceptual abilities that may have assisted them in becoming man’s best friend. This literature review would be incomplete without discussing these unique features. Jakob von Uexkull, a German biologist, was the first to propose a ground-breaking concept in studying animals- truly study and understand the life of an

animal, one needed to take into account their umwelt (OOM-velt). Umwelt refers to the animal's subjective world and portrays what life is like as that particular animal (Horowitz, 2009).

### **Cognitive**

Kaminski, Call, and Fischer (2004) discovered the ability of a dog named Rico, a border Collie in Germany, who could identify over two hundred toys by their names/words. Rico was born in 1994, lived as a companion animal with his owners, and began fetching at 10 months old. The experimenters were interested in Rico's word-learning ability- the ability to acquire a relation between a specific word and an object that the word refers to and his ability to infer a new, previously unknown word.

Under controlled conditions, the experimenters (Kaminski, Call, & Fischer, 2004) randomly assigned 20 sets of 10 different objects in an adjacent room apart from where Rico and his owners were waiting. The experimenters then told the owner which items to request Rico to retrieve from the adjacent room. Rico could see neither his owners nor the experimenters when he entered the adjacent room. Rico consistently and reliably pulled out the toy that was requested, retrieving 37 out of 40 items correctly. The size of Rico's vocabulary could be compared to that of language-trained apes, dolphins, sea lions, and parrots (Miles & Harper, 1994).

In addition and even more impressive, Rico could quickly learn the name of a new toy. By mixing in one new toy with seven old toys in the adjacent room, experimenters would use a word never heard by Rico before to request the new toy. On 7 out of 10 sessions, Rico correctly singled out the new toy, and in a way, naming it (Kaminski, Call, & Fischer, 2004). The finding of this study "indicates that the dog's cognitive equipment is good enough to understand

language in the right context” (Horowitz, 2009, p. 97).

Rico also demonstrated memory retention of the new words. Four weeks after the initial study, Rico correctly retrieved the target item on 3 out of 6 sessions. The researchers concluded that Rico demonstrated learning by exclusion and the ability to store new knowledge in memory. According to Kaminski, Call, and Fischer (2004), “Therefore our results strongly support the view that a seemingly complex linguistic skill previously only in human children may be mediated by simpler cognitive building blocks that are also present in another species (p, 1683).

In critiquing studies testing dogs’ cognitive abilities for physical objects, Horowitz (2009), claimed these intelligence and psychological tests are experimentally flawed in that the owners and/or researchers are present. For this reason, Horowitz believed dogs’ performances were mixed and, at times inconclusive.

In wanting to investigate the theory of a dog’s mind, Horowitz (2009) videotaped dogs playing together at parks and replayed the videos to see what was taking place in each frame (30 frames in one second). Horowitz commented,

Only at this speed could I really see what had happened in front of me. What I saw was not a repeat of the scene I’d witnessed at the park. At this speed I could see the mutual nods that preceded a chase. I saw the head-jockeying, open-mouth volleys that blurred into unrecognizability in real time. I could count how many bites it takes, over the course of two seconds, before a bitten dog responds; I could count how many seconds it takes for a paused bout to resume. And, most importantly, I could look to see what behaviors dogs do, and when. (p. 199)

Horowitz (2009) was most interested in understanding play-signaling and attention-

getting behaviors among dogs. The researcher reported remarkable findings including: dogs play-signal at the beginning of play; dogs play-signal following a pause in the play; dogs used an attention-getter before doing a bow to play; dogs used an attention-getter that matched the level of inattention of their playmates; and even in the midst of play, dogs used mild attention-getters to keep the play going. Horowitz reported that the dogs seemed to be using an order of operations: “get attention first, then send an invitation to rumble” (p. 203).

Horowitz (2009) concluded that dogs’ may have a “rudimentary” theory of mind (p. 204). She discussed that it is different from humans, but “still some mediating element between other dogs and their actions. A rudimentary theory of mind is like having passable social skills. It helps you play better with others to think about their perspective. And however simple this skill may be, it may be part of an inchoate system of fairness among dogs” (p. 204).

Sanders (1993) studied canine owners and their criteria for defining mindedness in the relationship with their canine. The findings revealed that participants experienced their canines as “authentic, reciprocating, and empathetic” (p. 221). The caretakers further defined their canine companions as possessing minds, emotional lives, unique personalities, and readily identifiable tastes.

## **Perceptual**

According to Anderson (2008), research suggests that dogs may have developed the ability to read social cues and communication cues from humans through convergent evolution, a process in which “two distantly related species share a similar trait or ability” (p. 25). A technique to study dogs’ sensitivity to human cuing actions involves an experimenter standing between two containers and pointing to a target container. Both containers are baited, but only the container the human points to is accessible to the dog (Wynne, Dorey, & Udell, 2011). Dogs

have demonstrated the ability to find accessible food in a container by following human pointing gestures (both hand and arm pointing); as well as human bowing, head nodding and head turning (Miklosa, Polgardi, Topal & Csanyi, 1998).

In addition, dogs have confirmed the ability to provide cues to humans to find food or a toy that the dog had hidden. With the owner out of the room, Miklosi, Polgardi, Topal, and Csanyi (1998) showed a hidden item to the dog. Upon the owner's return, the tethered dog communicated where the hidden item was located by alternating its gaze between the owner and the hidden location. This alternating gaze is also known as functional referential communication (FRC) (Anderson, 2008).

In showing the importance of face viewing and eye to eye contact, dogs demonstrated a preference for taking treats from a human with his/her eyes uncovered versus a human who was wearing a blindfold covering the eyes (Gacsi, Miklosi, Varga, Topal, & Csanyi, 2004) and dogs showed a preference for a person whose face was uncovered as opposed to being obscured by a blindfold, hands over their eyes, a bucket over the head, or a book in front of the face (Cooper, Ashton, Bishop, West, Mills, & Young, 2003). As Anderson (2008) stated, "In the absence of a shared verbal language, which is so crucial to social relationships, the ability to make facial expressions further bridges the gap between their species and ours, allowing for interspecies communication- and relationships" (p. 29).

Although it was thought all dogs possessed the ability to follow human cues and most canine companions living in human homes seem to possess this ability, one study (Udell, Dorey, & Wynne, 2008) found that dogs at an animal shelter could not follow human pointing cues. It is unknown why this may have occurred. Prior to the study, the shelter dogs demonstrated a willingness to eat out of a human's hand and showed no fear to the experimenters.

According to Wynne, Dorey, and Udell (2011), two conditions can increase the probability that a dog will develop sensitivity to human cues: 1) socialization to humans during a sensitive period of development and 2) learning that is not restricted to certain parts of the human body. “This interaction between species-specific developmental processes and environmental experience not only provides the basis of a strong bond between humans and dogs, but also allows for flexibility in their relationship and in the signals an owner might use to communicate with his dog” (p. 107).

It should be mentioned that dogs communicate through barking. Barks carry different meanings, have different frequencies, and vary in durations (Horowitz, 2009). Horowitz (2009) identified a number of diverse barks: yelps, cries, squeals, moans, grunts, growls, snarls, whimpers, chatter (with their teeth), snuffling, howling, and social panting. In addition to different barks, dogs also communicate expressively with their body language using varying postures and positions of tails. “It makes sense that communication works between our two species. Both are visual, social, and biologically predisposed to pay attention to others in our social group” (Anderson, 2008, p. 26).

This section highlighted canines’ cognitive and perceptual abilities. The study of dogs’ cognitive abilities emerged from comparative psychology, in attempting to compare animals’ abilities with humans’ abilities. As Horowitz (2009) wrote about dogs’ abilities, “... they communicate- but not with all the elements of human language; they learn, imitate, and deceive- but not *in the way* that we do” (p. 206). Although differences exist between dogs and humans, certain canine abilities seem fitting for developing relationships with humans.

### **Summary**

This literature review highlighted research concerning relationships, attachment,

the emotional and social growth in humans in relationships with canine companions, past and present animal companionship, and the cognitive and perceptual abilities of canines as a foundation for this research study on the relationships between adults and their canine companions. This literature review also provides groundwork for adult education to consider the relationships between adults and canine companions as a form of connected knowing and that learning within this particular type of relationship has potential to occur.

As the research has indicated, humans form relationships and attachments with animal companions and experience growth as a result. In the context of adulthood, research is lacking concerning the particular role relationships with canine companions play in personal growth and well-being. As a result of these findings, this study sought to address the current gap in the literature, and explored the role of relationships in adulthood between adults and their canine companions and the role of these relationships in personal growth and well-being. As McCardle, McCune, Esposito, Maholmes, and Freund (2011) wrote, “Research is needed to better understand the nature of interactions between humans and various animals, including study of the relationships themselves, as well as the contexts and conditions under which they occur” (p. 194).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter begins by briefly reviewing the purpose of the study, followed by an overview of qualitative research and why this paradigm is particularly suited for the study. Subsequent sections present the research design, guiding research questions, my background as the researcher, and procedures for selecting participants. Finally, the chapter includes data collection procedures, data analysis, and strategies that were used to insure the verification/trustworthiness of the study.

Humans are relational beings and seek relationships with others. Growth of an individual takes place in and through relationships (Miller, 1976; Jordan et. al., 1991). Despite studies suggesting adults become attached to their canine companions (Beck & Madresh, 2008; Kurdek , 2009) and view these companions as family members (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988), the existing literature does not address the role of relationships with canine companions in the context of adulthood. Furthermore, very little is known about the specific areas, outcomes, or ways in which canine companions may contribute to personal growth and well-being in the adult years. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the relationships between adults and their canine companions in an effort to address this gap in the literature.

#### **Research Questions**

Qualitative research focuses on text, words, and open-ended questions. “The purpose of gathering responses to open-ended questions is to enable the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories” (Patton, 2002, p. 21) With this in consideration, the study of the role of relationships between adults and their canine companions and the role of

these relationships in personal growth and well-being was guided by the following questions:

1. How do relationships between adults and canine companions foster personal growth and well-being?
2. What are the areas, outcomes, or ways in which adults grow as a result of the relationships with their canine companions?
3. What are the growth-fostering components or indicators in the relationships between adults and canine companions that promote well-being?

### **Qualitative Research**

While quantitative research approaches had dominated the 19<sup>th</sup> and part of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, qualitative approaches to research have gained interest and credibility during the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Qualitative research is described as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4) and is an interpretative research paradigm.

Researchers inherently bring their own worldview or philosophy to studies that guide how the research is conducted and interpreted. This worldview is “a general orientation about the world and the nature of research” (Creswell, 2009, p. 6). An underlying worldview of qualitative research is constructivism which assumes that individuals, in seeking to understand the world around them, construct their own knowledge and develop subjective meanings of their experiences. Meaning is derived by how an individual experiences reality from his or her own personal perspective. There is no single reality as is assumed in quantitative research. Rather, meanings are varied, multiple, and often formed through interactions with others (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research seeks to understand and interpret these meanings and realities. The proposed study sought to understand and interpret participants’ experiences, meanings, and

realities in the relationships with their canine companions and how it contributes to personal growth and well-being in adulthood.

Several key assumptions of qualitative research set it apart from quantitative research. First, qualitative researchers prefer to conduct studies within natural settings or real-world situations where human experiences and interactions take place. For a natural setting, this study was conducted in the participants' homes and with their canine companions present.

Researchers often use multiple forms of data collection including: interviews, field observations, field notes, collecting of documents, and audio-visual materials. As such, a qualitative researcher is the primary instrument in data collection, given that they gather and examine the information themselves (Creswell, 2009). In the study, I collected data through various forms, including interviews, field notes, and narratives about favorite photographs of the canine companions.

Second, qualitative research follows an emergent design. As the research gets underway in the field, the process, questions, and forms of data collection may need to be altered based on what is emerging from the participants' realities. "A naturalistic design unfolds or emerges as fieldwork emerges" (Patton, 2002, p. 44). Researchers must be flexible and open to what emerges during the study. Using semi-structured interviews, the study was designed to allow for flexibility during the interview process and during the interpretation of the data. Having this flexibility during the interview process was helpful in regards to asking participants relevant questions as they shared their narratives. A set of eleven questions was utilized as a starting point for the interview and to assist in keeping the conversation going; however, as the participants shared information of interest, I was able to further delve into questioning specific to what was being discussed. As each narrative was unique to a participant, so was the path of questioning.

Third, qualitative research is interpretative with data being analyzed inductively. Researchers immerse themselves in the details and specifics in order to interpret the information provided by the participants. In addition, participants and readers of the research will make their own interpretations of the study and the analysis of the data (Patton, 2002). Therefore, there exists the possibility of many varied interpretations of the study.

Qualitative research was considered to be the most appropriate for this exploratory study seeking to understand the role of relationships with canine companions in personal growth and well-being. Qualitatively researching this area has contributed a uniquely rich and descriptive view of the relationship between humans and canine companions, one that is often not present in quantitative research.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology for the study is narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a “strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Narrative inquiry has historically been used in various disciplines including anthropology, education, psychology, psychotherapy, and organizational theory. This methodology has gained acceptance and credibility over the years and is increasingly being utilized in adult education and the social sciences. The following is a definition of narrative inquiry accepted across disciplines:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in term of those stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a

methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

At the center of a story is an experience. The philosophical views of John Dewey had significant impact on the educational field, particularly his thoughts and writings on the nature of experience. Dewey believed that “an individual’s experience was a central lens for understanding a person” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2009, p. 331), and as a continuous process and that experiences build upon each other.

Narrative inquiry attempts to understand an experience or an event. Narrative inquiry pays close attention to how sentences are constructed and why sentences are constructed in a particular way by the storyteller; who is and who is not mentioned and their role in the narrative; and the context of the storytelling occasion (Riley & Hawe, 2005). From this information, the narrative’s plots or organizing themes can be determined, revealing how individuals make sense of the world.

The powerful experiences and relationships between humans and animals are often told in stories, whether shared between adults during conversations or written as books by adults, such as the hit book and movie “Marley & Me” by John Grogan (2005). It is apparent that animals and pets have a place in our lives and in our stories. It seems likely the heart of the relationship between humans and their canine companions is revealed in stories. Stories may be a key to understanding the role of this special relationship. For this reason, utilizing narrative inquiry to explore the role of relationships with canine companion in personal growth and well-being was a very fitting methodology.

Narrative inquiry presents a way of understanding growth through the “storied nature” of

human experience and by considering a “story as a metaphor for human life” (Rossiter, 1999, p. 77). An assumption of a narrative orientation is that individuals organize and make meaning of their experiences by constructing personal stories and change occurs by telling the stories, revising the stories, and expanding the stories over time. The nature of the information is subjective rather than objective with attempting “to describe development from the inside as it is lived rather than from the outside as it is observed” (p. 78). It emphasizes description and interpretation rather than explanation (Rossiter, 1999).

Rossiter (1999) highlighted several key aspects of a narrative orientation. These included narrative knowing is “based on a constructivist, interpretative epistemology”; “narrative is a central structure in human meaning making; thus, the life course and individual identity are experienced as story”; “temporality and narrative are integrally related, time is constitutive of meaning”; “narrative is historical; thus, change and growth can be understood retrospectively, as an interpretation of the life story”; and “individual and cultural narratives are interrelated” (p. 59).

A narrative approach to studying growth is holistic in that it takes into account the emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and social dimensions of meaning making. Individuals do not live in isolation and as such, narratives include sociocultural influences when making meaning and sense of the world. Narratives have been described as having four dimensions: contextual (sociocultural), interpretative (meaning making), retrospective (historical reflection), and temporal (time) (Rossiter, 1999). Given the four dimensions, developmental change takes place as stories are told and retold and meaning is constructed and re-constructed.

Taking these four dimensions into account, narrative inquiry is an interesting approach to gathering data. There are benefits to utilizing narrative inquiry as a research methodology and

these are discussed next.

### **Benefits of Narrative Inquiry**

Narratives can be powerful. To use an example, the following narrative is taken from *Merle's Door: Lessons from a Freethinking Dog* (2007) by Ted Kerasote. During his beloved dog, Merle's, final hours of life Kerasote writes:

It was so cold I built a fire. Lying by his side, I syringed many doses of water into his mouth, the water running down his tongue and out the lower side of his jaw, while his back legs jerked a little. His breath had begun to smell acidic and full of ketones. He swallowed the water and smiled again, that grateful smile, his eyes lighting happily. Then I lay with him, nose to nose, and we looked directly at each other. 'You and me,' I said. His eyes glowed warmly with the touch of my hands. 'Wherever I am, you'll be there too.' I tapped my index finger to the side of my head several times. 'And here, always.' I tapped my heart (p. 356).

Following Merle's death, Kerasote shares how deeply he was impacted by the loss,

Slowly, I looked to the corner of the room where he had slept. Of course, it was empty. I went downstairs and walked to his grave, where I stood, listening to the hum of the river and feeling the universe still pressed out to its farthest corners by him. And I couldn't tell if the bigness was him or how we had filled each other's hearts or if there was any difference between the two (2007, p. 361).

Kerasote's story demonstrates the power behind words in conveying an experience.

Powerful stories impact, influence, and move people. Story is defined as "narrative + plot + entertainment + personal experience + sense-making" (Gabriel, as cited in Matzdorf & Ramage, 2003, p. 272). Narratives provide an avenue to construct meaning and make sense of the world.

Storytelling is an active way to understand and derive personal meaning of experiences and events in one's life. "Stories invite engagement with meaning rather than challenging facts: they help tellers and listeners to interpret and re-create reality" (Matzdorf & Ramage, 2003, p. 272).

As is demonstrated in Kerasote's story above, narratives are descriptive and rich in detail allowing researchers to explore topic areas in depth. The storyteller has the freedom to be expressive and illustrative to help the researcher understand fully what he/she is trying to express through the narrative. A benefit of narrative inquiry is in participants sharing their personal stories and researchers obtaining first-hand information. The authority of storytellers to tell a story and the authority to speak on behalf of others carries great importance. How those who witnessed and experienced the event tend to be viewed as credible and having authority to speak (Gabriel, 2008).

Narrative inquiry as a methodology may be less intrusive and less exploitative than other research methodologies (Hendry, 2007). Individuals participating in narrative inquiry research have the the ability and power to deem what personal information is appropriate to share and not share based on their own comfort level.

With a researcher working closely with the participants in a study, narrative inquiry is considered "relational research" (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 599). Researchers become fully involved in the participants' stories, yet must also be aware and see their own personal story within the study. For narrative inquirers, a relationship exists between the research and those being researched. "We see narrative inquiry, then, as the study of people in relation who are studying the experiences of people in relation" (p. 600). The relational process continues when moving from gathering raw data to interpreting the data as participants are often actively involved in this co-construction process (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). With the purpose of this

study being to investigate personal growth in relationships with canine companions, narrative inquiry as relational research informs this purpose.

Although there are many benefits to narrative inquiry, as in any research methodology, narrative inquiry is not without limitations and liabilities. This is addressed in the following section.

### **Liabilities of Narrative Inquiry**

A potential liability for narrative research is researchers' lack of true listening skills (Hendry, 2007). Active listening would serve as a benefit for narrative inquiry. "Powerful listening is listening that matters. It is really listening for deep understanding, meaning making or the basis of a conviction to act, to extend the story, as a living story, in the listeners' lives" (Tyler, 2007, p. 14). Through powerful listening, windows of insight and new knowledge may open.

Narrative inquiry assumes that participants in a research study may exclude details or exaggerate portions of their stories (Riley & Hawe, 2005). Depending on the situation, this could be a liability. Although, it could be argued what information people elect to exclude and/or exaggerate is what makes narrative inquiry so interesting and worthwhile.

A final liability for narrative inquiry and qualitative research overall is the current political era. The push by the United States Federal Government for evidence and scientifically-based research in evaluating programs and initiatives threatens the acceptance of qualitative research (Barone, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2007). With all the potential knowledge that could result from qualitative research, it seems a shame that governmental involvement could be a setback in the acceptance of this form of research.

To address the potential liability of active listening in this study, I conducted one, and no

more than two, interviews per day when data collection was underway. This helped me stay focused and present in the listening of the participants' stories. The interviews were audio-taped as well to ensure accuracy of my listening skills.

In the interpretation phase, participants were asked to clarify or elaborate upon the narratives they provided. This was an opportunity for me to inquire why certain information was exaggerated or potentially omitted in the narratives, thus attempting to minimize this as a potential liability.

With stories rich in descriptive detail, holistic, and powerful, narrative inquiry was found to be a useful and valuable approach to obtaining lived stories with canine companions. In this case, the benefits of using narrative inquiry would seem to outweigh the liabilities.

### **Background of the Researcher**

In any research there exists the potential for ethical issues and biased interpretations and results. With these concerns in mind, qualitative researchers should "explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status, that may shape their interpretations formed during a study" (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). Taking this perspective into consideration, it is important for me as a researcher to disclose personal background information that may have impacted this study.

Of greatest importance is for me to acknowledge my passion for animals. Growing up in a household with pets and with my paternal grandparents owning a small farm, I have always had a connection with animals. I could not imagine my life without animals. In my adult years, I have experienced close relationships with my canine companions and feel it is a bond like none other. I feel I have personally grown and developed from having these special companions in my life and for this reason I was interested in studying other adults' experiences with their canine

companions.

Additionally, I should acknowledge that I am a white, female from a middle class background and realize my experiences and history have been shaped by my privilege and positionality in society. I recognize this privilege and positionality inevitably guided my interpretations of the adult participants' narratives in this study. As the researcher, I fully acknowledge I took steps to insure the accuracy of my interpretations of the data and to not interpret the results through my experiences.

### **Participation Selection Procedures**

For qualitative research, purposefully selecting participants and sites to conduct research is a design strategy in order to study a phenomenon of interest in greater depth. "The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Purposeful sampling is also referred to as judgment sampling. "You decide the purpose you want informants to serve, and you go out to find some" (Bernard, 2000, p. 176). For this study, purposeful sampling was utilized and participants were recruited for inclusion in the study based on the following preselected criteria: 25 years old or older, has a canine companion or companions presently, identified as having a relationship with the canine companion(s) for a minimum of three years, and identified as having an attachment to the canine companion(s).

The timeframe of having a minimum three year relationship with the companion animal was to recruit participants who have had time to develop a relationship and could speak to how the animal has contributed to their growth. The criterion of "identified as having an attachment" was to recruit individuals who are emotional invested and bonded with the canine. Participants were selected whose canine companions lived in the homes/residences with them.

Participants were recruited through several methods. Humane societies and canine rescue organizations within Central Pennsylvania were contacted, and I inquired with well-situated individuals within these organizations for potential participants. I also inquired with individuals I personally knew for potential participants who were unknown by me. From these initial contacts, participants of interest were recruited through snowball sampling. “By asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases” (Patton, 200, p. 237).

Additionally, opportunistic or emergent sampling was used. As the research was underway, it became necessary to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities with sampling that may arise during the data collection. For example, participants provided names of those they knew who would be good to interview for the study. In this way, the sample itself emerged during the research (Patton, 2002). It was hoped for a sample size of 8-10 participants and the study was completed with 10 participants. This sample size seemed adequate to gather in-depth data looking for similarities and themes, as well as, manageable based on my resources and time. The first ten participants were accepted for the study and were not selected from a larger group.

Although I have many family members and friends who have relationships with canine companions, I decided not to use these individuals as participants in the study. I felt that “backyard” research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) may compromise the participants’ ability to fully disclose information and/or compromise my ability to appropriately interpret the narratives. For this reason, participants were recruited from outside my personal connections.

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

Qualitative researchers use various and multiple forms of data collection including: interviews, field observations, field notes, collecting of documents, and audio-visual materials.

The method(s) of data collection selected should be influenced by the nature of the problem or issue (Creswell, 2009). The primary means of data collection for this study was interviews.

Interviews are described as “a purposeful conversation in which one person (the interviewer) asks questions and another one (the respondent) answers the questions” (Visser, 2010, p. 23). Interviewing has become a fundamental technique in qualitative research (Adams, 2010) and a method that is particularly useful in the field of adult education (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). “The purpose of the qualitative research interview ... is to understand themes of the daily world from the subject’s own perspective” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 24).

According to Creswell (2009), several approaches to interviews exist: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Structured interviews use open-ended questions worded in advance with the interviewer asking the same questions in the same order to each participant. This approach is highly focused and preplanned; however, it does not allow flexibility or allow the researcher to pursue other avenues of research that may emerge during the interview process (Patton, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews follow a particular focus or framework within which to ask questions. Some questions may be written in advance; however, questions may be asked spontaneously or within a different order. The researcher is free to converse with the participant and to explore certain areas within the predetermined subject. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility during the interview while comprehensively covering the area being investigated. A weakness of this approach is that participants may give differing responses if questions are asked in different ways by the researcher (Patton, 2002).

Unstructured interviews offer maximum flexibility with no predetermined questions being utilized. Although this approach offers spontaneity and can be readily tailored to

individuals, this approach may be more susceptible to researcher effect and bias and the data more difficult to analyze (Patton, 2002).

The main method of data collection for this study was in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews related to the open-ended questions given below. Semi-structured interviews seemed best suited for the study allowing for flexibility while interviewing participants within a pre-planned framework. Because this study was exploratory, semi-structured interviews allowed me to go off course in questioning and to follow where the participant led as it is the participants' experiences that are the focus of the interview and research (Adams, 2010). "Interviews are conversations in which both participants- teller and listener/questioner- develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerable freedom to both" (Riessman, 1993, p. 55).

The semi-structured interviews involved narrative interviewing and the eliciting of stories from the participants concerning their lives and the relationships with their canine companions. Participants were interviewed one time. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Another form of data collected during the semi-structured interview involved asking the participants to show a favorite photograph of their canine companion(s) and to tell the story about the photograph. This form of data collection allowed me to more fully take into account the canine. Asking the participants to narrate stories captured in time about the relationships with their canine companion(s) offered further insight into the relationship. The interviews ranged in time from 45 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes. The following are the interview questions asked with each participant:

1. What is your earliest experience with dogs?

2. How did you meet your dog?
3. How did you develop a relationship with your dog?
4. How does the relationship make you feel?
5. Can you tell me a story that says something about the relationship?
6. Can you tell me a story of something you have learned from the relationship with your dog?
7. Can you tell me a story about how you have grown in or from the relationship?
8. Can you tell me a story in which your relationship made you feel good, healthy, positive, etc?
9. Can you tell me a story in which you had challenging times with your dog?
10. What do you love about your dog?
11. What kinds of things do you enjoy doing/sharing with your dog?

The setting for this study was at the participants' homes and with their canine companion(s) present. This setting provided comfort and familiarity in their natural surroundings. All participants were permitted to choose their home or any other place/location of their preference for the interview. All ten participants chose to be interviewed at their homes.

### **Ethics and Informed Consent**

“Research in applied fields such as adult development and human resource development nearly always involves collecting data from human beings. Thus, issues of informed consent, privacy, deception and protection are important concerns...” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p.199). The study utilized an informed consent form which was pre-approved by the Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board prior to the start of data collection. Participants were

asked to sign a consent form acknowledging they were willingly choosing to participate in the study. The consent form consisted of a description of the study and how the findings would be used. The consent form was provided to the participant in advance of the interview and then reviewed again with the participant prior to the start of the interview.

In addition, participants were informed of confidentiality. Participants' personal and identifying information was kept confidential. In order to ensure privacy, participants' names were changed; each was given a pseudonym, and is referred to by this pseudonym within the written research report. The canine companion names were changed as well.

Confidentiality norms are being challenged and changed within qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Participants have insisted on "owning their own stories" (Patton, 2002, p. 411) and requesting to be identified rather than remain confidential. Although this "allows the participants to retain ownership of their voices and exert their independence in making decisions" ... "participants should be well-informed about the possible risks of nonconfidentiality" (Creswell, 2009, p. 90).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

"Qualitative data describe ... They capture and communicate someone else's experience of the world in his or her own words. Qualitative data tell a story" (Patton, 2002, p. 47). The data for the study consisted of stories from the participants. Data analysis is "an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study" (Creswell, 2009, p. 184). Data analysis begins with the first interview and continues until the final report is written.

The first step was to prepare the data through transcribing verbatim the narratives and organizing the data for analysis (Creswell, 2009). During this step, I listened to the audio-tapes

word-for-word and took handwritten notes. The audio-tapes were downloaded and transferred to CDs, then transported to the transcriptionist for transcribing. The second step involved reading the data and gaining a “general sense” (Creswell, 2009, p. 185) of the narratives and beginning to reflect on the information. During this step, the transcripts were briefly read once and then read several more times in detail while highlighting comments of interest. Special attention was given to comments or statements related to the relationships, to the attachments, and/or to growth and well-being. The third step was to code the data into chunks or segments which assisted in giving meaning to the text and provided a rough, first transcription to work with. During this step, the highlighted information was chunked and grouped according to potential emerging themes. The fourth step was to “go back and retranscribe selected portions for detailed analysis” (Riessman, 1993, p. 56). During this step, the data were re-read and further chunked into themes.

The final step involved interpretation of the data which entailed new information learned from the research, new insights, connections to literature and theories, and/or ideas or suggestions for additional research (Creswell, 2009). The data were analyzed and interpreted both individually and collectively. Information learned from the research included that relationships between adults and canine companions foster personal growth and well-being through the canines being thought of as family members, that the canines filled a void in their lives, and that participants who rescued a canine companion felt personally rewarded for providing a needed home. Other information learned included that canine companions taught adults about unconditional love, patience, and responsibility/accountability. Finally, the components that helped to foster growth in the relationship between adults and canine companions were spending time together, intuitiveness within the relationship, and differences in

the canines' personalities. The findings connected both to relational theory, connected knowing, and attachment theory and are discussed in Chapter 5.

For data reduction and data analysis, Bell's (1998) model of narrative analysis used in studying daughters exposed to DES (diethylstilbestrol) was employed. In summary, I identified important narrative segments reducing stories to a core narrative, paying close attention to word choice and structure. Particular words related to the theoretical frameworks began to stand out across narratives. For relational theory, words such as companionship, relationship, connection, and unconditional love were highlighted. For attachment theory, bond, bonded, attached, attachment, affection, and love were emphasized. Though not related to either theoretical framework, other words, such as learned, taught, teaches, a learning experience, and grown were also consistently used by the participants. The emphasis is placed on language and how the participants say what they do. "By studying the sequence of stories in an interview, thematic and linguistic connections between them, an investigator can see how individuals tie together significant events and important relationships in their lives" (Riessman, 1993, p. 40). Given that the study sought to understand relationships; this model seemed suitable to reducing and analyzing the data.

For analyzing the data, the conceptual framework of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was utilized. The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space involved taking into consideration temporality, sociality, and place. These "commonplaces" (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 23) were areas to simultaneously pay attention to when conducting the narrative inquiry.

Temporality refers to that individuals are always in a state of transition, having a past, present, and future. Sociality refers to the personal conditions and social issues the participants

bring to a narrative inquiry. Place refers to the environmental and physical boundaries where the narrative research is conducted. “Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of place” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50).

The narratives from participants in the study were analyzed according to a three-dimensional inquiry space. The data were analyzed in relation to where the narrative inquiry was conducted for each participant (place) and the transitional or developmental life phase each participant was in (temporality). For all participants, the place was their homes. Each analysis took into consideration the phase of life of the participant. The data were analyzed closely for personal issues and what role the relationship between a participant and his/her canine companion played in the participant’s life (sociality).

When analyzing research data it is important to take steps to insure accuracy and integrity of the findings. The specific steps taken and trustworthiness is discussed in the next section.

### **Verification/ Trustworthiness**

Researchers and those who utilize research seek confidence that the findings of a study are to be believed, supported, and trusted. Differing criteria exists for judging quality and credibility in quantitative and qualitative research. As an example, interpretive perspectives, such as constructivist and social construction, require different criteria from the traditional scientific criteria. Criteria may include: subjectivity being acknowledged, trustworthiness, authenticity, triangulation, reflexivity, an enhanced and deeper understanding, and contributions to dialogue (Patton, 2002).

In looking to address the issue of quality in research, Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested substituting terms from the positivist paradigm and applying to the interpretive paradigm. The educational researchers proposed *credibility* to replace internal validity; *transferability* to replace external validity; *dependability* to replace reliability; and *confirmability* to replace objectivity (p. 76-77). This criterion helps to address trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Qualitative research incorporates the language and ethics of traditional scientific investigation into natural inquiry and attempts to convey a sense of dedication and integrity to seeking meaning in the real world (Patton, 2000). Qualitative researchers carry a large responsibility to demonstrate that their research is trustworthy and authentic (Carlson, 2010). For this reason, it is imperative that researchers take appropriate steps in a study to guarantee the authenticity and trustworthiness of their findings. Authenticity and trustworthiness can be defined as the amount of trust given “that the researcher did everything possible to ensure that data was appropriately and ethically collected, analyzed, and reported” (Carlson, 2010, p. 1102).

For narrative research, Riessman (1993) proposed four ways to approach trustworthiness. First, persuasiveness, meaning that the interpretation presented by the researcher is convincing. “Persuasiveness is greatest when theoretical claims are supported with evidence from informants’ accounts and when alternative interpretations of the data are considered” (p. 65). Second, correspondence refers to the ability of the researcher to take interpretations and results back to the participants (also known as member checks) for further clarification and confirmation. Third, there should be coherence between the participants’ beliefs and goals (global coherence); structure of their personal narratives (local coherence); and recurrent themes in the text (thematic coherence). Fourth, pragmatic use describes how narrative researchers should

make primary data available to other researchers and that narrative studies have the potential to become the basis for others' research (Riessman, 1993).

In this study, several techniques were employed to increase the trustworthiness of the research. Confirmability means that “findings should represent, as far as is possible, the situation being researched rather than the beliefs, pet theories, or biases of the researcher” (Gasson, 2004, p.95), while dependability refers to “a systematic process systematically followed” (Patton, 2002, p. 546). For confirmability and dependability, an audit trail was created during and throughout the research process. “Creating an audit trail refers to keeping careful documentation of all components of the study” (Carlson, 2010, P. 1103). For the study, the audit trail consisted of interview notes, observation notes, and various drafts of the researcher's interpretations and thoughts during the timeframe of the research. In addition, the audiotapes from the interviews with the participants and their canine companions present are secured in a confidential place and will remain there for three to five years following the study.

Credibility refers to “how we ensure rigor in the research process and how we communicate to others that we have done so” (Gasson, 2004, p. 95). Member checking is an opportunity for the participants of a study to verify and approve “particular aspects of the interpretation of the data they provided” (Carlson, 2010, p. 1105). For this study, all participants were given the opportunity for member checking and asked to edit, clarify, and/or elaborate upon their narratives, particularly concerning the interpretation and themes. Six out of the ten participants responded to the member checking and confirmed my interpretation of their narratives. The participants did not member check the raw transcript data (Creswell, 2009). Member checking provided a means to find out whether the data analysis was consistent and

congruent with the participants' experiences and narratives they told, thus helping to establish credibility of the study.

It is important to keep in mind that three lenses exist in member checking: the lens of the researcher; the lens of the participants; and the lens of the readers of the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). A researcher seeks the approval of trustworthiness and authenticity from all three. "Data should be continually revisited and scrutinized for accuracy and interpretation and for meaningful, coherent conveyance of the participant's narrative contributions" (Carlson, 2010, p. 1105). Dr. Patricia Cranton, who is my academic advisor and co-chair of my dissertation committee, read all transcripts from the interviews. In addition, Dr. Cranton assessed and provided feedback concerning my individual and collective analyses of the narratives.

Transferability refers to "the extent to which the reader is able to generalize the findings of a study to her or his own context" (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). For transferability, rich, thick, and descriptive data were provided from the study. This included detailed descriptions of the participants and their canine companions, the data collection, data analysis, and excerpts from the participants' narratives. Qualitative research findings are often expressed in words rather than numbers as in quantitative research. For this reason, qualitative researchers need to present an adequate amount of data in the form of "quotes from interviews, episodes from field observations, or documentary evidence" to support the findings (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 101). A substantial number of direct quotes are provided from the study in Chapter four.

Rich and descriptive data in the findings help to provide readers with a realistic perspective and demonstrate transferability to other contexts or settings (Creswell, 2009). For the purposes of narrative inquiry, rich and thick descriptions have the ability to draw the reader more

deeply into the narrative “to increase coherence and to evoke feelings for and a sense of connection with the participants in the study” (Carlson, 2010, p. 1104).

Employing strategies to enhance a study’s trustworthiness and authenticity is crucial to demonstrating diligence in conducting respectful research (Carlson, 2010). For the study, an audit trail, member checks, and descriptive data were utilized to build confidence in how the study was conducted and in the findings that resulted.

### **Summary**

This chapter began with a review of the purpose of the study which was to explore the role of relationships with canine companions in adult personal growth and well-being. Following this was an overview of qualitative research and how this serves as an appropriate research kind for the study. Subsequent sections addressed the research type of narrative inquiry, background of the researcher, participant selection procedures, and ethics and informed consent. Finally, the chapter concluded with a discussion of the data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and strategies to insure verification and trustworthiness.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **NARRATIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

People develop various relationships with others. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of relationships between adults and their canine companions and the role of these relationships in the participants' personal growth and well-being. The narratives of the participants in this study begin to reveal the relationships adults form with their canine companions. The narratives also reveal how the relationship contributes to growth and personal well-being for adults. This chapter begins with a brief overview of the ten participants. The next section contains narratives from each participant's interview and the chapter concludes with a summary.

#### **The Participants**

The summaries of the participants' stories in this section are snapshots of the lives they share with their companion animals and cannot completely convey the complexity and emotions the participants expressed. The summaries are meant to narrate the significant details revealed within the participants' stories. The findings of this study are based on the stories of the ten participants.

All of the participants were willing and enthusiastic in talking about their canine companions. Each participant also reported knowing several other individuals who would be good candidates to interview for this study or future studies. For confidentiality purposes, all human names and canine names were changed and given pseudonyms as stated on the informed consent form. The narratives are presented in the order in which the interviews occurred and following key principles of narrative inquiry; as much as possible the narratives are presented in the words of the participants.

**Leeann**

Leeann is a 44 year old, married female who works full-time and volunteers for a local animal rescue league. Leeann has grown children and young grandchildren. She presently has four dogs of her own and is fostering a number of other dogs.

Leeann's earliest experience with dogs occurred when she was a child. Her parents got a puppy, but the family only had the puppy three months because her mother "got rid of it." Since her parents do not like animals, Leeann says:

*I was born with it. I just have that compassion. I love animals. And dogs, I just enjoy them. People think they're a lot of work... I don't see it as work. I actually find it's an enjoyment. Watching children, I find is work! You look around my house. I have tons of animals. I have birds, fish, reptiles. I have four cats, a guinea pig. We have a pond outside. We've had rabbits. We've had frogs. I've always enjoyed animals. I used to bring spiders and frogs and salamanders home, 'everything,' my mother said, when I was little. I could not wait to move out of my parents' house when I got married and the first thing I wanted was a dog. My mom and dad are not animal fans. My mom and dad 'die' when they come here! I think people can be taught how to deal with dogs, but I think you have to have the personality and persona about you that dogs automatically respect about you. I've always had it. I've always had this little knack with dogs. Even when I go to other people's houses, their behavior towards me is different.*

One of her daughters has the same passion for animals as she does and all of her children "have one time in their lives taken someone's animal because they've threatened to release it in the woods or do something to it. So, they will get on their soapbox and they will stand up for an animal and say, 'No, this is not how things are done!'"

At 20 years old, Leeann adopted her first dog and has had several dogs throughout her adult life. For the past ten years, Leeann has been involved in a local animal rescue group:

*I'm actually Vice-President now. I had asked to be Vice-President years ago when they lost their Vice-President. I do a lot of typing, a lot of computer work. I deal with a lot of 'issue dogs.' I deal with problems, with applicants who are upset or whatever. I deal with my volunteers, plus I still foster, not usually in this volume that I have right now. I know my family gets tired of it. My family gets frustrated because I either have a phone [up] to my ear or I'm on the computer talking to somebody or dealing with it, but that's what I enjoy.*

In addition to fostering, Leeann has four dogs of her own. Each of Leeann's dogs was rescued and has come with emotional and/or behavioral issues.

*Abel does not cuddle with you. I can't touch him. He was beaten so bad for 7 months of his life and kept in a basement that he is the closest dog I have ever had to being feral. He does not like human contact, human touch. We've had him 2-1/2 years; I think it's been now. There's a ritual you have to do to put a leash on him. I can bathe him now. I mean, I can do things with him, but he has to have a leash on. He just won't come to you and want lovin'. Rena, my Border Collie, you couldn't touch her for 2 months, and she's semi-scatterbrained. She's intelligent, like a Border Collie, but she's scatterbrained. Bo is partially deaf and she's sight impaired. She's been very hard to train. She's a challenge from that. So those are my kind of dogs.*

Leeann likes the challenge and acknowledged the connection she feels for these particular canines:

*I have to take the ones that nobody else is going to want. Everybody will take a puppy,*

*but who's going to take a dog that you have to be cautious [with] around other people? Who's going to take a dog you can't touch? When Norris goes, I'll look for another one that's got attitude or something that's not right—blind, deaf, I don't know, but I like a dog that's a challenge.*

Leeann actively spends time with her dogs by walking them, training them, and participating in obedience classes. She describes:

*In going for a walk or training my dogs, I find enjoyment. I enjoy that a lot. I love to train him. I think it's awesome. When I walk, I walk 6 dogs and I'm very proud of that, because my dogs walk behind me or beside me. They don't pull me down the street. My arms don't move. My husband gets the biggest kick out of it when we take our dogs to dog events where you can take them and I'll say, "Here, hold them," and I'll go look at something and he stands there and they all sit there. People [say], "Wow! How do you get them to behave?" and they've got one dog and it's jumping all over the place and won't stay with them. [They'll ask], "How do you get them to stay?" and he says, "I have nothing to do with them. My wife trains them. She does it all!" Well, I DO do all the training! And I enjoy that training. It's my little outlet. I guess it's my little 'empty nest syndrome'. [I] "become their pack leader and they count on me. I am very anal about my care for my animals because they count on me. It's just like my children. My children had the best I could give them because they counted on me to make sure of that. [My dogs] ... they don't get kenneled, they go on vacation with me, and I spend lots of time with them, walking them and training them and working with them and interacting with them. That's what they thrive [on] and that's what builds the bond.*

Her dog, Norris, the focus of the interview is a four year old Rottweiler adopted from a

local shelter. Leeann describes the moment she met Norris:

*I just love Rottweilers and I just fell in love with him. When I touched him at the shelter, I just absolutely loved him and said 'That's it, we're gonna pull him and we're gonna keep him' There was just something about him.*

Leeann believes Norris was put out on the streets after possibly mouthing/grabbing someone. Leeann takes extra precaution around people as she has not yet determined what triggers Norris to respond with aggressive tendencies. According to Leeann, "He would have been euthanized if he had gotten adopted out to somebody else, they would have euthanized him the first time he grabbed somebody. I feel good, healthy, and positive- I saved him from being euthanized."

Leeann describes Norris' guarding behaviors of the yard and house to be a challenge, but realizes this is his personality; this is his nature and embraces who he is as a canine companion. Leeann expressed:

*He would follow me to the end of the earth and do whatever I ask him to do. It's a relationship that you have to be an animal lover to understand, you really do. The relationship I have with him is not like what I have with one of my kids, or my husband, or a friend, but he is a friend. He fills a need... He likes to go for walks. He likes to hang out. He's different. A dog that is well taken care of, it doesn't matter what breed, they'll die to protect their home. That's the relationship I have with him.*

Leeann has learned two important lessons from Norris: patience and the ability to love another dog of the same breed.

*Believe it or not, he has to stay in the crate. He cannot be out of the crate when we're not here. He will clear a 3-foot gate and he's about 120 pounds or so. He clears the 3-*

*foot gate that's there and he will open my refrigerator and get food! He opens a child safety lock for the refrigerator! I have tried putting one of them on but I cannot trust him when it comes to the refrigerator. Norris will also open the back door if he wants to. He's extremely intelligent and he has taught me a lot of patience... When you come home and you didn't know he could open the refrigerator, and your refrigerator's been hanging open and you've been gone for 4 hours, and you're thinking, "How long has my refrigerator been open?" you can't yell. You can't scream at a dog, because it's like a 2-year-old child. They don't understand. So he has taught me a lot of patience.*

Leann goes on to explain some of what she has learned from Norris. In particular, he has also taught Leeann not to compare:

*[He gave me] the opportunity to love another Rottweiler after I lost Nitro. My family didn't think I'd get another one. He taught me not to compare, he really did. I actually think Nitro sent him to me because a lot of things about him are a lot like Nitro, but not identical to Nitro. The bond that I had with Nitro was just so intense that I wasn't looking to replace him. But, Norris has taught me that I can love the same breed, another dog, and still not feel guilty that I've replaced my first one.*

Leeann spoke fondly of Nitro and remembering the relationship with him showed a photograph of him which she said sat at her wedding table. Leeann recalled, "He was my best friend and he would love on me and we had a bond that was just....if I had a bad day, he knew it as soon as I walked in the door. If I wasn't feeling good, he knew it when I walked in the door. He was my dog."

Leeann's passion for animals is reflected in her future goal to leave her house and buy land to open a kennel "so I can take in issue dogs that are going to be euthanized and rehabilitate

[them].” Additionally, Leeann would like to “open a training facility where I can work with children and teach children how to handle and work with their own dogs.”

### **Jamie**

Jamie is a 32 year old, married female with a seven year old daughter and four year old son. She works part-time and has had her two canine companions for all of her married life. Her dog, Sebastian, is 11 years old and Ginny is 10 years old. Jamie has had both since they were puppies.

Jamie recalled from her childhood, “My dad’s mom had a dog when we were little. I remember her being at our house and my mom hated dogs. Back then I always wanted dogs, and my mom always [said], “No, you’ll never get a dog.”

Jamie adopted her first dog, Stanley, when she was 20 years old and dating her husband: *I lived in San Diego. My husband had dogs and his dogs were fun, and I always thought, “Oh, we should get a dog!” We were just dating. I lived with his grandma and this lady was walking down the street and she was walking him, and I said, “Oh my gosh, your dog is SO cute! Where did you get him?” He was 3 months old and she said, “Oh, we have to get rid of him. Do you want him?” and I said, “Yeah!” So I [ran] to my [husband’s grandma’s] house and I said, “This lady’s walking this little dog and I really want him! Can we get him?” and he said, “We are NOT getting a Rottweiler!” He was dead set that we would not get one because he thought they were mean. I [asked], “Can we just go look at him?” because she lived right down the street, so we went down and looked at him. [My husband thought] he was so cute and we just got him. I told my parents and they said, “You are nuts! Why would you get a dog? You are insane!” and I said, “Well, we got him!” So that’s how we got him.*

Jamie's second dog, Ginny came from a kennel. She explains, "We took Stanley with us and he was walking around. We picked her out of the cage and she runs over to him and starts swatting at him, ran up and was jumping on him, so we knew that was the one we were getting. That's how we picked her out."

Jamie describes Ginny and forming a relationship with her:

*She was awful at first. We used to call her "devil dog." She was so bad! We would pick her up when she was a puppy and she would snarl at us. I have a scar on my thumb from her bite. She was awful! She was so bad. I would cry because she was so bad. That's all I remember about her when she was little. Then somehow she changed and she's really sweet. She's very vocal and she always has been. We said, "Oh, she's funny!" But I did cry. I thought, "She's so mean! How did we get this dog that was so mean?" She's always just been vocal and we were, like, "Oh, that's just her." We read online that Rottweilers grumble. [We said] it must be just in the breed that they're very vocal. She's vicious, but she's loving. And she's just crazy! She's very loving. Like, you're sitting here, and she comes up to you and nudges you to pet her and wants to sit. I think she thinks she's a person. She always wants to be right with you. She's very attached to me. She'll follow me around the house if I go somewhere. When we leave the house, they both howl. We'll go to the pool and we can hear them howling. Oh, I love them. They're so cute. They're so sweet. I can't imagine not having them now that we have them.*

Over the years Stanley and Ginny have taught Jamie:

*I think just about the unconditional love, about how they love you when you come home. They're so much better than kids—well, not better than kids, but you know, in a sense, you know what I mean? They don't talk back to you, they love you no matter what, and*

*they're just so easy. Not that I don't love my kids to death. It's just different, it really is. And they're so loving. You're gone for 5 minutes and you come home and they're so excited to see you! And [kids] don't do that! Also, putting them before yourself and not always... It teaches you responsibility, definitely, that you're not the most important person. They don't come before you, but anything you want to do; you have to think about the dogs. What are we going to do now? Like if you want to go away for the day, what do you do with the dogs? You can't just leave them at home all day.*

Jamie describes how the relationship makes her feel:

*I think it just feels good to have them, to come home and always having somebody here makes you feel good. The people at our old house were scared of us because [the dogs] would go out into the backyard and bark, and I think anybody who would see them would think, "I'm not going near THAT house!" So I feel totally protected with them being here."*

The most challenging time Jamie experienced with Ginny was several years ago when she almost lost her:

*She got her vaccines, and we don't know if it's related to the vaccines—we assume it was. She had a cut on her eye, too. Then a week or two later, her eye started bleeding. Then she started bleeding from "down there," so we called the vet and said, "She's bleeding, it's really weird, and we don't know what's going on!" So we took her in and I guess they did tests, I don't remember now, I think blood tests, and her platelets were deadly low. They're supposed to be "here" and they were "here." They said they needed to do platelet transfusions, and can we do one? And I said, "Yes, of course." She was only 6 or 7 at the time. She was kinda young. They said she probably wouldn't*

*make it through the night. I was a mess! I still get sad when I think about it. [tearful] But she did. It's been 3 years. They think she might have had an infection or something and then the vaccines triggered it. Then she was on medicines forever. She would fall when she was walking because they had her on prednisone and I think she lost all the muscle in her head. It was really sad. So now she's healthier than she's ever been! It's so weird—we say she has 9 lives, because she has all this energy. She's a sweetheart.*

A challenging time with Stanley's health was several weeks ago:

*Stanley couldn't walk. It was really weird. So I took him to the vet and I was crying hysterically, "What's wrong with him? He can't walk!" And it turns out at the vet's; they said it was just arthritis. And they gave him medicine and he's better ... And I said to my sister "I don't know if I want another dog ...The thought of them dying is so depressing, [pause] but I can't imagine not having them.*

Jamie spoke of Ginny's favorite activity, "She loves going to the creek, so we take them to the creek a lot. She loves to swim. So she swims in the creek. That's her favorite thing to do." Jamie's daughter shared a story of a family celebration with the dogs: "On Stanley's birthday, we made him a cake, a big cake, and we went outside and Ginny didn't stay and she ate his cake... and [he] had to eat a little one!"

### ***Leslie***

Leslie is a 57 year old, married female with grown children and a young grandson. She works part-time driving a school bus and has had her dogs, Sandy for 14 years and Lacey for 8 years. She adopted both when they were puppies.

Leslie recalled growing up with dogs all of her life:

*We had a St. Bernard when I was tiny. My dad used to hook it up to a sled and the dog*

would take me places! I just love dogs. I lived on a farm and we had 2 little miniature Chihuahuas. One was real tiny and one was just a little bit bigger. He got distemper and he died, but then we had kept the miniature Chihuahua. She lived to be about 14. Her name was Brownie. I've had dogs and they've always slept with me. I've just always had dogs. I love dogs. My aunt Mary said, "You must have an attraction for dogs, because every time we go somewhere, you always find a lost dog and are always finding a home for it." I drive a school bus and every once in awhile, I will pick up the neighbor's dog, because it runs over [the road] and I have to take the dog home.

Leslie presently has two Schnauzers, Sandy and Lacey:

Dogs just seem to be attracted to me. I've found that Schnauzers are very loving dogs and... I don't know how to say it... they're very "for" you. They'll do anything for you, as long as you're kind to them. They listen very well. [Schnauzers] are pretty smart, so it doesn't take too much training for them. They can ... have their own mind set, but if you work with them enough, they're very trainable. I just love Schnauzers. They're just so friendly and outgoing. They get a little yappy, and they get yappy because they want to be noticed: "Hey! Here I am, come play with me!" but they just chase everybody away. They just don't understand, "What are you doing? I wanna play with you!" But they're pretty yappy. Yes, well, you heard when you came in how they were talking to you, and that's a Schnauzer's yodel. It's sorta like, "Hey, hello! Here I am!" But that chases people away because people don't understand this Schnauzer's yodel. They're just there for you. They're loving, they're affectionate, and they're more or less a guard dog for you. I don't think they'd ever really attack anybody, but they do give that serious bark.

Leslie shared that Sandy and Lacey are “both Schnauzers, but they’re their own individual personalities:”

*With Sandy, it’s the agility that we have done with her. We’ve traveled with her and done agility, and her being the ball baby. She always loved playing with a tennis ball... and I miss that now because it really hurts her hips if we start throwing it, so we’ve sort-of hidden the balls so she will forget them. If she finds a tennis ball, she’ll get it out and still want to play with it, but I know in my heart it really hurts her hips if I get her running. She’ll only last maybe 3 runs and she’s down, and then she’ll be down for a couple of days. So we try to hide all the tennis balls. With Lacey, she’s the bad girl! She’s just into anything and everything she possibly can! She’s been a joy. She’s a funny dog. I tried doing training with her and she wanted nothing to do with it. She was just the silly dog, so I said we’re just going to let her be Lacey. She’s never really done any training or anything. She’s just the silly dog.*

Leslie shared how the relationship with Sandy and Lacey makes her feel:

*Good! And, you know, it doesn’t matter what kind of a day you have. You come home, they’re there for you. They’re usually standing right there at the door, waiting on you. They’re glad to see you and just sort of make you feel a little bit better, even if you’ve had a really bad day. They’re there for you. Lacey’s there with her hugs and kisses. They just touch your heart. If anything would happen to them, oh my! I would just be devastated, but you know, that’s part of life. It’s just part of life.*

Leslie found that she, herself, learned in doing agility:

*I must say [doing] agility made me feel good, doing something with my dog. Usually, people just have dogs and they don’t really do anything with them but maybe take them*

*for walks or whatever. Doing agility, it made me use my brain, for one thing, because I had to run the course, even though my husband said I wasn't doing it right and I said, "You do it!" so then he started doing it. I think it made him feel more positive too, because he was doing something that made him use his brain. You have to learn how to do that course and then learn how to make the dog go through the whole course. It was a lot of fun. We used to have a course set up out here in our yard for practice and people would go by and say, "You know, those people who live there that have the circus!" The circus yard! That really made us feel good, because we were working together, doing something with our dog.*

Sandy and Lacey have also taught Leslie to be patient and loving:

*I needed more patience with Lacey, because she's the more "outstanding" dog. She's the one who wants the attention all the time. She's always right there and I have to be more patient with her. Sandy is the more down-to-earth dog. I don't know if the agility and everything has anything to do with that, because you have to have patience with the agility. They have to learn to stay and wait till you give the command, and I've just learned a lot from them [about being] patient, and to be more loving. Because they're so loving, they want that back and you have to learn to give that loving back to them, even though you've had such a busy, hectic day and your day gets really busy. Sit down; take a couple of minutes with them. They need that as much as you do.*

Leslie spends time with her dogs:

*They go camping. We go camping, and I tell you what, I feel much safer with having a dog, especially with snakes! I feel much safer with having a dog there. And they're just a lot of fun. They get you out to go for a walk, do whatever with them. And I find that*

*when we go camping and they're there, you take them for more walks... whereas I would just sit around the campground if I didn't have them. They love going out in the boat, but they don't like the water! Just the ride... they love going out in the boat or going for car rides. The car ride or going out in the boat. Anytime those keys rattle, they're ready! They go everywhere in the car as long as the weather is suitable. If it's too darn cold or too hot, no, they stay at home, but if the temperature is just right, they do go with me. These dogs have never been kenneled. They have always been with us or I've had someone come to the house and [stay] with them. No, they have never been kenneled. I just couldn't put them through that strain. Wherever we go, they like to go. They have just always ... They're part of the family. They just go with us and I don't know what I'd do without them. If they're not with us and we go somewhere, I feel lost, because I don't have 8 extra paws under my feet.*

Leslie lost a dog last year, a Shih Tzu:

*She started coughing and the vet couldn't really find anything, so we were giving her steroids. As long as she was on the steroids, that seemed to help. Then we stopped the steroids because I just felt in my heart that this was pretty much her time. It was my daughter's dog and I called my daughter and I said, "I'm taking her in to the vet today. Today's the day. She has to go." And my daughter said, "Can't you do anything else for her? Can't you give her any more of that medicine?" And I said, "It's just that time." My grandson was six, and I'd had her ever since right after he was born. I brought her home with me and she was the nastiest dog! But I worked with her and worked with her, and she just became such a nice little doggie. So Lacey really missed her for quite a while. I still really miss her. I had her for 6 years and I really worked for that*

*dog. I just knew she could have a better life, and she did. I gave her the best that I could.*

### **Angie**

Angie is a 46 year old, married female who teaches elementary school. She has a 14 year old son and 12 year old daughter at home. Honey, her dog, is six years old and has been a part of their family since she was a puppy.

Angie shared how her family found their dog, Honey, and how this canine companion has made the family whole:

*It was a family affair! We went looking. We knew that weekend that we wanted to look. We looked at some puppies. We were familiar with Cockers. I was actually looking for Springers, and we were looking at some Springer puppies and then we thought we'd just take a look at her. We looked at her and looked at her, and then we were headed out driving an hour further to look at Springers, and we said you know what, we're going to end up getting her, so we turned around. So she was from a private breeder. When we got her, it was just like the family was a family. Without the dog, it was nice and it was easy. But when we brought her in, it was like, "Oh my gosh, it's been missing!" There's just something about them that's comforting and just completes... I don't know, it's a different element to the family, just that unconditional love, I guess, that they give.*

Angie and her family developed a relationship with Honey by spending time with her:

*We took her to puppy kindergarten. We walk her all the time. She's totally part of the family. She's like one of my kids, just lots of time with her. And I've heard about Cockers that they bond with one person. Now our other two weren't that way at all. She is definitely more bonded with the two of us than with the men in the family. She does*

*seem a little more comfortable with women. She is like my little companion. She is everywhere that I am. She'll follow [my daughter] or me around the house. She follows one of us. I take her running all the time. From the time she's been little, she's been my running buddy. She runs with me all the time. The minute I get my shoes out, she's in my face and ready to go. But she likes it off the leash. So that would be my story. She's just, definitely, the minute I get the shoes on and sit down, she's right there, and if I don't take her, she's very upset.*

Honey is treated as a family member:

*We totally spoil her and we know that. We don't go overboard, but she gets presents. We celebrate her birthday. She's just a great addition to our family, and she's very lovable. She's my little lapdog. She's just such a good companion. She's great with people.*

*Not as great with dogs.*

*She's allowed [everywhere in the house]. She's in bed. She's everywhere. She started out not coming to bed with us. We had a crate next to our bed and we were crating her at night. But then we realized oh, while I'm teaching, she's going to be in a crate all day, and our other ones were in bed with us. She's at the bottom of the bed, luckily.*

*She does just about everything with us. I mean, we don't share food with her from the table, but she goes hiking with us a lot and she runs with me. We take lots of walks together. She just hangs out with us all the time. She goes on trips with us if we can.*

*She's not great with the water, so if we're going to the beach, we don't take her... she's not a beach dog, but she travels with us. We go to the lake and she goes with us. [If she doesn't go along] she will often go and stay with my family. If they're going with us, we have another girl that we take her to her house, so she doesn't get kenneled. I*

*don't think she would do well in a kennel.*

Angie has learned from the relationship with Honey:

*I guess I have learned that you can't really change what a dog is like, because she is so alpha and we've always wanted her to get along with other dogs and be subservient and play, let's not have this, but it's not going to change. She is that. Even the breeder... I still remember back to whenever I made that phone call to the breeder and she said,*

*"She's an alpha." I didn't know enough about dogs. But I'm not going to change her, so we just work around it and try to get her through her issues. But I think she's taught me that you are the way you are and you just adapt.*

*She's taught me a lot about the differences between the different dogs and the dynamic.*

*She's been very interesting, though, in how different she is from the other two Cockers. I think it's her personality, so that's been interesting for me to learn, how each one has their own individual personality. Like if I walk her, she sticks close. If we go in the woods, once in awhile she'll take off after an animal, but I can always see her, whereas my other ones would chase and pursue. They would take off. If we'd go to Kings Gap and they'd see a deer, they'd be gone a good 10 minutes before they reappeared. So she's definitely an interesting one.*

Angie shared a positive outcome in the relationship:

*I think probably the breakthrough that we've had, and I think it's been good for her and good for us, is that she has made some dog friends. I don't know... That's made me feel like we've broken some barriers. My sister has a big dog that is alpha as well, and that dog has come after her and attacked her a couple of times. Through that, she has become more shy and more, kind of aggressive toward dogs, but I think we have kind of*

*broken through that. And it's made me feel good that she's able to get over that and she's made some other dog friends, as long as they're off leash. It's made me feel good that she's overcome that fear with my sister's dog.*

Angie talked of when the family loses Honey:

*That is a tough loss. It was tough with the other two. I remember how rough that was. The other two are buried right there down by that tree. We planted that dogwood when the first one died, and then the other one is under there. We have little rocks... We'll probably find her a little spot down there, but that'll be tough. We don't like to think about that.*

### **Jane**

Jane is a 54 year old, divorced female who resides alone with 7 year old dog, Bran, 6 year old dog, Sally and her 9 year old cat, Miss Kitty. She works full-time at a business office and has family in the local area.

Jane recalled a story about dogs from her childhood:

*I remember when we lived on a farm and I was the youngest of four girls. We had a collie dog and we had another little dog. They both had puppies within two weeks of each other. Well, the "Lassie" dog got jealous of the other girl's puppies, so she carried them off! She carried them down to the neighbor's and put them on their porch!*

Jane has two Jack Russell Terriers, Bran and Sally:

*Well, I have always liked Jack Russells. And I did some research because I do have a cat. And I did research to find that Jack Russells and cats usually don't get along. I read and read and read. I found Bran with a family that had a cat and small children, so I went over and there was the cat and Bran, and [he was] a puppy, ready to go. So they [Bran and Miss Kitty, the cat] play together now. Sally, she can take the cat*

*about this long and then she lets the cat know she's had enough.*

Jane described forming a relationship and connection with each of her dogs:

*[By] spending time with them. Probably with him, I brought him home on a Wednesday, went to work on Thursday, and then spent Friday, Saturday, and Sunday with him, constantly. We just ... I had company come over that Friday night and he growled at them. So it was just an instant connection with him. She [Sally] was at an Amish farm and their pets are their pets. They're not house dogs or anything. And it took her probably three weeks to warm up to me. Then, if I would sit on the couch, she would come over and sit beside me, but other than that, she didn't want anything to do with me. She stuck with Bran.*

Jane explained how the relationship makes her feel:

*Because they're [such] happy dogs that it makes me happy... As you can see, I don't care about my furniture! They make me feel wanted. I know they depend on me, but I depend on them for friendship and company. I talk to them all the time. It's almost like they know exactly what I'm talking about. They don't back-talk me. They're there for the whole nine yards. They're always there, no matter what. If I come home and I'm in a bad mood, they're there. They don't care. [I love] the companionship. That I can come home, like I said and be in a bad mood, and when you have [this face] looking at you, you're automatically out of that. And I just get unwound. If I'm not feeling well, they all come up and lay on the couch with me, even the cat, so I have all three of them that are around me, comforting me. You know how he tried to crawl up on your lap? He was trying to put his paws around you? That's what he does. He gives hugs. He's the little lover boy. It's just a good relationship that [we] have. They seem to understand what I*

*say if I ask them anything. It is amazing, because I will ... talk to him, and ... he just automatically knows. I don't know... He knows. And I can tell... I mean, just like when I told them that they were getting company tonight, they sat up there and waited. It's just like they know!*

Jane talked of learning patience and sticking to a routine:

*Probably if I [didn't] have these dogs, I probably wouldn't be home. I'd be out running around. They make me come home. They make me want to come home, because I know they depend on me walking in the door. I'm very patient anyhow, but ... the routine.*

*They've got me in a routine now that I can't get out of. It's a routine that we always do. I think they depend on it and they don't like to get out of the routine. We walk, 365 days. It doesn't matter. If it's really icy, we don't walk. Everybody tells me, "You're nuts!" because it's hot. Even if we just walk three houses up and come back, I'm satisfied that they in fact walked, and they get their special treats when they get back from a walk.*

*[I learned] Patience. With him, I'm scared when he gets out, because he's a runner. So it's a challenge to keep him in and make sure that the gate's locked and he can't get out, make sure that he's hooked up when we walk. She's not a runner. She probably would walk beside me and not run off. The front gate he went out and I had no idea... But I was calm and collected, so he must have read me then, that I wasn't panicky, and I said, "What do you think you're doing?" He just turned around, and I said, "Get back in here!" and he turned around and walked right back in.*

Jane shared a story about their relationship:

*I bred them and I delivered the puppies. During labor, I had a big back room and Bran laid on the chair and watched the whole time. He never left her side. Eventually, then, I*

*had to take her to the vet and had to get the rest of them out. She had 8 puppies! And I took her... she was just so big... and I took her, and I always told everybody that I was getting her a sonogram, and they looked at me like ... The vet [came] out and she [said,] "You have to come back here," and I said, "What?" and she said, "Come back here. I want to look at this again." She had four puppies on one side of her and four puppies on the other side, and they said, "Very, very, very rarely. They usually have two to four." Well, needless to say, we didn't make out good. We had three. Three lived. I delivered the first one and it was the runt, and the next one I delivered was dead, and we had no more for hours. I called the vet and they said, "Leave her alone for an hour."... I didn't go to sleep. I laid there with her. So I took her to the vet, took the one puppy along, and they all looked like him, every one of them. But, like I said, we got three of them, and then the runt actually passed away a week later. Then I had a male and a female. That's what we had. They were wild. They were just unbelievable! She was just so small and [there were] so many puppies. So I decided no more puppies. I couldn't put her through it again. So I had already signed the papers when I had taken her there, if they had to [do] a cesarean to get any of the puppies out, I just signed the papers to just fix her. And they called me and said the last puppy would not come out. So I said to just go ahead and fix her. I don't want to do it to her.*

Jane enjoys spending time with her canine companions:

*We swim. I have one of those little pools and we put water in it and we swim. I tell them, "Come on, we're going swimming!" They actually like being sprayed with the hose more than anything. We actually go to the park when it's their birthday. We go to the park and we walk. We have a fantastic dog park up here, big huge one. They have*

*sections for the big dogs and then sections for the little dogs. We were there once and he [Bran] [wanted] to stay with the big dogs!*

Jane shared her favorite photographs of her animal companions:

*Oh, yeah, I have a picture of both of them [at work]. When she had her puppies, she was skinny, skinny, skinny. I have a picture of both of them standing and I had the camera and they're both looking up at me. Bran is my background screen on my computer [at work]. [A woman] who works with me was taking a photography class and she wanted to come up and take pictures of Bran and Sally in their own little world, where I used to live. So she came up and we sat in the back yard and she took pictures and pictures. They had sticks in their mouths and they were tugging with toys and with each other. She took some really nice pictures. Then she came up here and we tried to get Christmas pictures. They were more worried about the camera and her than they were about sitting still, but I actually still have some left.*

### **Becky**

Becky is a 49 year old, married female who resides in an urban setting and works as a massage therapist. Becky has had her canine companions, Jingle for 13 years and Hannah for 4 years. Jingle was a puppy and Hannah was 6 years old when Becky welcomed them into her home. Becky has grown children in the local area. She is married to Matt who is also a participant in the study.

Becky recalls her earliest experience with dogs and her first dog as an adult:

*Oh, I might have been... we've always had animals. The earliest experience I can remember... I think I was four and we had a dog. Her name was Duchess and I think she was... it was a mixed [breed] dog. It was a rat terrier, but she was [the whole family's]*

*dog. I think because I was the youngest, I probably played with her more. That was probably the earliest.*

*I got a Cocker Spaniel... I'm thinking here... I was probably, oh, 25-ish. His name was Tiger. I have to remember how old my kids were to remember how old and they were both in middle school. Then after that, we rescued an English Springer Spaniel. His name was Jimmy and someone locked him in the basement, so he was a little wired. I had them till they were 13-ish. Then I got Jingle during that time. I think it was right before I had to put them down, maybe a year or two.*

Becky shared the story of finding Jingle:

*Jingle... [that's] a funny little story! My sister had a Jack Russell Terrier. She has no children, so it was like her child—well, that was her child. And the dog... When I would run into the house it would run to me like a kid, like “ooooohh!!!” So it was like I was her aunt and this was a true child. So I said to my sister, “If you ever find a Jack Russell that's small, was bred by a family, not coming from a pet store, is white with one black eye, that's what I want.” Because most Jack Russells have a mask and most of them are brown. Well, she called me from a horse show because a lot of Jack Russells are horse dogs. I think [she] was in Virginia, or ... I don't know exactly. She said, “I finally found your dog!” But the time was not a good time for me, because I was actually going through a divorce, and she's saying, “I found your dog!” And I said, “This is not a good time for me to have a dog!” And she said, “You've been looking for 3 years!” I found a picture of a dog that I wanted and [put it] on my refrigerator. She said, “It took me 3 years!” I said, “Fine, get the dog and bring her home.” So my sister called me and said, “Come over and get your dog! It's crying! It's in the bathtub!” and I went over and she*

*was, oohhh, teeny-weeny, like the size of a guinea pig! But I think I bonded with her more, probably because of what I was going through, too.*

Becky shared the story of rescuing Hannah:

*Hannah was a litter sister of the [previous] Rottie that we had. Her name was Torch, and Torch had to be put down because she had cancer. My sister had rescued Hannah from a previous bad owner, so we took Hannah because we thought that her sister Torch would like it if we took her sister. She [Hannah] was more like a kennel dog ... and not a pet, so I had to of course put her in a crate and teach her how to be a house dog and a pet. I think it only took about a week. Jingle, I think, bonded with her [Hannah] immediately, because in my opinion, I think Jingle knew—I don't know how they know, but I think Jingle knew that it was some relation to her other sister dog, Torch, that was here. I was probably more lenient with her [Hannah] having to learn as an older dog, because I knew her background and where she came from, and again that she was my other dog's sister. I didn't feel good when Torch was put down, but I did feel good when we took Hannah. Torch would have been happy that we took her litter sister. I felt happy because she was here to ... heal a wound. In the same [way], she needed a home and family too. So we took a bad thing and turned it into a good thing.*

Becky talked about going through her divorce:

*So at that time, like I said, I had the two older dogs. I think at that point, they probably didn't do a lot. So Jingle was new, so I think what happened was that I was going through a different stage and she was new, so that probably ... tied in with all of that. My kids, at that time, were teenagers, and teenagers are on their own, trying to do their own thing. But that's probably why I bonded with her at that time.*

Becky explained how she feels about her dogs:

*I feel like they're my kids! Yeah, they're my kids. [My husband], Matt, works a lot. I always looked at dogs as kind of like people. When I'm home or I'm walking around the house, I'm talking to them constantly. I talk to them like they're kids. Honestly, I think Jingle is more kid-like than Hannah is, because we've had [Jingle] longer. Jingle thinks she can talk or I talk to them. Matt will walk in the house and he's used to this now, because I'm always talking to them. I think she [Jingle] knows when I'm upset or when I'm nervous. I think whatever my reactions are, I think she picks up on them, without a doubt she picks up on them, because I think she knows me that well. They're like our kids. If they have health problems, it gets fixed.*

Becky shared an interesting story about the bond that can develop between two animals:

*When we put Torch down, it was really hard for us. We did get her cremated, and I'll tell you this story. I don't know if you've ever heard this before, but we took her to the vet. She couldn't breathe well anymore and we put her down. I stayed in with her when they put her down and then we left. We already had it set up that somebody was coming to pick her up to get her cremated. She had a private cremation. This lady was absolutely wonderful. She had dealt with my sister before and she also has an animal rescue, so we didn't mind paying because she uses the money for her animal rescue. So when [she] called me and said, "Torch is done and I'm going to bring her home. Make sure you're there and don't be surprised when I walk in the door if Jingle comes running over to me." And I said, "What??" and she said, "You'll understand." And when she walked in the door with the cremation box, Jingle came running around the corner and jumped up on her back legs and wanted the box, because she knew Torch was in there! To this day,*

*if I get the box out and open it, Jingle will take her paw and scratch in the ashes. She knows [Torch] is there. I was totally amazed by that. So I think they do bond with each other.*

Becky shared what she has learned from Jingle and Hannah:

*Not to worry about stuff as much. Not to be so “uptight,” to look at them. They’re happy with simple things. They’re happy to go for a walk. They’re so spoiled that when we go away on vacation, when I walk in the door, Jingle knows—because we’ve had her longer—she’s toy crazy. She has her head in the bag! She knows... She knows she gets something, and of course now Hannah is starting to know. She doesn’t play as much, but she still likes to get something too. But I look at them some days and I think, “Oh, it’s the middle of the day, let’s go take a nap!” Or, “Hey, let’s just sit on the floor and chew on this for awhile!” So I think what I’ve learned from them is that life is too short to be worrying about things. Take every day as it is and deal with it as it comes along. When you’ve had dogs this long, you can look at them and it’s funny because even now, if Jingle gets yelled at, she puts her head down and walks away, like she’s mad. But 15 minutes later, she’s fine! So I don’t think they hold any anger or dislike or anything like that, so I think that would be what I would say.*

Becky has also grown in other ways;

*I do canine massage now, because I have dogs. I probably never would have done that... I think from having dogs as puppies that as they grow up, you learn with them. And if you have them when they’re old and in pain, that affects you emotionally. Then when they get older and something happens and you have to put them down... it’s hard. It’s like a life cycle. Hannah does get massaged and so does Jingle. It’s a little funny story*

*that she knows how to open the bathroom door, Jingle does, so if I'm in there and she opens the bathroom door, she comes and sits in front of me, like, "Okay, you're stuck here!" and she wants me to massage her!*

Becky talked of spending time with her dogs and how her human children react:

*More or less, we take them wherever we can. We try and take them wherever we go, and try to include them [as part of] the family. But sometimes if they're bored, we take them for rides. Hannah loves Rita's ice cream! Yeah, I'd push you out of the way for Rita's ice cream! We have a trailer in Wellsboro and they go up there with us. We have a fifth wheel trailer. It's huge. They have toys up there. They know when we pull in where we're going. Hannah loves to lie outside. Jingle has toys up there and she runs in the door and [heads] right for her toy box. My kids are grown up now and their favorite saying is, "These dogs have more stuff and get to do more things than WE did when WE were kids!" and my [reply] is, "These dogs listen better than you ever did than you [did] as a kid!" But they think it's funny.*

Becky shared what she loves about her canine companions:

*I probably love everything about them. I love when I come home and it's not an empty house. I love that I can talk to them and they don't talk back to me. I love that I think they know what you're feeling or what you're going through. I like it that Hannah loves Rita's, that when you give her a Rita's, she's, like, "Ahhh!" Kind of like a person! I like it that they're like that.*

### **Matt**

Matt is a 46 year old male and works as a police officer. He is married to Becky, another participant in the study, and has stepchildren, but no biological children of his own. Matt has

known Jingle for eight years meeting her while dating Becky and the couple rescued Hannah four years ago.

Matt described getting a dog of his own as an adult and how it connected to his relationship with Becky and her dogs:

*[It was] not until 9 years ago [with Torch.] I used to deal with [Becky's] dogs when we were dating. So I was 37, 38, before [I had] my own. Then her sister, who is a breeder and shows dogs... we would go to their house and [have] all the dog interaction... They would go camping with us and bring their dogs. She got a show dog that, how do I say, was injured to the point that if she would have had her "repaired," they couldn't show her any more. When she got sick, she said, "You know what? I'm going to get my money back and I'm getting another dog. So how about if I get another dog and see if I can give you this dog?" So for my birthday one year, I got a year and a half old Rottweiler, former show dog. Becky just sort of looked at me. She was still living in Palmyra and I was living here. So all of a sudden, I had a dog. And that was Torch, the first Rottweiler.*

Matt specifically spoke of how he developed a relationship with his dogs:

*Well, all three of them [Becky's previous dogs and], Jingle, just from being down there [at Becky's house] all the time. Torch ... when I was down at my sister-in-law's house, the first time, she was just, right up! She was just [always] pushing, doing that old Rottweiler moving, leaning, sitting... So I would take her out and play with her in the yard and stuff like that. Get down there [with Jingle and Hannah], play with them, pet them, play tug-of-war... When she [Jingle] was younger, I used to throw the tire. I couldn't find a toy that was indestructible until [I found] it was literally a tire. She and her sister Torch used to go try tear the tires apart and chew them, and they*

*couldn't tear them apart. So we found a toy that they could play with.*

Matt expressed how he feels about the relationship:

*They're great. I've never had kids, so those are my kids. I take care of them. They go with us. We have fun. They listen, which is better than most kids. It's tough when we put Torch down. They said we could have a few minutes with her and we were sitting there, like, "What do you do?" This dog has been in our lives for 6 years, did anything and everything we asked her to do, very loyal. It was a difficult experience. [I love] their loyalty, their companionship. They're always there. They make holidays... I mean, you name it. They're just like kids.*

Matt has personally grown from his dogs:

*With [having the] responsibilities of them. I never had a dog before I was married. I would go do whatever I needed to whenever, I needed to, do what I wanted to. Now, I have to take the time... think, like today, she's [Becky] leaving for the camper. I have to go to training, gotta be there by 1:30, she's leaving at 3:00, now there are 7 hours that are unaccounted for. Now we have to figure out... [how to take care of the dogs during that time].*

Matt enjoys activities and spending time with his canine companions:

*[I enjoy] just having them around all the time. You can go out and they'll be there, like going up to the camper, or going away, when they were younger, they used to all the time. Now I'll take them for a ride, say, "Let's go for a ride!" and they come out. I don't even have to say anything. They went out and sat by the back of the car. And when I tell them "Up," they just jump up in the back of the car. I try to take them everywhere. I take them in to work and everybody just loves them. I take them into the Finance*

*Department and they were all over them. Everybody in the office was all over them, out front... I had to go down to the District Court and they said, "Did you bring your dogs? Can I play with your dogs?" and I had to say, "Look, my dogs are getting older now and I can't bring them out all the time." She's [Hannah] 115 pounds, 120 pounds. She has a handicapped placard.*

*A buddy of mine we used to work with had two dogs. When I first started working with him, and he would ask, "So what are you doing with your dogs in the back of the car?" I was like, "They go with us. They go with us. They go with us. They do everything." And so I started finding out that you know what, they listen. They're excited, they have fun, they want to do stuff too. They're just good everywhere. Everybody looks at us at the camper, like, "Is your dog gonna bite me if I pet her?" and I say, "You know, you'll probably drown [from drool] before you'll get bit," because that's all she'll [Hannah] do. Your feet will get stepped on and sat on before anything. The other one [Jingle] will come up and sniff you and run. They're just another part of the family.*

### **Kathryn**

Kathryn is a 60 year old, divorced woman who raised five children and has seven grandchildren. Kathryn works full-time at a planning and development organization. She has one cat and three Shih Tzus. Kathryn has had all of her dogs since they were puppies. Toosi is a six year old female, Tan is a five year old male, and Jay is a two year old male.

Kathryn recalled her earliest experience with dogs: "We had a German Shepherd when I was growing up. I think I was around five or six when we first got him—Klondike—we had him for 12 years, so I pretty much grew up with him. A good dog!

Kathryn has had dogs throughout her adult life:

*After I was married and I had five children, and we always had a dog. Most of them, for a while, we had one fairly young that was killed by an automobile, but yes, I married a man who had a German Shepherd. She never liked me, even though I was the caregiver! We had two Rottweilers, a male and a female, and the last dog we had, the one of course in between that got killed, and then we got a Golden Retriever till the last of the kids were raised. He died of old age. So yeah, dogs have always been a part of my life.*

Kathryn discussed the decision to get her dogs:

*Well, after raising a decent-size family (I had five children and ended up divorced), it was hard coming home to nothing. There was an adjustment period. I worked a second job until the property was settled. I just remember having a really hard time coming home to an empty house and actually, my younger sister in Boston said, "You need a dog!" Well, I was in an apartment at the time so that wasn't a good idea, but I moved into a home to take care of an elderly man, and we had talked about getting a dog that would keep him company during the day, and that's actually, to make a long story short, how we ended up.... I knew I wanted a Shih Tzu at that time, because my best friends, who live in Florida, have two Shih Tzus and they had visited. I liked them because they don't shed and when you have more than one that becomes a problem. I just liked their temperament. That was really the first time I had ever been around a Shih Tzu was their dogs. I'd go to Florida or they'd visit, and I just knew I wanted a Shih Tzu. I found this breeder down in Petersburg, near Alexandria. We went and picked her out, visited her a couple of times till we could get her and take her home. How we got Toosi was... She was born in January and we got her, oh, let's see, at the end of March. My youngest daughter moved in with us, so I'm taking care of this elderly man, but she moved in*

*temporarily between schools. And one September day, she said, "Oh, I just think we need to get another puppy!" So we called the breeder and sure enough, she had a litter, and [they] were ready to go. [We] went down and he [Tan] ran right to the door, and we knew. He was the only one that was marked like that. We knew we were taking him. Truthfully, he's my boyfriend! I mean, he can never let me out of his sight. It just worked out very well.*

*My friend works at the animal hospital. She's been there for 17 years so she has a lot of connections, and she heard through the hospital that the woman she thought was the breeder of these other two had a disaster happen in the family and had puppies that she hadn't planned, and needed to, basically, give them away. [They were] purebred Shih Tzus, but they wouldn't have papers. She didn't want to go through all that work. And we made an appointment and went down and looked, and there were three litters born within two weeks. He [Jay] was in the third litter, the last litter, the only male, and just the way he acted, we knew that ... And, it was Tan, my other male, his half-brother. And I knew I wanted another male. I am partial to males. For Toosi, there's no right place to pee, there's no right place for this. She's the boss. She is the boss, and they all listen to her. She's quite persnickety! [My children] never thought I'd have this number [of dogs] at one time, let alone little dogs! But they have really filled a void.*

Kathryn talked of developing a relationship with her dogs:

*Well, it wasn't difficult. They're lovers. I mean.... they were meant to love you. I'm a very regimented person and I think dogs, like kids, like to know what's expected of them and they like to be regimented. We pretty much do the same thing every day and that's our relationship. There are certain things I do in the evening that they all know,*

*especially him. When it's time for "b-e-d" (spells out), see, I have key words here that I spell, "b-e-d," or "b-e-d-d-y" sometimes, I'll say, and their sitting at the bottom of the steps, ready to go up, because they know it's time, and I really don't even have to say it any more. Same thing when we walk, as we do every morning and every night. We have a routine. As soon as I bring out the harnesses and the leashes, I always put on a fanny pack that has the bags in it. And they just all sit so politely because they know what's coming. They just don't misbehave. I think the hardest thing that I've had to deal with is he [Tan] is supposed to be a purebred, and I do have papers for him, and he's like a beagle! Birds, anything around. He's better, but rabbits, squirrels, he just goes crazy! So my relationship with them is just loving them. I just don't even remember ... I mean I go, "Ah-ah-ah!" She [Toosi] still ... a couple times a year, she'll pee in the house just because that's her personality. She has no reason to. They are in a routine. It's just her personality and she knows that I'm upset with her, but truthfully, she doesn't care. When I'm upset with him for whatever reason, like if he's at the window at a rabbit or something that bothers him. So, am I describing my relationship with them? I don't know! They just... How do you not love a puppy of any breed? And that love just grows as they become adults. They know my way and I know theirs, and again, I think it's been very helpful, because I am very [much in a] routine and they know what's expected of them, what not to do.*

Kathryn commented on how the relationships make her feel:

*Oh, so fulfilled! I mean, when I think of not having them, I just couldn't even imagine ... The care, and to give them the attention that they need, and the Frontline and ... you know, I do it right, and I wouldn't want to do it any other way...*

*Every morning when we get the leashes out and walk down the street, whether it's snowing... I mean, we'll run up... it's great to have that field there. Oh, it's just glorious! In the spring, when those first warm rays of sun are starting to hit you after a long winter at 6:00 in the morning... it's just... oh, I don't even know, it makes your heart just want to burst. They're ahead of me and I watch them loping along at times, especially her because she's so physically lazy, and she'll start loping up that field... it just, oh, it just makes my heart sing. Even when I take them in the pool occasionally, which they're not crazy about, just maybe to refresh them on a hot day, and just having to chuckle to myself. They'll swim, that's why they call it the doggie paddle! They're just... how do you even put it into words? It's fulfilling. When I feel that, I think the comparison I can make is when we had dogs and I was raising kids, I again was the caregiver of the dogs as well as the kids. I always took a lot of enjoyment out of seeing... [say] we'd hike and how the dog at the time would run after the kids, or interact with the kids, not so much with me. So this probably is my first one on one. There aren't all these others, "diluting" the relationship, all these other things that are going on.*

Kathryn shared memorable stories about the relationships:

*Well, I've had a couple of losses in my life. [During] one of them, I remember being in my bedroom—that was when I was living in the elderly man's home—and I only had Toosi. I just cried and wept and wept, and she cried too. She was lying in my arm... a couple of nights I did that, I was just so upset. She was whimpering like she was crying too, which made me stop because I didn't want her to be so upset. That is something I will never forget.*

*With Tan, I was wrestling with one of my grandchildren and he got really upset and was*

*barking, because he thought my grandson was hurting me, which really surprised me when it happened, because he was a bit younger. I think that's when I began to realize that he was my boyfriend! And before I really realized it, every time I turned around, even if he was on the other side of the room, like I think he's sleeping, and I happen to look and he's watching me to make sure. If I moved to another room, he moved. That was kind of the beginning of all of that.*

Kathryn shared what she has learned from her canine companions:

*Well, I don't know if they've taught it to me (or "reinforced" is probably a better word) what the term "unconditional love" means. You know, that term is thrown around in our society and has been for some years. Truly, I think a lot of mothers, not all, in my experience, love their children unconditionally, but until it's put to the test, you just don't know. I know that this is unconditional. This is pure, unconditional love. And even if I wouldn't feed them ... the flip side of this, somebody could say, "Well, sure! You're the one with the food!" which is true, but it's just beyond that.*

Two challenging times for Kathryn have been:

*[A]challenging time was when I was still living with that elderly man. I had both of them [Toosi and Tan] and we were walking, as we have always done, and a Rottweiler came after us. She [Toosi] stood up to him. He [Tan] screamed like ... I've never heard a dog make that sound and was trying to crawl up my back, and I was [within] a second of dropping their leashes and taking the dog on myself so he would leave them alone, hoping they would run home. We were only about a block from home. That was going through my mind in the split second as this dog was coming and I saw the owner coming to try to get him. My only reason that prevented me ... from dropping the leashes was I*

*didn't think Toosi would run. I thought she would stand up to him and get hurt. I am forgetting something that was very challenging for me. Because, don't forget, I had Toosi and Tan and that elderly man was still alive. So they were crated. He could let them out and they just kind of sat with him while he watched TV. Then, after he passed, I took them to this [doggie] day care every day when I came in to work. Well then, when I bought this house, that became unaffordable and I was thinking, "I've gotta make some other provision here!" It was the hardest thing for me to do when I was doing that. I had to talk about it with my friend from the animal hospital. She said, "Well, what do you think most people do?" They crate them or keep them in 1 room. It's not awful." And I said, "But I've never done it!" And I just had to bite the bullet. I just started taking them [to doggie daycare] only once or twice a week, and then that ... I'll show you where they live while I'm at work! That was the hardest thing for me. I was guilt-ridden. I came home at lunch. It was inconvenient. Oh, yeah, I felt terrible doing that, but now it's second nature [that the dogs stay home alone].*

### **Chrissy**

Chrissy is a 36 year old, single woman who works full-time as a public school administrator. She has no children, but her father lives in the local area. Tragically, she lost two of her canine companions within five months of each other this year (2011). Presently, Chrissy has one dog, Max, who is 9 ½ years old and was the dog of Chrissy's brother who died seven years ago as a result of injuries sustained in an automobile accident.

Chrissy shared her first experiences with dogs:

*My first experience with dogs ... Growing up, I grew up in a military family, so my parents never really wanted to have a dog, because when you get stationed in foreign*

*countries, you have to quarantine them. But my best friend, probably [this was ] in the second grade, had a Standard Poodle. That was my first experience that I can remember with dogs, and I just loved being around her dog. We were outside with it all the time and it would play, and I just thought at that point that it was so cool that a dog would chase a ball! So that was my first experience with a dog and I always wanted one. When we moved back to the States, I convinced my parents to get a dog, because they thought we would be in the States probably for the rest of my dad's career. So I had to wait awhile. That about 5-year period was pretty hard. They said, "Do your research!" so I studied dogs for a year and I narrowed it down to three. I wanted a German Shepherd, an Irish Setter, or a Golden Retriever, and the Golden won out. We got our first dog, Jagger, in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. He was supposed to be my dog, but ended up being my mom's dog. He followed my mom everywhere and slept with my mom and dad. I would try to coax him upstairs but then 20 minutes after I went to bed, he left and went down the hall to sleep by my mom! So yeah, he ended up being my mom's dog.*

Chrissy explained how she came to have her dogs:

*I got Doc and Dane when I was 26. I got them from the same litter. I went there [planning to] only get one dog, but then I couldn't choose between the two, so I ended up getting the two dogs. They were both males. Our first dog was a male and I wasn't really sure about female dogs, so yeah, I went with the two boys. Max came to live with us seven years ago. Max was born in September, I guess, of 2001, because he'll be 10 this fall in September. So when [my brother] Mike would come home he would bring Max. So the first time we met Max was at Christmas, and he was about 4 months old then. So they [Doc and Dane] knew him since he was young. [My brother] he lived in a smaller*

*apartment and there would have been room for another dog, but he was a manager at a mountain biking store and so he was able to take Max to work with him. Mike rode his bike to work and Max ran right next to him. So they were inseparable. [Max] he came to us when he was about 3 years old.*

Chrissy spoke of losing Doc and Dane:

*I lost Doc in the beginning of February; I think it was the 7<sup>th</sup> or the 8<sup>th</sup>, the Monday after the Super Bowl. He had cancer. The vet told me last summer [when Doc] had surgery to remove a couple of tumors, which bought him another eight months, that he didn't think [Doc] would make it past last September, but he made it to February. And then I just lost Dane on Sunday night to basically cardiac arrest. He had a heart attack. I have my moments. I used to always tease him [Dane]. He was born an old man. He loved to eat and sleep; that's what he loved to do. So now, he is in a place where he can eat and sleep all day.*

Chrissy shared how her three dogs interacted and the relationships they had with each other:

*Dane and Max had some issues to work through, kind of an alpha dog thing, I think. They got into one pretty big disagreement and then kind of just coexisted. But Doc and Max were thicker than thieves. They did everything together. They wrestled, they played, they chased each other, and Dane would just lie down and watch all that. That's why I called him 'my old man.' He was just, like, "Yep, you guys go play and chase each other, and I'm just gonna lie here and chill out." I always called them "the 3 boys." Like, "Where are the boys?" They would run up the stairs, run around the loft, run back down, run around down here... I had to put some rugs down because they kept wiping*

*out! [Now, Max] he will play by himself, or roll on his back and play with a toy in the air... so cute! Still energetic.*

*My first dog with my family, we just had one. He was great. Jagger was a wonderful dog. You obviously learn a lot from each dog that you have. He was our first family dog. When I got the two together, I wasn't really sure how it was all going to work out. But I think I will always get two dogs at the same time, because they have a buddy, a friend when you're gone during the day at work. I always felt bad for Jagger and now with Max, I probably won't get a puppy while I still have him. I think it would probably be too much for him. But I think I'll always get two just for that companionship, so they have each other during the day. Some days, I would come home and nothing would be touched. Other days, I would come home, their beds would be all over the place, their toy bins would be knocked over, the pillows off the bed... [I said], "You guys must have had a rip-roarin' party or time or something!"*

Chrissy talked of how she formed a relationship with her dogs:

*I think we just did a lot of stuff together. The picture that I want to show you is my favorite, one in the back of the car. I think I like it so much just because we were either going hiking all the time, or we were going to the dog pool, or we were going to my friend's house and she had dogs... we just would go places and have fun. I would take them down to the beach. I think just spending time outside with them and doing stuff with them ... The one time I had them in the car and we were getting ready to go [hiking]. It was late spring so I had the windows down and we were driving up my street, so we weren't going very fast, and it just has always stuck with me, that one of my neighbors said, "Oh, there go the three Golden's, always going!" and I think that just summed us*

*up. We were always going someplace. They were always in the car with me. And I think I also love it too because I would see people's reactions in my rear-view mirror when we were driving places. At first, they pretty much saw that there were probably two in there. Doc always had his head out, Dane would pop his head in and out, and Max didn't do it as much but when he did, it was like, "Oooh, look at that!" and you'd see people waving, or they'd honk the horn, [or smile] out the window. A couple times, people were trying to take pictures with their cell phones. They do bring joy to other people too, even from a distance.*

Chrissy shared how she feels about the relationships:

*It makes me feel... it's just a great feeling. I look forward to coming home. It's just that unconditional love. They're always there to greet you. They're always there to get your attention and it's just a very happy, loving feeling. They have their own antics that make you laugh. They each have their own personality. The 3 of them were very different in their personalities... but it's just a happy feeling.*

*When I had all three of them, I said, "I have three children," and [people would say], "Oh, what are their names?" and I would say, "Okay, let me qualify that, it's three, four-legged children, and their names are... !" But yep, I definitely consider them family. I work with a lady who does not have pets and has never had pets. I don't remember what we were talking about, but one day she said, "You know, my sister was talking to her DOG over the weekend!" and I [just said], "Mmmm-hmmmm..." And she was just going on, and I said, "I have to say I talk to my dogs all the time!" and she said, "You DO?" And I said, "Yeah! They're a being." She said, "They're a dog!" and I said, "No, they're not a dog. When you have a dog, then you'll understand that it's different."*

Chrissy has learned from the relationships with her dogs:

*I think what I've learned from having my dogs is just that unconditional love and that giving. They're always giving of themselves. Their attention is always [on] you, and their love is always [for] you. And no matter what's happening, they're always there. So I think just trying to make sure that you're always there for your family and friends, giving them that unconditional support and love. I think that's what they've really taught me, that no matter how bad it is, your family is always there to support you and give you that love.*

*They're definitely a part of the family. Seven years ago, my brother passed away. He was in a car accident and passed away from injuries from the car accident. Having all the family and friends coming over to the house, that's wonderful in itself. But having those three dogs at the house (we were actually at my dad's house at the time); it was just amazing what all three of the dogs did for everybody at the house. I mean, for me and my dad, they were phenomenal. They were just our rocks during that time. But even for everybody else who was at the house grieving, just petting the dogs or hugging them or sitting on the floor next to them ... So I think for my dad and me, absolutely, they were our rocks at that time, and for everybody else who was there. And then, 13 months later, my mom passed away. So again, it was that whole same thing. They were there for my dad and me. I never had to worry about the dogs because they were always with somebody and someone was hugging them or loving them up or just petting them. I think it's very soothing. And obviously, when Doc and Dane passed away, especially Sunday and Monday nights. Max became my squeeze bag! But, yeah, I think during difficult times like that, they're just there with that unconditional love.*

*I think they really teach you responsibility and accountability. [For example], I have a good friend who lives down at the beach. I didn't take them down to the beach a lot because Dane didn't travel well. Short trips, he was fine in the car, but he would shake the whole time and stand the whole time, so I just didn't like putting him in that [position]. But always making sure you have somebody to take care of them, and I was very picky. It was only my dad or my friends I knew would take care of them. Not that nobody else could do it, but I just knew that [they] would love them up and pet them and hug them, treat them just like they treated their own pets. So I think it teaches you responsibility in making sure that they're taken care of like you would your own children. That's why I think you can't trust just anybody.*

*When I first had Doc and Dane, I went to the beach and didn't have anybody to watch them, so I put them in a kennel and I was going to go for four days. Well, I was sobbing as I was leaving the kennel, because I [saw them] in my rear-view mirror, because they came out of their kennels. I lasted at the beach for two days and I came home and got them. I just [couldn't] leave them there. And I'm sure the people at the kennel did a wonderful job. I know they took them out several times a day to play, but it's not the same. I was with ten of my friends, and they said, "You're leaving?" and I said, "I can't, I'm sorry!" They're all dog people so I got teased and they ribbed me, but they would have done it too. I just couldn't leave them there. It was heartbreaking.*

Chrissy shared how the relationships have helped her stay mentally and physically healthy:

*I just think it's not one specific time, but every time we went to [a local state park] and it was about a 2-hour hike that we would do, and literally, we probably 90% of the time,*

*didn't run into a single soul. I don't know why people don't go out there, but ... And sometimes I would be with my friends, but the majority of the time, we were out there by ourselves. That 2-hour time of just watching them play in the woods and chase each other, chase the animals... And this gives you that time to reflect and ... kind of grounds you, gives you that inner peace. For me, it gives me inner peace to be out in the woods and think about things, reflect upon things. I think it's my time spent out [in the woods] would be ... just seeing how much fun they're having, and I think you just internalize that yourself. It's very peaceful out there and you're just able to come to grips, terms, with what you're dealing with, and it's always just put me in a much better place.*

*I love that they are playful and energetic, because that gets me moving, because sometimes I need motivation to get moving! So, playful, energetic, loving, [tolerant] of when I want to squeeze them! They're just happy all the time! That happiness, I think, just kind of transfers, to me, at least.*

### **Steve**

Steve is a 57 year old, married male with no children. Steve and his wife have three dogs: Baby is an 11 year old Sheltie; Ronnie is a 6 year old Sheltie; and Farrell, the focus of the interview, is an 11 year old Collie. Steve is a retired architect and spends his time training Farrell to herd and volunteering at a local animal shelter.

Steve shared his earliest experiences with dogs:

*As a child, my parents had two Dachshunds consecutively. Actually, they were terrible dogs! We trained them terribly. We kept them tied up. They turned into "bitey" animals, so they were unsuccessful. In my world today, they would be unsuccessful pets. We were bad pet owners.*

Steve spoke of having dogs in his adult years:

*I did all sorts of research, read a couple of books on raising dogs and I selected the breed, and we went to meet the breeders. They had Shetland Sheepdogs and we went to an obedience trial. I remember [watching] them on a long down-stay. We were so impressed by what we saw in the obedience ring that we said, “Hey, we need to do that!” So then we got one Sheltie, which I started training, and then a year or two later, we got another Sheltie, which Diane trained. We did obedience with our first two. While we were showing those dogs, we met a nice trainer. She had all the modern techniques, all the positive techniques. It made a world of difference, but it was really too late for those two dogs we had. They were shy to start with, so I think that was always working against them. But it did show us that there was another way of training, that training could be a lot more positive. Then, by the time we got the next two Shelties, agility had just started. So we didn’t do obedience, we did agility. Agility is so much more fun than obedience, so the next two dogs were agility dogs.*

Steve shared how he came to adopt his dog, Farrell:

*I’m an architect, and I designed the new [animal] shelter. So I started walking dogs there. In about a year period, we must have had about 6 Collies come through the shelter. We went to go adopt... there was this old Collie. He was very nice, weren’t sure how much he could see, but he was old—like, 11 years old. I talked to Diane and said, “No one’s going to adopt this guy! Let’s go get him.” So we went over to get him and he had been adopted! But they had Farrell. He was a four-time loser! He had already been surrendered by three families. He didn’t do well in the kennel. His nose was bleeding because he was using it to try to open the door, so they moved him to*

*quarantine, where nobody probably saw him. It's not a good place to be. So the executive director sort-of steered me to Farrell and said, "Why don't you take him home and foster him?" Diane thought we were bringing him home to foster! I never said I was intending to foster him!*

*Well, there were three original owners. Somebody had him along with their grandmother, and they were afraid he would knock the grandmother down. Well, that's entirely possible when he was younger. He was a handful, because he's so big. And if he had nothing to do, if he was stuck in a house, he'd be a crazy dog. The first three families said he liked to jump, he wasn't housebroken, and he wouldn't eat. When we got him, he only weighed 49 pounds! He's 80 pounds now and he's not heavy. I mean, he's a good weight. He's not a great eater and he had a broken tooth, so maybe that's why he wasn't eating. So actually, he was a "free" dog, but we paid, I think, \$1200 for a root canal the first week! He cost us a root canal and a vacuum cleaner, because in the first week we realized we needed a new vacuum cleaner—the old one wasn't going to cut it! The "not housebroken" thing was crazy! He IS housebroken! I don't know how many hours they were leaving him, but that ... just ... I don't understand that. And the jumping up, well, for agility, jumping is ... I'm thinking, "Oh, a dog that likes to jump!" So the first weekend we had him home, he was new. It takes a dog at least a month to settle into a house actually until his personality comes out. The first weekend, I "wound him up" outside and he jumped over my head! He really can jump! In the beginning, when he was trying to figure out who was who, if you would run, he would run along your side and jump up and grab your shoulder. That's the exact motion he uses in herding sheep. He'll run behind the sheep and when he gets a chance, he'll latch*

*onto their wool right at the shoulder.*

Steve described developing a relationship with Farrell:

*Well... he needed a home. You don't know what history they bring, so it's experimental at first, like when I was running outside and he would jump up and grab my shoulder. He actually scared [my wife] a little bit because he's so big he could knock her down until he learned some manners. You don't know what they're going to do. Is he really going to bite, or is he just trying to herd you, or what is he going to do? I think he fit in right away. He was very respectful of the other dogs. Like at dinnertime, he won't eat till they have eaten and he really won't eat till we sit down to eat. He just stands by his bowl, waiting for all that to happen. I know he's a big dog and you wouldn't think he's a lap dog, but I sort-of insisted that he sit on my lap. Well, he had never been on a lap. When I picked him up, he must have thought this was the strangest thing he ever saw! But I made him into a lap dog now. It's funny—we never let the little dogs sit on the furniture when we watch TV. Diane sits at one end of the couch and we really have to push to each end—he hops into the middle and spans the space between us. He fit right in. I started doing agility training with him right away, and I'm sure he needed something to do. Now, this property is big enough that he has a job. They have plenty of space to run and it's fenced. But you can leave gates open and he wouldn't ever wander off, I don't think. He walks well. He's always been very calm and very respectful. We hit it off right away. He was real good at agility from the very start. But very quickly, he did great! So part of that is expectations, I think. I expected him to do all that stuff, so he did all that stuff.*

Steve shared how he feels about Farrell:

*Well, I've always been real proud of him because he's from the shelter, so I just think that's good that he's a shelter dog. So from the shelter, he's a real success story, because he's got ribbons, which everyone thinks are so wonderful. I've got shoeboxes full of ribbons—I mean, they're only ribbons, right? To people we meet, that's just wonderful. So I think he's a really good ambassador for SPCA dogs. So on the one hand; he's a really great ambassador for the SPCA. On the other hand, I've gotten active in the Collie Club of America, which I find really amusing, because I'm very anti-dog show, so all these people are these big dog show people. However, there are people who really believe in doing performance events, proving that the dog isn't just a fluffy show dog. In fact, the Collie Club's national show is [nearby] next year and my whole goal for him is I'm getting ready for the herding trial at the National. I want my rescue Collie to beat all the poofy Collies! And he'll be 12 by then, and I'm thinking that may be the end of his career. Yeah, so I'm grooming him. I want him to beat all the poofy Collies because he's a terrible Collie [according to Collie standards]! I mean, people see him and really like him, but they don't know what they're looking at. I mean, his ears, his nose, his eyes... I think he's a wonderful dog, and I can't see any of that. I just think he's beautiful. I'm really proud of him. He's such a wonderful dog. And it's been quite a learning experience. The herding has been unlike other dog experiences. I always wanted to have a guide dog. My eyesight was always bad and I always thought I'd be blind, always thought, "Well, at least you'd have a guide dog." But having a herding dog is very much that same relationship. It's like he's fulfilled something that was ordained many, many years ago.*

Steve has learned two insightful things from his relationship with Farrell:

*I always thought that my Shelties—I'll have to bring them out, because they're only 12 and 19 pounds—I always thought they were his size. When I run them, I'm running a big dog. Now I see videos and I realize I have a dog that's as high as my ankles, but I think I was always running a Collie, even though they were 15-pound Shelties. Then Farrell IS the dog that I think they were. What do you call that in body image, when people don't know they're 400 pounds? I think that's some mental aberration, because I didn't want to run a little pocket dog. To me, I was always running a big dog, and it always amazes me when I see a photograph and think, "Oh, look, who's that little squirt?" He's [Farrell] as big as Collies come.*

*He's a big dog, so he's a lot to manage. [My wife] is half-scared of his size now. I'm 57. I want to train another Collie. Well, if I don't get one started soon, I'll be too old. It made me feel very old, because I only have so many dogs left! I'm not sure I'm ready to come to grips with that. [Made me realize my own] Mortality! Only have so much time left... you sort of measure your life in dogs. But I've really retired now to a dog's life, two years ago. I still work a day or two a week. So two days a week, I take him herding, two days a week I walk dogs at the shelter, one night I take lessons at school, one night I teach lessons at the dog school, and then I could have shows on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I'm on the board at the shelter, so usually there are other things I'm doing for them. I've become very dog-centric.*

Steve talked about two interesting stories:

*See, here's two coincidences. Growing up as a kid, in our living room, was a painting from a house looking across a pond, just like this pond, and a red-sided barn. And beneath that gray siding of course there's a red-sided barn. I am living in a house that*

*was in a painting in my parents' house that I grew up with. I don't think I remembered it till when we were looking at photographs of how we restored this place. Very quickly after we bought it, the neighbor bought the barn and put the gray siding on it, and we were looking at old photographs of when we first moved in and it was red, and I was thinking, "This looks familiar!"*

*Then, the first oil painting I ever did was a paint-by-number of a Collie's face. I painted him. I painted him when I was about 5 years old, 7 years old, however it was. Is that weird? That can't be a coincidence! I don't know what the meaning of it is, but I find it really strange.*

Steve addressed saying good-bye to his canine companions:

*Well, my oldest Sheltie [Baby] has bladder cancer. Seven months ago she got diagnosed and her life expectancy was six months, so she's doing fine. She's on a lot of medicine. We're not doing chemo or anything, not any of that extreme stuff. And she's had a good seven months. I know somebody who does euthanasia and I've made arrangements for them to come to the house, because it's hard to take the dog to the vet. They're scared. I just feel better [that way]. I've always held them while they're being euthanized. I've gone through that twice now. My friend who's the Collie expert says that Collies go to about 13. All of hers have been 13 years old. We're not that far away. But maybe he's [Farrell] not! I think I see him getting older. He's tired when we come out of the sheep ring. So when we started this, of course he'd circle like crazy and I couldn't get him out of the ring, so I had to put him on a leash. It was hard to get him to stop even to get a leash on him, and now he'll sit at the gate.*

Steve expressed activities he enjoys doing with Farrell, aside from herding:

*We enjoy walking in the morning. We watch TV together and he usually hops up on the sofa with us. If we're out here in the garden, he meets and greets all the garden visitors. So he hangs out with us. If we're out here, he hangs out with us. His behavior now... See, we're babysitting a young Collie for a friend of mine who is on vacation, so his behavior now is very odd. He's very upset. That's why he's standing there with his back to us. His nose is out of joint because there's a new Collie in the house! I had the Collie out playing Frisbee and I had the Collie out doing some agility stuff. But we'll go herding tomorrow. He's really ticked off!*

*He takes a lot of brushing. That's a real good experience. He didn't like it at first. He still doesn't really like it because it pulls a lot of hair. But I really think it builds... It takes a lot of touching for that and he has to sit, I make him sit, and I think that teaches him a lot of stuff. He needs to be brushed or he'd be... every day, not that I don't miss some days, but it's good if you're sitting there watching TV, you might as well go get a comb out and brush him. And parents must [feel this way] with children too! I really like him more than the Shelties. My other Sheltie [Ronnie] is the highest-earning champion dog I'll ever have. She's out to win, but there's just something about him [Farrell].*

### **Summary**

This chapter presented narratives from each of the participants. The participants come from diverse backgrounds, yet share similar experiences in the relationships with their canine companions. All interviews took place at the participants' homes where they eagerly introduced their canine companion(s). The participants were enthusiastic and passionate in speaking about their dogs and in sharing stories about these special relationships. The participants' joy and love

for their canine companions was evident both during the interviews and throughout the narratives. The information presented in this chapter helps to set the stage for a deeper understanding and appreciation for the study findings that are in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of relationships between adults and their canine companions and the role of these relationships in personal growth and well-being. This research was premised on three guiding questions: 1) How do relationships between adults and canine companions foster personal growth and well-being? 2) What are the areas, outcomes, or ways in which adults grow as a result of the relationships with their canine companions? 3) What are the growth-fostering components or indicators in the relationships between adults and canine companions that promote well-being? Both the individual and the collective analyses were guided by these three research questions.

The chapter begins with individual story analysis of the ten narratives. This is followed by collective story analysis. While each participant's relationship with his/her canine companion(s) is unique, this chapter reports the commonalities and themes that emerged across the narratives. To support the interpretation and findings of the commonalities and themes, direct quotes from the participants are presented. The chapter then discusses implications for relational theory and attachment theory and implications for practice in adult education. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research and a summary.

#### **Individual Findings**

In the order of the interviews, each participant's narrative is analyzed in this section. Each analysis emphasizes significant comments, insights, and learning experiences the participants shared during the interviews. Included in each analysis is a discussion of the growth-fostering components of the relationship that promote the participant's well-being. Growth-fostering components are elements or features of the relationship that promote growth in and of

the relationship and, in doing so, according to the participant promotes his/her well-being. It should be noted that all participants had the opportunity to member check and review their individual analysis. Six out of the ten participants responded back that the analysis was “good” and met their approval with no changes requested. Four participants did not respond to provide feedback.

### ***Leeann***

For the interview, Leeann requested we meet later in the evening allowing her time to get home from work, feed her dogs, and take them all outside. When I arrived Leeann was outside with one of the puppies she is fostering. Leeann’s interview took place in her kitchen at her home. It was apparent from stepping into her home that she loved animals. Her home was decorated with dog knick knacks, photographs of her dogs, and a calendar with animals on her refrigerator.

Leeann mentioned several times throughout the interview that she felt she was born with compassion and love for animals- not something learned or demonstrated by her parents while growing up. In working with a local animal rescue, Leeann’s passion is in rescuing, fostering, and adopting dogs with issues and/or problems. She finds this population of dogs to be challenging, yet very rewarding. Her own dogs have emotional and/or behavioral issues as well.

For Leeann, this ability to save canines that many others would not want makes her feel healthy and positive and contributes to her personal well-being. Leeann spoke with great satisfaction and determination in helping this particular type of dog. Leeann’s relationships with her canine companions are fostered by the special needs of the dogs. She eloquently spoke of each of her dogs’ challenges: unwilling to be touched, guarding behaviors, deaf, and blind.

The challenges of the dogs give Leeann purpose and keep her active and occupied. She

enjoys walking, training, and obedience classes with her canine companions. Leeann had raised a family and is able to enjoy both her children and grandchildren as they live locally, but Leeann hinted that the relationships with her canines fill a void: “Well, I DO do all the training! And I enjoy that training. It’s my little outlet. I guess it’s my little ‘empty nest syndrome’.”

Leeann described her relationship with Norris as unlike anything she has with her husband, children, or human friends. She expressed that Norris “is a friend” and that “he fills a need.” Leeann suggested that Norris provides her with friendship and companionship that she does not receive in her other relationships. In attempting to capture what the friendship means to her, Leeann spoke of how only animal lovers would be able to understand the relationship.

In her relationship with Norris, Leeann has grown in the area of patience. According to Leeann, Norris is highly intelligent and she has been unable to let him be uncrated in the house as he has an ability to break into the refrigerator. She told several stories of coming home to find the refrigerator open and food eaten despite various attempts to keep him out. For this reason, Leeann has developed patience in handling Norris’ cunning ability and stated, “... he has taught me a lot of patience.” From this experience with Norris, Leeann has transferred this patience to some other areas of her life.

Leeann implied that learning patience from Norris has also assisted her in her work for the local animal rescue. Leeann described how she deals with volunteers and “deals with problems, with applicants who are upset or whatever...” Leeann also spoke of having more patience helps in fostering dogs as well. She has house rules for all of the canines (foster dogs and her own dogs). With patience and the help of the dogs who know the rules, the new foster dogs eventually learn what is expected and accepted in her home.

As a result of the relationship with Norris, Leeann has personally discovered the ability to

love another dog of the same breed. She had thought she would be unable to do this after losing her dog, Nitro. “He [Norris] taught me not to compare, he really did... Norris has taught me that I can love the same breed, another dog, and still not feel guilty that I’ve replaced my first one.”

A growth-fostering component of the relationship between Norris and Leeann is spending time together and training together. According to Miller (1986), positive outcomes of growth-fostering relationships are increased zest/vitality and action. Leeann spends a lot of quality time with Norris and her other canines. “... I spend lots of time with them, walking them and training them and working with them and interacting with them. That’s what they thrive [on] and that’s what builds the bond.” Leeann thoroughly enjoys walking with her dogs and training them. This is reinforced for Leeann each time she is out in the community with her canine companions and a person comments on her dogs being well-behaved and well-mannered. Leeann takes pride in this accomplishment with her dogs; particularly given all of her canines, as discussed previously, have emotional and/or behavioral challenges.

Another growth-fostering component of the relationship seems to be the notion of intuition. By connecting with her canines on this level, Leeann is tuning into her subjective experience with other beings (Lasher, 1998) and this serves to strengthen the relationship. Leeann spoke of intuition between her and her dogs. She shared of knowing the moment she touched Norris, he was going to stay with her. Leeann described how she can tell from a photograph about the potential of a dog: “I pick a dog out of a picture and I know if it’s staying or not... It’s something in their faces.” Leeann also shared feeling the intuition is reciprocal- that her dogs can instinctively read her. She spoke of Nitro: “He was my best friend and he would love on me and we had a bond that was just...if I had a bad day, he knew it as soon as I walked in the door. If I wasn’t feeling good, he knew it when I walked in the door. He was my dog.”

Leeann seems to have the ability to forge a bond between her canine companions in which she believes the two parties develop an intuitive connection. This is similar to Sheldrake's (1999) notion of attunement between two species.

A final growth-fostering component of the relationship for Leeann is the protection Norris provides to her and her home. This protection reinforces Leeann's attachment security (Beck & Madresh, 2008; Margolies, 1999) to Norris and provides Leeann comfort and reassurance. Although Leeann acknowledges Norris' guarding behaviors can be quite challenging, she also acknowledges feeling safe and secure with Norris. Leeann feels Norris would "die to protect their home." In taking the best care of Norris Leeann can, she feels her canine companion is reciprocating the respect, trust, and gratitude through his guarding behaviors.

During the interview, Leeann showed me an engraved plaque with a photograph of Nitro, the dog she had lost. Leeann shared this was her favorite photo and that she kept the in the kitchen on a shelf so that she could see it every day. Leeann also disclosed that when she and her husband married, this special photograph sat at their wedding table. Leeann had hoped Nitro would "walk his mom down the aisle," but sadly Nitro died before Leeann's wedding. Leeann described Nitro as a best friend and shared that he was supportive and helped her through a difficult divorce with her first husband. This description of their relationship connects to relational theory in that growth-fostering relationships are built on mutuality and empathy (Jordan & Hartling, 2002).

Leeann's passion for animals is evident in her future goal of buying land and opening a kennel for "issue dogs." She sees this as a way to save more dogs that otherwise would be euthanized. In addition, she hopes to open a training facility to teach children how to train their

own dogs. Leeann's future goals and dreams speak of the importance of relationships with companion animals to her.

### ***Jamie***

The interview with Jamie took place in the kitchen of her home. Both of her children were present and contributed at times to the conversation. Jamie's canine companions were both present as well- Ginny had free reign of the house, but stayed close to Jamie and Stanley was restricted in the family room by a gate. Jamie cannot always trust him when a new person enters their home- so for my safety he was confined. Jamie's son showed me a Rottweiler knick knack and a "devil dog" knick knack to represent Ginny that are kept in their formal living room. Jamie's daughter and son have grown up with both dogs in the household.

Jamie views her dogs as part of the family and appreciates their presence, stating several times she "can't imagine not having them." Jamie shared how she depends on the dogs being there when she and her family come home, as well as the dogs depend on them. The family recognizes Ginny and Stanley as part of the family so much so that they celebrate the dogs' birthdays by baking cakes and letting them devour the cakes out in the yard.

Although Jamie seemed to have difficulty talking specifically about the relationship, she easily talked about one outcome of the relationship, which has been learning and experiencing true unconditional love. Jamie described how the relationship with Ginny and Stanley is different from the relationship with her children. Jamie described her canine companions as loving no matter what, listening without talking back to her, and being easy compared to children. "It's just different, it really is." Jamie's description is consistent with subjective knowing (Belensky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986)- a personal feeling and knowing from within based on experience.

Jamie also shared that having her dogs before having children helped her learn responsibility in putting the needs of another being before her own needs. Jamie feels her dogs helped her mature and learn how to care for others. Jamie reported before having dogs she could come and go as she pleased. After getting her dogs, she had to think of their care and needs before making plans or doing as she pleased. In this way, Jamie was more prepared for motherhood and the challenges of raising a family.

Jamie also personally grew as a nurturer which prepared her for motherhood. Jamie acknowledged Ginny went from a “devil dog” as a puppy to a loving older dog. Jamie seemed to appreciate Ginny being “vicious, but loving.” Jamie shared that she cried when Ginny was a puppy because she couldn’t understand why Ginny was such a mean puppy. But then, Jamie accepted Ginny for who she was and her personality and worked with her through the years.

A growth-fostering component in the relationship between Jamie and her canine companions has been going through challenging times with each dogs’ health. The experience of almost losing Ginny strengthened Jamie’s attachment and relationship to Ginny. According to Josselson (1996) one of the eight dimensions of relatedness is tending and caring. Several years ago, Jamie and her family almost lost Ginny to an infection and reaction to vaccinations. Jamie tearfully recalled this experience and seemed to become more bonded in the relationship as a result of this difficult experience. Several weeks ago, Stanley also had some health issues related to arthritis. These experiences most likely helped Jamie realize how much she stood to lose- “The thought of them dying is so depressing, [pause] but I can’t imagine not having them.” It was clear how emotionally attached Jamie is to Ginny and Stanley and how the experiences with their health have deepened the relationships.

Another growth-fostering component of the relationship is spending time together. Jamie

shared that her family enjoys walking the dogs and taking them to the creek to swim. Ginny and Stanley help to keep the family active and getting outside together. This opportunity to engage in activities together promotes the building of additional relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

A final growth-fostering component is that Jamie feels protected by her canine companions, a similar theme from the first participant, Leeann. This protection reinforces Jamie's attachment security (Beck & Madresh, 2008; Margolies, 1999) to Ginny and Stanley and provides comfort and peace of mind. Because Ginny and Stanley are Rottweilers and bark when outside, Jamie spoke of how individuals and neighbors tend to avoid their home. Jamie reported her and her husband declined an expensive home security system when they built their home because it wasn't needed as Ginny and Stanley are their security system.

### *Leslie*

Both Sandy and Lacey, Leslie's dogs welcomed me by running across the yard to my car. Leslie's back patio had stuffed toys, chew toys, and water bowls. The interview took place in Leslie's living room as it was a very hot and humid summer morning. Leslie's home was decorated with many family photos and photos of her dogs. Leslie also had many Schnauzer knick knacks throughout her living areas and kitchen. Leslie reported having stuffed animals (dogs) upstairs in a bedroom as well.

Leslie grew up with dogs and dogs have always been a part of her life. Leslie feels dogs are attracted to her and she told stories of rescuing stray dogs and finding dogs that had run away. Leslie shared that the single most important thing her canine companions provide to her is being there for her when she comes home. Leslie spoke of how the relationship with her dogs lifts her spirit even when she is having a bad day. "They're glad to see you and just sort of make you feel a little bit better, even if you've had a really bad day." Sandy and Lacey wait for Leslie

to arrive home and happily greet Leslie at the back door with hugs and kisses. Leslie talked of how both canine companions touch her heart. It was evident from their interactions and in how Leslie talked about the relationship that she truly loves her canine companions and is emotionally attached to them. Without a doubt, Leslie feels Sandy and Lacey are members of her family, even referring to them as her “girls.” An attachment or bond can develop between a human and canine companion that is similar to the bond between human mother-child (Serpell, 2003).

With viewing both dogs as members of the family, Leslie shared how she could never kennel her girls. Instead, the girls travel and accompany Leslie and her human family members wherever they may go. Leslie’s family takes them camping, on road trips, when running errands, and recently Leslie and her family were planning to take Sandy and Lacey along to Walt Disney World in Florida. Leslie feels lost if her canine companions are not with her. “If they’re not with us and we go somewhere, I feel lost, because I don’t have 8 extra paws under my feet.” Leslie’s feelings speak to the connection she has with Sandy and Lacey.

Despite their small size, Leslie feels safer in having Sandy and Lacey with her family, particularly when camping. For Leslie, this feeling of safety and security is a growth-fostering component in the relationship that promotes her well-being. She feels more secure camping knowing the girls will bark or “yodel” as she described if someone approaches or if they encounter snakes. Leslie has a fear of snakes and knowing they would warn her helps Leslie enjoy time walking and hiking in the woods rather than sitting at the campsite. This increased zest and vitality (Miller, 1986) is a positive outcome of the growth-fostering relationship.

Leslie shared that two areas in which she has personally grown as a result of the relationships with Sandy and Lacey are in learning how to give love back and in developing more patience. The learning and personal growth Leslie has experienced in the relationship with

her canine companions is a core idea of relational theory (Jordan & Hartling, 2002). Leslie feels because her canine companions give her so much love, they want and look for the love to be returned. Leslie sees the relationship as reciprocal with both parties needing the love and affection and benefitting from this closeness. Leslie has learned from Sandy and Lacey to pause after a hectic day and “Sit down, take a couple minutes with them. They need that as much as you do.” Leslie shared this giving of love has transferred to her grandson and other family members as well. She has a different outlook on love and expressing it- an outcome of the relationship with Sandy and Lacey.

Leslie feels she learned patience through different ways with each dog. For several years, Leslie and Sandy participated in agility training and competitions with Sandy winning many blue ribbons. Leslie’s husband also became involved in the activity. Leslie talked of needing patience in both learning the course yourself and also teaching your dog to run the course. Leslie enjoyed agility and talked of how it made her feel positive and healthy because it required her to use her brain. Spending time together in agility training and competing served as a growth-fostering component in Leslie and Sandy’s relationship. This activity helped them to keep active and work to accomplish goals together as a team. Leslie thoroughly enjoyed agility, but her family has since stopped competing as Sandy is aging and unable to do what she could do as a younger dog. At times, Leslie misses the training and competing. Leslie joked that everyone in her family is becoming senior citizens and it was the right time to stop competing.

Leslie learned patience in another way. She learned patience with Lacey as she was a needy puppy and is still a dog that requires more attention and time. Leslie feels part of the issue is that Lacey has a lot of anxiety and seeks to be close to her. Leslie learned that even though both dogs are Schnauzers, each has their own personality. Leslie acknowledged knowing that

Lacey required more patience than Sandy. Leslie described how Lacey would frequently be under foot and she had to take time to comfort Lacey. Leslie was determined to be a support for Lacey and be there for her just as Lacey is always there for Leslie. It was apparent that Leslie embraces Lacey for who she is rather than trying to change her. Learning patience from Sandy and Lacey has helped Leslie have more overall patience in her life. Leslie has been able to be more patient with other family members and with the students who ride her school bus.

Leslie seemed exceptionally attuned to her dogs and to dogs, in general. A year ago Leslie had to make the difficult decision to euthanize one of her dogs because of failing health. Although it was an extremely difficult decision to arrive at, Leslie recalled knowing in her heart that was what needed to be done for the dogs' sake. Leslie told her daughter, "I'm taking her in to the vet today. Today's the day. She has to go." It was a learning experience for Leslie as well. Leslie feels that this difficult decision was the final gift she could give to her canine companion and realizes she has the strength to make this heartbreaking decision if necessary in the future. Leslie shared she worries about losing Sandy and Lacey and will be devastated when they are no longer with her. This connects to the idea in relational theory that growth-fostering relationships are built on mutual empathy and empowerment. Leslie has an ability to unite with her canine companions on an emotional and affective level (mutual empathy- Covington, 2007), yet also has the ability to act and make a difficult decision of euthanasia if necessary (empowerment- Miller & Stiver, 1997). It also has connections to Dirkx's (1997) learning through soul. Dirk (1997) wrote, "Experiences of mystery- birth and death, incomprehensible tragedies, love, and separation- open up a realm of being that is barely visible to our waking ego consciousness. It is this realm of being that is expressed in learning through soul" (p. 82).

Leslie showed me her favorite photograph which sits on a coffee table in her living room.

The photograph was of Sandy with her favorite stuffed animal when she was younger. Leslie shared that it is her favorite because it truly captures Sandy's personality and spirit. Leslie's home had a number of other photographs of the dogs, but this one Leslie identified as being special to her. For Leslie, having photographs of her canine companions is another window into their relationship and is a way to reflect back upon times they have shared. It is one way she nurtures her soul (Dirkx, 1997).

### *Angie*

The interview took place on Angie's back patio during a beautiful summer morning. Angie's pre-teen daughter and, Honey, her dog was present for the interview. Honey is a six year old Cocker Spaniel whom they have had since she was a puppy. Honey barked and was uncomfortable with my presence at first, but quickly settled down and fell asleep. When awake, Honey was busy observing and stalking squirrels that wandered into their yard.

It was clear that the relationship with Honey contributes to Angie and her family's psychological well-being by filling a gap in the family unit and providing companionship to the family members who are at various life stages (Staats, Wallace, & Anderson, 2008). Angie and her family did not have a dog for a period of time after the loss of their other dogs. She described how once the decision was made to get another dog and they brought Honey home- it made the family feel complete again. "When we brought her in, it was like, "Oh my gosh, it's been missing!" There's just something about them that's comforting and just completes... I don't know, it's a different element to the family." Angie and her family are thankful for Honey becoming a part of their family. Honey is treated as an equal member. Angie even described Honey as one of the kids. Honey has full reign of the house, sleeps with them, has her birthday recognized, and receives gifts at Christmas.

The relationship is reciprocal in that Honey's family takes very good care of her, she, in turn provides the family with never ending unconditional love as described by Angie. This unconditional love that dogs bestow was missing for a period of time in Angie's family. It seems once this love was again restored, the family recognized how much it had been missed- making the family whole once more. It would seem this recognition and gratefulness for the unconditional love helps to foster growth and well-being on an individual level, as well as on a familial level.

Angie has personally grown in several specific ways as a result of the relationship with Honey. Honey has been a challenge in ways for the family because she is an 'alpha' personality and has difficulty getting along with other dogs within the neighborhood and in their extended families. Honey has taught Angie that "you are the way you are and you just adapt." Angie spoke of how the family has worked with Honey in these issues and feels accomplishment and pride in that Honey has made a few dog friends in their neighborhood. Angie feels healthy and positive about this breakthrough.

Angie is more accepting of things that dogs do and has also learned in this relationship that dogs can be so different. According to Angie, Honey is quite different in personality and ways from her previous canine companions. Honey has taught Angie not to compare, but to welcome and embrace diversity and differences among different dogs. This life lesson may likely transfer to other areas of Angie's life, such as in her interactions with and understanding of other adults and/or students whom she teaches.

The most significant growth-fostering component in Angie and Honey's relationship is spending time together and sharing activities. Spending time together both established and strengthened the relationship. From the time Honey was a puppy, the family actively involved

her in their lives. Honey serves as Angie's running partner and helps keep Angie physically healthy, as well as promoting a sense of well-being. "From the time she's been little, she's been my running buddy." Honey excitedly knows when Angie's running shoes come out that it means the two will be going running soon. Honey even becomes upset if the running shoes come out and the two don't go running. In addition to running, Honey spends time with her human family walking around their neighborhood, hiking at a local state park, going along to the lake, and simply hanging out with them at home. These actions and zest/vitality are outcomes of growth-fostering relationships (Miller, 1986) and promote physical well-being both for Angie and her family.

### *Jane*

The interview with Jane took place at her home in the living room. Bran and Sally, Jane's dogs were sitting on the back of the couch watching out the window for me when I arrived. Jane had said she told them they were getting company and they were waiting anxiously. Both dogs were extremely friendly and loving and welcomed me into their home. Jane's home was pet friendly with blankets on furniture, small dog crates in the living room, and dog bowls in the dining room. Her home was decorated with photographs of all of her animal companions.

Jane described the relationship between her and her canine companions as a very happy one. Jane expressed that Bran and Sally are such happy dogs and because they are happy- this makes her happy as well. Within the relationship, happiness seems to be transferred among them. This happiness certainly contributes to Jane's well-being and fosters her personal growth. Jane lives alone and "I depend on them for friendship and company." Jane's canine companions fill a void for her and make her feel wanted.

Jane views Bran and Sally as family members and treats both as her children. Jane comes

home from work and other places because “they make me want to come home, because I know they depend on me walking in the door.” Jane’s relationship with Bran and Sally have changed her “running around” ways to spending more time at home. She comes home because she wants to take care of them, spend time with them, and simply be with them.

With growing into a more home-body person, an outcome for Jane has been falling into a daily routine with Bran and Sally. Jane credits Bran and Sally with getting her into a routine. The three seem in sync with this routine and Jane feels her canine companions depend on the routine. They know what to expect at different times throughout the day, such as feeding times, playing/exercise times, and sleeping times. The trio walks 365 days a year. This has been a positive outcome of a routine- daily exercise that keeps Jane physically active.

A growth-fostering component in the relationship has been spending time together. A way to establish a connection or relationship is by spending time together and serve as “an interaction that engenders a sense of being in tune with self and others...” (Byington, 1997). Their routine certainly encourages time together. Jane shared that Bran and Sally like to play outside in a little swimming pool or be sprayed by the garden hose. Jane also enjoys taking them to a local dog park where they can meet and play with other canines. They always make a trip when it is either of the dogs’ birthdays. Spending time at the dog park allows Jane the opportunity to socialize with other humans. Growth unfolds through relationships and promotes the building of new relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1997). In taking Bran and Sally to the dog park, this increases Jane’s social contact and interactions with other dog owners, thus decreasing her isolation and promoting her well-being.

A final growth-fostering component in Jane’s relationship with Bran and Sally is intuitiveness. This intuitiveness deepens the connection in the relationship and reinforces the

importance of the companionship for Jane and therefore promotes her well-being. Jane feels her canine companions can read her emotions and understand what she says to them. Jane talks to Bran and Sally and shared “It’s almost like they know exactly what I’m talking about.” Jane describes this as “amazing” and has not experienced this in a human relationship. This links to relational theory and the notion of attunement, as well as connected knowing and the idea of intuition. If Jane is not feeling well, all three of her animal companions, including her cat, “come up and lay on the couch with me, so I have all three of them that are around me, comforting me.” Jane feels her animals can sense things about her and their environment.

Jane went on to show me several photographs of her canine companions. One of which was sitting on a table in the living room and the other was a Christmas photograph on her refrigerator that had all three animal companions. The fact that Jane has her animal companions as her Christmas card demonstrates how she sees them as family members and is not afraid to convey her feelings about the relationships to others. Jane works outside of the home and has photographs of her animal companions at work. In addition, Jane shared that a photo of Bran is her computer’s background screen at work.

### ***Becky***

The interview with Becky took place at her kitchen table in her home. When I arrived, Jingle greeted me enthusiastically at the front door and Hannah came in from outside to say a hello before settling down beside the chair I was sitting in. The home was canine friendly with dog toys in baskets, dog bowls, and Jingle’s dog crate which she views as her special area. The home environment was warm and inviting. I could easily tell the canines were content, happy, and real members of the family.

Becky stated more than once that she treats Jingle and Hannah as people rather than as

animals. She views them both as her “children” and they receive the best care that she and her husband can provide. Becky feeds Jingle and Hannah holistic foods, seeks medical care through specialists for Hannah, and takes both on vacations and family outings. As her children, Becky talks to Jingle and Hannah- “When I’m home or I’m walking around the house, I’m talking to them constantly.” The manner in which Becky regards, respects, and treats her canine companions fosters her personal growth and well-being and serves as a growth-fostering indicator in the relationship. Becky’s motherly instincts have transferred from raising her human children to caring for her canine children. “My kids are grown now and their favorite saying is, ‘These dogs have more stuff and get to do more things than we did when we were kids!’” Becky tells her human children that “these dogs listen better than you ever did as a kid!”

The connections with her animal companions broaden her relationships and provide emotional support through difficult times. Jingle was there for Becky through her divorce and sharing this challenging life experience together helped the two to bond. Becky helped Hannah by providing Hannah with a stable loving home, something Hannah had never had before. In return, Hannah helped Becky to heal from the heartbreak and “wound” of losing her dog, Torch. According to Becky, “So we took a bad thing and turned it into a good thing.” Becky’s relationships with her canine companions seem to nurture her through difficult times. This is consistent with Kurdek’s (2009) finding that canine companions serve as attachment figures that help to alleviate distress. Becky is able and willing to lean on her canine companions when needed. As such, this extends her support system beyond what she may receive from her human support system. “I love that I think they know what you’re feeling or what you’re going through.”

Becky did well expressing herself about the relationship with Jingle and Hannah and

shared stories to further clarify the relationship. Becky acknowledged feeling not only does she have a relationship with each dog, but that the dogs, themselves, develop relationships with each other. Becky shared an emotional story concerning her dogs, Torch, and Jingle. Torch's declining health prompted Becky and her husband to make the painful decision to euthanize her. After Torch had been cremated, her ashes were brought home and Jingle responded by running to the cremation box and jumping on her back legs. "To this day, if I get the box out and open it, Jingle will take her paw and scratch at the ashes. She knows [Torch] is there. I was totally amazed by that. So I think they do bond with each other." This story speaks to the strong bond that forms between animals and that remains in existence beyond death. From this experience with Torch's ashes, Becky appears to have developed a deeper insight into the connections between two animals. Without directly saying, Becky seems to have a spiritual connection to her canine companions and a spirituality that encompasses relationships with animals. This spiritual connection with animals is consistent with the writings of Dresser (2000), Bekoff (2003), and McDaniel (2006).

Becky has personally grown in the relationships with her canine companions by learning not to worry and stress about things in life. She watches how her canine companions simply enjoy life. They take great pleasure in a brief nap, playing with an old toy, or going for a car ride for Italian Ice. Jingle and Hannah have taught Becky that sometimes the simplest things in life bring the most pleasure. Becky has taken from both how to be happy and stop to enjoy the small things in life. "So, I think what I've learned from them is that life is too short to be worrying about things. Take every day as it is and deal with it as it comes along."

Along with the life lesson in not worrying, Becky's canine companions including Torch have taught her about the cycle of life. As her canine companions were growing through

puppyhood and adolescence, Becky feels she learned along with them through the various developmental stages. In addition, Becky feels as they age “when they’re old and in pain, that affects you emotionally.” Over the years and through losses of canine companions, she has learned much about aging gracefully and death- witnessing the cycle of life through the relationship with her beloved canine companions.

Becky has grown professionally as a result of the relationship with Jingle and Hannah as well. Becky is a massage therapist and combining her work and her love for her canine companions, she has started doing canine massage. Both Jingle and Hannah benefit from this on a regular basis. This is another example of Becky’s belief in what is beneficial for humans are equally beneficial to animals and that animals deserve to be treated just as well. The power of touch and massage could possibly be another avenue for connected knowing. Through Becky’s own intuition and experiences to understand her canine companions, she is able to connect with them on a different level- through physical contact and touch. According to Clinchy (1996), connected knowers possess sophisticated abilities to understand others.

Becky spends as much time as she possibly can with Jingle and Hannah. Spending time and sharing in activities together serves as a growth-fostering component in the relationship. Becky seemed to have both a desire and an appreciation for spending time with her canine companions. Becky, her husband, and canines spend time camping, playing, going for car rides, dining, and hanging out together.

### ***Matt***

Matt is married to Becky, another participant in the study. The interview with Matt took place following Becky’s interview at the same kitchen table in their home. Matt was not home during Becky’s interview; ironically he was shopping for holistic dog food for Hannah. Becky

was home during Matt's interview.

Matt did not have canine companions of his own until dating and marrying Becky. Matt views Jingle and Hannah as his children and treats them as part of the family. He does not have human children of his own and his canine companions have filled a void for him. Matt has personally grown in the relationship by developing nurturing and fathering skills.

Matt thinks nothing of showing affection towards his canine companions around others or outwardly expressing how important they are to him. Matt frequently takes his canine companions with him whenever possible. For example, Matt takes them to run errands, to work/court appointments, and vacations. The relationship Matt has with Jingle and Hannah is so well-known in his work community that many people ask if Jingle and Hannah are with him because they want to see and play with the canines. Matt now often responds, "Look, my dogs are getting older now and I can't bring them out all the time." Hannah who is having difficulty getting around has a handicapped placard and a ramp to get into the car.

Through the relationship with Jingle, Hannah, and Torch, Matt has learned about responsibility. Before having this responsibility to take care of others, Matt "would go do whatever I needed to whenever, I needed to, do what I wanted to." Now, Matt's schedule revolves around care for his canines. If Becky is not home, Matt will run home during a shift to let Jingle and Hannah out and take care of any quick needs they may have. Matt shared that each day he takes time and thinks how to accommodate the care of his canine companions into his schedule. Matt seems very accepting of this responsibility and is willing to be an active partner in caring for Jingle and Hannah.

The relationship with Jingle and Hannah has also fostered Matt's development by showing him true loyalty and companionship. Matt never experienced these qualities in other

relationships. The relationship demonstrates to Matt what it means to stand by another no matter what. Matt seems grateful and appreciative to have discovered this from his canine companions. It is quite possible these ways of being and relating can transfer to and enhance the human friendships and relationships that Matt has both in his personal life and his professional life as a police officer.

It is important to acknowledge that the attachment and emotional tie Matt had with Torch, the canine companion who he lost several years ago, also played a tremendous role in Matt's personal growth. Saying good-bye to Torch was a very difficult experience for Matt. "They said we could have a few minutes with her and we were sitting there, like, 'What do you do?' This dog has been in our lives for six years, did anything and everything we asked her to do, ...very loyal..." This difficult experience speaks to Matt's attachment to Torch. Matt considered Torch to be the first dog of his own. For this reason, Torch most likely was instrumental in helping Matt learn the ropes of being in a relationship with an animal companion and paved the way for Matt to have the ability to develop future bonds and relationships with canine companions. This example supports relational theory and the idea of learning through one relationship helps build and support the development of other relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1997). It also supports connected knowing in that Matt learned through the relationship and connection with Torch.

The main growth-fostering component of Matt's relationships with his canine companions has been spending time with them. Matt established relationships with each of his canines by being actively involved with them. Matt shared stories about rough-housing with them, throwing the ball for them, getting down on the floor or ground and playing with them, and as mentioned previously, taking them with him out into the community as much as he possibly

could. By spending time with them, the connection that formed has been strong and endured through the years.

### *Kathryn*

The interview with Kathryn took place on the back patio of her home. Despite it being a very hot and humid summer evening, the patio was shaded by a roof with a view overlooking her pool. It was a comfortable and relaxed setting for the interview. All three of Kathryn's canine companions greeted me at the fence and excitedly sniffed and welcomed me into their yard. The interview was scheduled in the evening allowing Kathryn enough time after work to take care of her animal companions (she has a cat also) and to complete their evening routine.

Although Kathryn had pets while growing up and throughout adulthood, it has been the relationships with her present canine companions that particularly have fostered Kathryn's personal growth and well-being. For Kathryn, after raising a family and going through a divorce, she found it was very difficult to come home to an empty house. Her three Shih Tzus: Toosi, Tan, and Jay have filled a void for Kathryn. Kathryn described how "fulfilling" the relationships are to her. She eloquently described how when she was raising her children she always enjoyed having canines, but how the canines more often interacted with her children than with her. The relationships she has developed with Toosi, Tan, and Jay are Kathryn's first "one on one" relationships with canine companions. "There aren't all these others, 'diluting' the relationship, all these other things that are going on" In this way, Kathryn has been able to focus solely on the relationships with her canine companions without the commitment to other people or other responsibilities.

With Kathryn being the only caregiver to her canine companions, she realizes they depend solely on her and she goes above and beyond for them. She provides the best she can in

all areas of their lives: veterinary care, exercise/physical activity, toys to keep them stimulated, food, and safety/ security. Kathryn shared a story that expresses how deeply connected she is in the relationship, so much so that she would risk getting hurt herself to save her canine companions. An aggressive Rottweiler approached Kathryn, Toosi, and Tan one day when they were walking. "I was [within] a second of dropping their leashes and taking the dog on myself so he would leave them alone, hoping they would run home." Being able to care about other beings to this extent fosters personal growth and promotes well-being. That Kathryn would risk injury herself to save her canine companions truly speaks to the depth of connected and relational knowing. Flannery (2002) describes connected knowers as empathetic, trusting, and understanding of others' experiences, as well as feeling a visceral connection with others. It is possibly a visceral connection to her canine companions that prompted Kathryn to consider this response.

An outcome of the relationship is that Kathryn has experienced unconditional love from Toosi, Tan, and Jay. Kathryn spoke of how even with human mothers and children, love may or may not come with conditions. Until the love is tested, one never knows for sure. For Kathryn, there is no guessing if her canine companions love unconditionally. "I know that this is unconditional. This is pure, unconditional love." Kathryn shared how this unconditional love was there to help her through several losses in her life. She told of how Toosi laid in her arms and wept with her. Experiencing and feeling this unconditional love is a rewarding life experience. Kathryn may be better able to cope with future losses or difficult life circumstances knowing her canines' unconditional love will be there to comfort and support her.

Another outcome has been learning responsibility. Kathryn had challenging times when she moved to her new house and had to leave her dogs at home rather than taking them to doggie

daycare. This decision was made based on Kathryn's financial means and not necessarily what she wanted to do. Initially, Kathryn felt guilty when leaving her canine companions at home. With time, everyone adjusted to the new routine. In addition, Kathryn learned responsibility through the daily routine she and Toosi, Tan, and Jay live by. Kathryn gets up for work approximately an hour earlier than she really needs to in order to take care of her animal companions' needs. They have a structured morning of walking, feeding, and cleaning the yard. This routine helps Kathryn meet their needs and comforts her knowing they will be okay through the day without her.

Two growth-fostering components in the relationship that foster Kathryn's well-being are spending time together and the canines' individual personalities. In relational theory, connections with others is a basic human need and growth occurs with and through others (Jordan et. al., 1991). As mentioned previously, Kathryn walks Toosi, Tan, and Jay each day. The daily walks provide time for Kathryn to pause, think, and de-stress. Not only is Kathryn benefitting physically from daily exercise, she also benefits emotionally/psychologically. "They're ahead of me and I watch them loping along at times, especially her [Toosi] because she's so physically lazy, and she'll be loping up that field... it just, oh, makes my heart sing." Clearly, Kathryn cherishes this time spent with her canine companions and serves to promote her well-being.

Toosi, Tan, and Jay each have their own individual personalities. Kathryn can easily speak to what she loves about each one. Kathryn refers to Tan as her "boyfriend." She shared how he is protective of her, follows her around the house, and never wants her out of his sight. Each canine has developed a relationship with Kathryn based on their own unique personality. Each one seems to have his/her own place within the family, thus making the family complete. Feeling her family is whole and recognizing the individual differences within the relationships

promotes Kathryn's well-being.

### *Chrissy*

The interview with Chrissy took place in the family room at her home. Max wagged his tail and excitedly circled around me when I arrived. He settled down quickly and chewed on a toy for most of the interview. Max had a lot of energy and playfulness for being 9 ½ years old. The interview took place on a Tuesday evening after Chrissy got home from work. Originally when the interview was scheduled Chrissy had two canine companions. Sadly, the Sunday before the interview took place, Chrissy's canine, Dane, experienced cardiac arrest and had to be euthanized. Chrissy had lost another canine, Doc, due to cancer just five months earlier. Clearly, it has been a difficult year for Chrissy's canine family.

I offered Chrissy the option of rescheduling the interview in case she was not in a place to speak about the relationship she has with her canine companions. She declined and commented she has her "moments," but would prefer to keep the interview as planned. In my opinion, the interview with Chrissy was remarkable because of her ability to reflect on the relationships she had and recently lost. She eloquently spoke of what her canine companions mean to her and what they provide for her. This narrative analysis will not only be about, Max, who now is Chrissy's sole canine companion, but also about the companions she lost this year.

Chrissy is single with no human children and views her canine companions as family members. In fact, Chrissy considers them to be children and would often tell others (when she had all three canines) that she had three children. Chrissy would clarify that statement by "Okay, let me qualify that, it's three, four-legged children, and their names are...!" Chrissy talks to her canines and doesn't categorize them as just dogs. She views them as beings which deserve to be well cared for, loved, and respected. "When you have a dog, then you'll understand that it's

different.” Chrissy’s perception of her dogs speaks to what soul (Dirkx 1997) may mean for her. “To nurture soul is to recognize what is already inherent within our relationships and experiences...” (Dirkx, 1997, p. 83). By viewing them and treating them as children, the relationships with her canines seem to fill a void in her life. This way of interacting and relating to her canine companions fosters Chrissy’s personal growth and well-being.

Because of the relationships, Chrissy looks forward to coming home each day. She enjoys when Max greets her at the door and is so very happy to welcome her home. With his energy and playfulness, Max helps to get Chrissy moving and motivated. She shared just squeezing him and being with him puts her in a better frame of mind. “They’re just happy all the time! That happiness, I think, just kind of transfers to me, at least.” The relationship with Max supports both her physical and mental health.

Emotionally, Chrissy feels her canine companions were always there for her. The giving of unconditional love has been the biggest outcome and learning experience. Her canine companions have taught her the importance of being there for family and friends, no matter how bad the circumstance or situation. Chrissy provided two poignant stories of her canine companions being there and serving as her “rocks” during difficult life experiences. The first story was of her brother’s death seven years ago as a result of injuries sustained in a car accident. The second story was that thirteen months after her brother died, her mother also passed away. Her canine companions provided comfort and helped to soothe everyone who was grieving. “It was just amazing what all three of the dogs did for everybody at the house... just petting the dogs or hugging them or sitting on the floor next to them... I think it’s very soothing.”

Max had been Chrissy’s brother’s canine companion. Following her brother’s death, Chrissy brought Max into her home to join her own canine companions, Dane and Doc. At the

time of the interview, Max was there for Chrissy through Dane's death. Helping her through the first few days, she referred to Max as her "squeeze bag." As was discussed in Becky's analysis, touch may be another form of connected knowing. The relationships with her canine companions have helped support Chrissy through difficult times. As a result, Chrissy has personally grown in her understanding of unconditional love. "I think that's what they've really taught me, that no matter how bad it is, your family is always there to support you and give you that love." Chrissy's experiences support Kurdek's (2009) findings that the unconditional love and support provided by canine companions may be a factor in humans viewing their canine companions as a dependable source of emotional comfort. These shared experiences between Chrissy and her canine companions most likely strengthened the relationships.

Thanks to the relationships with her canine companions, Chrissy has also grown in the areas of responsibility and accountability. She feels they have taught her how to take care of them as if they were children. From taking them outside, to exercising them, to making sure they have veterinary care and food/ toys/ treats, Chrissy has learned the responsibility of caring for other beings. She acknowledged not trusting just anyone to dog sit for her. Knowing they depend on her, she is accountable to them. Chrissy shared a heartfelt story of planning to go to the beach for four days with friends, but missing and worrying about her canine companions so much that she cut her vacation short to come home to them. "I lasted at the beach for two days and I came home and got them. I just [couldn't] leave them there. And I'm sure the people at the kennel did a wonderful job. I know they took them out several times a day to play, but it's not the same."

Chrissy would spend a lot of time with her canine companions and this served as a growth-fostering component in the relationship. Chrissy feels spending time with them, doing things together, and going places together helped to build their bond and establish their

relationship. Chrissy showed me her favorite photograph of all three canines in the back of her vehicle ready to go somewhere. All three were sticking their heads out and eagerly waiting to get the ride going.

Chrissy was always taking them somewhere with her. Her canine companions thoroughly enjoyed hiking, going to the dog pool, or visiting Chrissy's friends who also had canines. Chrissy shared a story in which as they were leaving one day, a neighbor said, "Oh, there go the three Golden Retrievers, always going!" Chrissy feels that summed up their relationship- always spending time together and going somewhere. The four would frequently go to a local state park to hike. This time alone in the woods with her canine companions allowed Chrissy uninterrupted time to pause and think. "Just watching them play in the woods and chase each other, chase the animals... and this gives you that time to reflect and ... kind of grounds you, gives you that inner peace." Spending time with them hiking and reflecting fosters growth in the relationships and promotes Chrissy's well-being. As mentioned previously, now Max is in charge of keeping Chrissy busy-moving, motivating her, and fostering her personal growth and well-being.

A final growth-fostering indicator in the relationship is each dog's own personality and the relationships the dogs had with each other. Chrissy was able to describe how each canine was different and what she adored in each one. Doc and Max were "thicker than thieves" and mischievously played and wrestled together all the time. Dane was Chrissy's "old man" because he preferred to lounge and sleep. In addition to the relationship with Chrissy, each canine had relationships with each of the other canines. Chrissy appreciated her canine companions for who they were and embraced their personalities. Each contributed in their own way to making Chrissy's canine family fulfilling and rewarding.

*Steve*

The interview with Steve took place at his home outside on a patio overlooking a pond with ducks. Across from the pond was a Daylily farm that he and his wife own. It was a beautiful setting and a warm summer evening. Farrell joined us outside alternating between lying on the patio and in the grass.

In addition to Farrell, Steve and his wife have two other dogs, Ronnie and Baby, both Shelties. Steve and his Shelties participated in agility training and competitions. Presently, Farrell is engaged in herding lessons and plans to compete in this skill.

Four years ago, Farrell was rescued from a shelter by Steve and his wife. At that time, Farrell had been surrendered by three different families to the shelter and was placed in quarantine. The relationship between Steve and Farrell was built on the fact that Farrell needed a good home. The relationship has been sustained and grown through participating together in herding lessons and activities. Steve's goal for Farrell is to have his shelter dog become a winning champion in herding. "I want my rescue Collie to beat all the poofy Collies!" The two are well on their way to achieving this aspiration. Steve and Farrell are hoping to compete at the Collie Club's National Show next year.

Through setting goals and working together to achieve these goals, the relationship with Farrell has fostered Steve's personal growth and well-being. Learning to herd together takes effort and time. Steve enjoys sharing this time with Farrell and feels Farrell takes pleasure in herding and competing as well. Farrell has won enough ribbons to fill several shoeboxes- the place where Steve keeps the ribbons. Steve is very proud of what Farrell has accomplished to date and shared how bonded he feels to Farrell, possibly more so than to his other dogs. Steve finds it very fulfilling and rewarding that his shelter dog is a success story. "So I think he's a really good ambassador for SPCA dogs." It is also fulfilling to Steve that he is the person who

provided Farrell the opportunity to fully reach his potential.

Farrell is considered a member of the family. In actuality, Steve views his three canine companions as his children. Steve and his wife do not have human children. The relationship with Farrell and the other canine companions may be filling a void in Steve's life. Steve wonders if Farrell coming into his life was meant to be. Steve shared how because he has poor eyesight, he worried in the past that he may go blind. If he lost his sight, Steve reasons that at least he may be able to have a guide dog. "But having a herding dog is very much that same relationship... It's like he fulfilled something that was ordained many, many years ago." There was a sense of intuitiveness and spiritual connection between Steve and Farrell. This in and of itself may promote Steve's personal growth and well-being.

Along this line, Steve spoke of how the relationship with Farrell has helped him reflect and remember connections to his past. Steve shared two perceptive stories. One story involved realizing he is currently living in the house that was in a painting in his parents' home while he was growing up. The second is that the first oil painting he did was painting by numbers of a Collie's face. "I painted him. I painted him when I was about five years old, 7 years old, however it was. Is that weird?" From these past memories and stories, Steve seems to be learning through symbols and from his unconscious. Recalling his past and contemplating the meaning behind his relationship with Farrell supports Steve's growth and development as an adult and fosters continued growth in the relationship.

A very insightful learning outcome for Steve in the relationship with Farrell is recognizing his own mortality. Farrell is approximately eleven years old and considered elderly. Steve has noticed Farrell is more tired when he comes out of the ring and he sits by the gate rather than circles as he once did. Steve acknowledged that he would like to train one more

Collie to herd in his lifetime. Steve voiced concern that with himself aging, he may not have the opportunity to train another dog unless he gets started in the near future. “It made me feel very old, because I only have so many dogs left! I’m not sure I’m ready to come to grips with that. Only have so much time left... you sort of measure your life in dogs.” That Steve came to realize his own mortality through his herding experience and relationship with Farrell is fascinating. This speaks to the capacity of relationships with companion animals to serve as opportunities for learning and reflection on life and death.

Another outcome of the relationship is that Steve has learned a tremendous amount through the experience of herding with Farrell. Steve has been learning along with Farrell how to herd. “They have to want to do it. You have to rely on their judgment. They’re reading the sheep better than we’re reading the sheep, and you have to work at a distance.” Steve informed me what ‘driving’ and ‘start’ means in herding, as well as the different tests in herding. Farrell achieved his Herding Test last fall and was to get his Pretrial test this August. Steve also discussed bringing power and a presence with your canine companion into the ring.

Through the herding experience and through looking back at old photographs and videos, Steve realizes that when he competed in agility with his Shelties, he thought that he was running a big dog. He thought Ronnie and Baby were as big as Farrell. “Now I see videos and I realize I have a dog that’s as high as my ankles, but I think I was always running a Collie, even though they were 15-pound Shelties. Then Farrell IS the dog that I think they were.” Although Steve cares deeply for all three of his canines, herding with Farrell taught him that he may have always preferred running a bigger dog in competitions. From this example, rather than viewing his world as it actually is, Steve appears to be viewing his world through the way things should be or could be. In this way, Steve is living with his intuition and learning from his intuition.

A significant growth-fostering component in the relationship between Steve and Farrell is sharing time together herding, training, and competing. Working together serves as a way to nurture their relationship and support one another. Herding is an activity that requires both physical stamina and cognitive skills. In this way, herding with Farrell promotes Steve's mental and physical well-being.

Another growth-fostering component is caring for and treating Farrell and the other canine companions as family members. In the evenings while watching television, Farrell has a special place between Steve and his wife in the middle of the couch. They take pleasure in simply hanging out together. Steve shared how brushing Farrell has helped to foster the relationship because brushing involves a lot of touching and Farrell must sit and be still. In the mornings, they enjoy walking and working in the garden. "If we're out in the garden, he [Farrell] meets and greets all the garden visitors."

Farrell, the former shelter dog, has certainly found a good home and a place within Steve's heart. As Steve says, "there's just something about him." Steve and Farrell's story seem to portray soul (Dirkx, 199) between a human and a canine companion. Steve, himself, acknowledged the very special connection with Farrell as different from the relationships with his other canines.

In summary, this section analyzed each individual narrative. Although each participant's experiences and relationships with his/her canine companions are individual and unique, there were commonalities that emerged across narratives. These commonalities are discussed in the greater detail in the next section.

### **Collective Findings**

All interviews took place in the participants' homes and with their canine companions

present. For my protection and safety, two canines were kept confined during the interviews. All participants had their canine companions for at least three years with many having had their canines since they were puppies. Eight out of the ten participants had more than one canine companion: five participants had two canines, two participants had three canines, one participant had four canines, and two participants had one canine. Although it should be noted that one of the participants (Chrissy) having only one canine had just lost a canine companion two days prior to the interview for this study and had lost another canine companion five months earlier. The canines' ages ranged from 4 years old to 14 years old.

During their childhood and adolescent years, a majority of participants recalled growing up with dogs as pets. Six of the ten grew up with dogs in their households; two remembered having a dog briefly during their childhood (Leeann, Matt), one had her first dog in 7<sup>th</sup> grade (Chrissy), and one grew up having no dogs at all during her childhood or adolescence (Jamie). This is consistent with findings from other studies in which having a pet in childhood resulted in higher levels of attachment and positive attitudes towards pets in adulthood (Kidd & Kidd, 1989; Serpell, 1981).

The participants consisted of eight females and two males. The participants' ages ranged from 32 years old to 60 years old. Seven out of the ten participants were married, two were divorced, and one was single. Four out of the ten participants had grown children and four participants had no human children. Only two out of the ten participants (Jamie, Angie) were married with children at home. All participants except Jamie and Angie fit into the past research finding showing the highest rate of attachment to animal companions was among divorced, never married, remarried, widowed, childless couples, and empty-nesters (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988).

Three commonalities were expressed by the participants in how relationships between

adults and canine companions foster personal growth and well-being: the canine companions were thought of as family members; the canine companions filled a void in the participants' lives, and the participants who rescued canine companions felt rewarded for providing needed homes.

Every participant felt their canine companions were part of the family and many were treated as well as human family members. Although the research is nearly twenty-five years old, the present finding supports Albert and Bulcroft's (1988) study in which families perceived their pets as true members of the family. Albert and Bulcroft (1988) found that 87% of the households reported this; however, they predicted that pets would gain importance and meaning to people in the future. In the present study, all ten or 100% of the participants reported their canine companions were family members.

Five of the participants (Jane, Becky, Matt, Chrissy, Steve) viewed their canine companions as their children and referred to the canines as children. This finding supports the hypothesis that humans can develop a positive emotional bond to their canine companions that is similar to the human parent-child bond (Serpell, 2003).

Many of the participants expressed looking forward to coming home to their canine companions and being warmly greeted by them. Jamie, Leslie, Jane, Kathryn, and Chrissy spoke of the importance of knowing their canine companions are at home and "there for you." These same participants also shared of how just knowing this makes them feel positive, can change their moods, lift their spirits, and give them energy and motivation. Jane and Kathryn, in particular, feel their canine companions help to keep them in a consistent routine and provide structure to their daily lives.

Not only are the canine companions considered members of the family, but the canines

seem to be filling a significant void within the participants' lives. For Leeann, Leslie, Becky, and Kathryn, who have raised children and find themselves at home with an empty-nest, the canine companions seem to steadily fulfill the need within themselves to nurture and care for others. This desire to nurture and support another being also seems to be evident in the participants who have no children of their own (Jane, Matt, Chrissy, Steve). These participants reported feeling their canine companions satisfy a missing part in their adult lives- having human children--a life experience that they acknowledged they may never have. For them, the relationships with their canine companions provide a sense and understanding of human parent and child relationships (Dresser, 2000).

The relationship between these adults and their canine companions may be providing meaning and purpose in their lives, similar to how many describe the human parent-child relationship. This finding supports the hypothesis that with the changing American family composition, companion animals would fill an emotional void for adults (Dresser, 2000) and serve as "emotional substitutes for family members" (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988, p. 550).

By recognizing their canine companions as family, it seems quite likely that being an owner of a beloved canine would become part of the participants' identities. Given that all participants expressed being open and forthcoming with others in how they feel about their canine companions speaks volumes about the significance of the relationship and how they view themselves in the relationship. The nature of this particular part of their identity would align with Tennant's (2005) concept of the authentic or real self. By being true to themselves, the participants have engaged in a rewarding relationship with another species. In caring for their canine companions, they are caring for themselves and enhancing their well-being.

Five of the participants (Leeann, Becky, Matt, Chrissy, Steve) shared that rescuing and/or taking in their canine companion when he/she needed a good home fostered their own personal well-being. All described how emotional gratifying the relationship has become. For these participants, the conscious decision to rescue a canine can have a “projective function” as proposed by Veevers (1985, p. 12). Rescuing a canine in need could be interpreted as making a statement about the owner and/or the owner’s identity and personality, such as the owner is nurturing/caring or possibly wanting to make the world a better or more just place.

Three commonalities were revealed in the areas, outcomes, and ways in which adults grow as a result of the relationship with their canine companions: the canine companions taught the participants about unconditional love; patience; and responsibility/accountability. What is quite interesting about this growth and learning is that the adult participants learned from those who do not speak and do not possess the capability to use voice to verbalize such information. It is important to point out that canines do communicate though behavior, body language, eye contact, and barking. The participants had to experience the learning on another level- connected knowing seems a likely avenue for this learning. Through connected knowing in the relationship with their canine companions, participants learned about unconditional love, patience, and responsibility/accountability. “Feeling connected and in contact with another often allows us our most profound sense of personal meaning and reality...” (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991, p. 289).

The giving of unconditional love by their canine companions helped the participants to experience and to fully understand what is meant by this type of love. All of the participants expressed receiving love and pure acceptance in one way or another from their canine companions. The participants (Jamie, Leslie, Angie, Kathryn, and Chrissy) used the actual term

‘unconditional love’ to describe what they have experienced in the relationship. The participants shared that they have learned and grown through being unconditionally loved. The participants talked of trying their best to return that kind of love to their canine companions. This notion of unconditional love corroborates Kurdek’s (2009) conjecture that unconditional love and support provided by canine companions may be a factor in why humans consider them to be a dependable source of emotional comfort.

Becky, Kathryn, and Chrissy shared how this unconditional love helped see them through difficult times. For Becky, it was going through her divorce. For Kathryn and Chrissy, it was the death of someone close to them. The giving of unconditional love in the relationship helped them feel comforted and secure during challenging times in life. This finding confirms the speculation that companion animals may serve as a consistent source of attachment security and help to cope with life (Beck & Madresh, 2008). As Chrissy described, her canine companions were her “rocks” and were there in her time of need. Knowing that their canine companions love unconditionally would likely increase attachment security within the relationship. As well as, serve as a resilient/protective factor during emotionally difficult times, promoting a sense of well-being and security (Sable, 1995). As a result of the relationships with her canine companions and the receiving of unconditional love, Becky shared how she has learned not to be so stressed and to enjoy little things in life. In addition, Becky and Leeann spoke of how the unconditional love of their current canine companions have helped them to realize they had the ability to love another dog after losing a beloved canine companion. It is quite possible that individuals who receive unconditional love from their canine companions are better able to give love to other humans and/or receive unconditional love from others.

All of the participants acknowledged talking to their canine companions. This finding

supports research demonstrating pets are often talked to and confided in (Bryant, 1985; Mallon, 1994). Jane, Becky, Kathryn, and Chrissy reported that they talk to their canine companions just as they would talk to another human. The participants feel their companions understand them and often respond appropriately to what they are saying to them.

In several relationships, the giving of unconditional love was coupled with the giving of protection and a sense of physical security as well. Leeann, Jamie, Leslie, Becky, and Matt shared how they feel protected by their canine companions. Having a guardian in their canine companions helped these participants to form an attachment and feel safe, thereby promoting their well-being. As Margolies (1999) pointed out, attachment can occur in any relationship if the relationship fulfills needs for safety and security.

Learning patience was another area in which several participants grew as a result of the relationship with their canine companions. Leeann, Leslie, and Jane shared stories of how through challenging times they learned to have more patience in their lives thanks to their canine companions. Angie, Becky, and Steve also indirectly spoke of learning patience through helping their canines reach a goal or change a behavior. The result of learning patience from interactions with canine companions in this study mirrors the findings of Turner (2007). Although a different population was utilized, Turner found a major theme of patience emerged from prison inmates who were given the opportunity to participate in a canine program. The inmates became more patient as a result of the participating with the canines.

A final learning outcome that was expressed by five participants (Jamie, Jane, Matt, Kathryn, Chrissy) was in the area of responsibility and accountability. These participants shared how through the relationship they learned how to take care of their canine companions and to be responsible for and accountable to another being beside themselves. Each expressed how they

personally grew into having and accepting this responsibility. This finding supports the results from Rew (2000) and Turner (2007) in which pets seemed to awaken a need within individuals to act responsibly and to make better choices. The development of patience and responsibility may parallel or complement the development of these attributes in parent-child relationships. Jamie, in particular, acknowledged that having her canine companions before having human children prepared her for motherhood and made her a better mother.

As mentioned, the learning outcomes seem likely to have resulted from learning within the relationship and seem consistent with the descriptions of connected knowing put forth by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) and Flannery (2002). The literature on connected knowing does not discuss this way of knowing in relation to animals of any kind. Additionally, the notion of touch may be potentially considered a part of connected knowing and learning, but it, too, is not directly addressed or discussed in the connected knowing literature.

In answering the research question--what are the growth-fostering components or indicators in the relationships between adults and canine companions that promote well-being--commonalities became evident. These commonalities included: spending time with canine companions, intuitiveness within the relationship and learning from this intuition, and the differences in canines' personalities.

All ten participants shared that spending time with their canine companions contributed to the attachment and bonding that developed initially within the relationship. In addition, all participants agreed that spending continued time with their canine companions has helped to sustain the relationship and promotes their well-being. The importance of spending time and sharing routines together is consistent with the description proposed by Sanders (2003) of the human-animal friendship.

All participants expressed enjoyment in spending time with their canine companions. This finding confirms the attachment research by Bonas, McNichols, and Collis (2000) in which canine owners reported enjoying the companionship their canines provided and put effort into maintaining close proximity to their canine companions.

For Angie, her canine companion serves as her running buddy. For Jane, spending time walking with her canine companions helps her exercise and get out into the fresh air each day. As well as, Jamie and her family spend time with their canine companions by taking them for walks or taking them swimming. For Kathryn and Chrissy spending time walking their canine companions provides time for peace, quiet, and self-reflection.

Sharing time with their canine companions, Leeann and Steve are presently active with obedience training and herding training respectively. In the past, Leslie actively took part in agility training with her canine companions. This type of shared activity promotes physical and mental well-being. As Leslie pointed out, "... it made me use my brain..."

For Matt, simply running errands or having his canine companions with him helps to foster the relationship. For Becky, being home with her canine companions or doing canine massage on them is an enjoyable way to spend time with them and fosters her personal well-being.

Another commonality that Leeann, Leslie, Jane, Becky, Kathryn, Chrissy, and Steve shared was an intuitive connection with their canine companions. Leeann and Leslie expressed having a special way with animals since very young and this continued into adulthood. Leslie, Jane, Kathryn, and Chrissy spoke of how their canine companions can read their emotions and seem to have keen abilities to sense things in the relationship and in the environment. They also felt their canine companions can understand both verbal and nonverbal communication. This

finding supports Sanders (2003) discussion that the human-animal friendship may be strengthened by owners believing that their pets feel and read emotion. Although the connected knowing literature includes intuition, it does not directly discuss intuition between humans and animal companions. Although the connected knowing literature does not address that some people believe their animal companions can feel, sense, and read emotions, this can be extrapolated from the connected knowing literature.

The descriptions shared by participants about the intuitive connection between themselves and their canine companions lend support to the notion of attunement. This perceptual ability to mutually connect with one another is an extraordinary experience and not one generally experienced in human-human relationships. This finding supports Lasher's (1998) idea that attunement is the primary mode of communication between humans and animals. The finding also potentially supports Sheldrake's (1999) hypothesis that attunement is the result of humans and companion animals sharing a social field.

Steve, in particular, shared insightful stories of learning through his intuition and how he came to realize things about himself as a result of the relationship with his canine companions. Steve discussed that he is questioning his own mortality with measuring the rest of his lifespan in how many more dogs he will be able to have and care for. Through the relationship with his canine companions, Steve also sees things as they actually are or through a different lens. All that Steve revealed corroborates Dirkx's (1997, p. 85) notion of "learning through soul." It has been through these peak experiences where Steve felt deep meaning and connection to his canine companion. By engaging in self-reflection about these peak experiences, Steve has gained an awareness of himself and learned from this intuitiveness.

Not only are the human participants perceptive in the relationship, but the canine companions are also perceptive. Leeann, Leslie, Jane, Becky, Kathryn, and Chrissy expressed believing in and witnessing the perceptive abilities of their canine companions. From sensing information and acting on it, whether verbally told to do so or not, to cuddling up and being there in a time of grief or illness, all the participants shared stories in which they felt their canine companions were astonishingly perceptive. These stories confirm Anderson's (2008) suggestion that dogs may have developed the ability to read social cues and communication cues from humans. Not only did the participants' canine companions develop the ability to be perceptive, but the canines also reportedly performed a behavior and/or acted as a result of the perception as well.

The final commonality that emerged in relation to the growth-fostering components or indicators in the relationship was the appreciated differences in the canines' personalities. Each of the ten participants articulated ways in which each of their dogs (past and present) was diverse in their personalities and behaviors. Participants cited how unique their canine companions could be from breed to breed, within the same breed, or even within the same litter. The canines were appreciated and respected for their differences. As Cavanaugh, Leonard, and Scammon (2008) proposed in studying the impact of canine companions' personality traits on the human-animal relationship, it is possible the canines' personalities are complementing or filling a void in the humans' own personalities or sense of identity.

In particular, Angie shared how her current canine companion is completely opposite to her past canine companions despite it being the same breed. Angie learned how each canine has an individual personality and "you are the way you are and you just adapt." All participants seemed to accept their canine companions for who they are and embraced the special qualities

about them. This finding supports Sanders' (1993) research where participants defined their canine companions as possessing minds, emotional lives, unique personalities, and readily identifiable tastes.

Interestingly, many participants showed me favorite photographs of their canine companions that demonstrated the canines' unique personalities. Chrissy showed a photograph of when she had all three of her male canine companions and they were waiting patiently in the back of her SUV to go for a ride and a walk. Each canine had a different expression that portrayed his personality. Chrissy said it was the single, most precious photograph she had of the three canines together that truly told of their lives together- "Oh, there go the three Goldens, always going!"

Photographs seem a significant method for depicting the individual personalities of the canines, as well as the relationship between the adults and their canine companions. Leeann, Leslie, Jane, Kathryn, and Chrissy shared the importance for them to capture memories of their canine companions and special times with their canine companions through photographs. Jane, Kathryn, and Steve shared that the holiday cards they send each year are photographs of their canine companions. Many participants also disclosed that they have photographs of their canine companions at their place of employment. Photographs are a means of capturing a story in time of the special relationship the participants have or have had with their canine companions- a story that for the participants in this study will be a cherished and unforgettable one.

This section highlighted the collective findings that emerged from the study. Collective findings were summarized according to the three guiding research questions. The next section discusses implications for relational theory and attachment theory.

### **Implications for Theory**

In seeking to understand the relationship between adults and their canine companions, the theoretical frameworks of this study were based on relational theory and attachment theory. Relational theory provides a discourse to make sense of the connections between adults and their canine companions as relationships. Attachment theory provides a means to understand the emotional bond that develops between adults and canine companions.

For relational theory, this study extends the idea of significant connections developing solely between two humans to demonstrating the development of significant connections between humans and companion animals. Not only did the participants of this study identify having a relationship with their canine companions, but all acknowledged viewing their canine companions as members of the family.

Not only did each participant identify having a special relationship with their canine companion, but each participant also identified experiencing personal growth as a result of the relationship. This study validates the concept of personal growth within relationships and offers a different relational context for adults to experience personal growth and well-being.

The present study confirms the emphasis of intuition and attunement in relational theory and further elaborates the theory by the finding of attunement between humans and canine companions. Seven out of the ten participants shared in experiencing an intuitiveness and attunement with their canine companions. All participants also reported feeling this perceptual awareness was reciprocal between them and their canine companions. This confirms Belenky, et. al. (1986) concept of subjective knowing that involves personal feeling and knowing from within based on experience and intuition. In addition, Flannery's (2002) distinction that connection of oneself with others includes knowing in relation to one's personal inner world and includes

subjective knowing and intuition is also supported. The study elaborates on this work by incorporating relationships with animals.

This study adds theoretically to connected knowing that adults can have ways of knowing with canine companions and these ways of knowing seem to take place through nonverbal means, such as intuition, attunement, and touch. Adults develop trustworthy knowledge from their personal experiences in the relationship and through the connections with their canine companions. The connections, themselves, between adults and canine companions are essential and significant in that knowledge and information cannot be passed verbally between the two. Given canine companions are voiceless in the human sense, knowledge is passed through other means. It should be noted that as Horowitz (2009) pointed out canine companions do vocalize through barking, growling, etc; however, clearly communication between adults and canine companions is different from communication between two humans. This study theoretically offers that connected knowing can occur in the absence of voice and between two different species.

The notion of connected knowing through touch is not directly addressed in the connected knowing body of literature. In the study, eight out of the ten participants spoke explicitly of the importance of touch in the relationship with their canine companions. Leeann eloquently spoke of meeting Norris in her narrative: *When I touched him at the shelter, I just absolutely loved him and said 'That's it, we're gonna pull him and we're gonna keep him.'* *There was just something about him.* The notion of touch as a way of knowing is a potential area for future research. Theoretically, touch could add another dimension to connected knowing.

For attachment theory, the study's findings confirm that adults develop deep emotional bonds with companion animals and these bonds may be very similar to what is experienced in

human-human attachment. The study appears to confirm Ainsworth's (1991) four distinct characteristics of attachment figures. Participants in the study agreed they enjoy coming home to their canine companions and spending time with them (proximity maintenance). Many participants also commented that they miss their canine companions if having to be separated from them and many attempt not to kennel their canine companions (separation distress). All participants acknowledged their canine companions provide a sense of security, protection, and/or routine to their lives (secure base). Many participants disclosed their canine companions are needed in times of comfort, stress, grief, and/or illness (safe haven).

An example of the profound emotional bond that develops between adults and their canine companions is evident in the unconditional love that was expressed by all of the participants. All of the participants spoke of the love and acceptance they receive from their canine companions and how they have learned and grown from being unconditionally loved. Many of the participants shared that they try to return this love to their canine companions. In addition, all of the participants mentioned how devastated they will be to lose their canine companions. This finding of unconditional love validates that emotional bonds develop in this enduring relationship and that attachment theory provides a framework to understanding adults' internal growth in a relationship with canine companions.

In summary, the theoretical frameworks of relational theory and attachment theory seem appropriate to studying the relationship between adults and their canine companions. The findings of the study both confirm the theories and extend the theories into the human-canine companion relationship. The next section discusses implications for practice in adult education.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study has demonstrated the importance of the connections and relationships between adults and their canine companions and contributes to the growing body of literature that promotes growth through relationships. The study has established that adults learn, personally grow, and promote their well-being through being in a relationship with a canine companion. For the adult education field, it is important to recognize that growth and learning is not limited to relationships with other humans, but also occurs through connections and relationships with companion animals. Not all adults will have experienced this type of relationship with a canine companion, but for those who have, it would also be important for adult educators to show acceptance and embrace this as another form of diversity among individual, adult learners.

By supporting soul in an adult learning environment, adult educators could consider, at times, breaking away from a set agenda or curriculum and caring for the soul. “The soul responds to less structured environments and to activities that bring one’s inner life together with the outer world” (Driks, 1997, p.85). Incorporating the notion of soul, adult educators could allow learners to explore what soul means to them- which may include canine companions, other animal companions, and/or many other valued things in their lives.

For those adult learners with canine companions, opening a space within a classroom setting for acceptance and discussion of connected knowing and learning with canine companions may be very welcoming for those in these relationships. This also allows the opportunity for these particular learners to connect with other adults who have had similar experiences.

The following are possible suggestions for implementation within a classroom setting and embracing the relationship between adults and their canine companions: incorporate activities or discussions where adult learners can include their canine companions; encourage adult learners

to reflect or journal about the life experiences with their canine companions, if they are comfortable doing so, have adult learners share with the class about their life experiences and learning experiences with their canine companions. Other suggestions include: assist adult learners to reflect on intuitive experiences with their canine companions; have adult learners make a scrapbook or capture images/photographs of their companions, or bring a metaphor/symbol to class to share that expresses how they feel about their canine companion.

These suggestions are not for every adult in a class, but rather are suggestions for those particular students who identify themselves as having a close connection and relationship with their canine companions. Based on Albert and Bulcroft's (1988) research, it is possible some of the adults learners may be divorced, never married, widowed, childless, and/or empty-nesters and may have found a special relationship with a canine companion. The suggestions above would be a way to allow these adults the opportunity to express themselves about the relationship with their canine companion. By sharing this information with others, it may encourage individuals not owning a canine companion to consider this as an option for their own life or to possibly volunteer at a local humane society or rescue league.

Adult educators could encourage adult learners who have a relationship with their canine companions to foster their personal growth and well-being by spending time with their canine companions. Adult educators could stress the importance of keeping physically and mentally healthy as adults age and have adult learners list ways to stay active with their canine companions. Examples could consist of enrolling in obedience, agility, or herding classes; exercising/walking daily; visiting a dog park; volunteering at a shelter; and/or training to become a therapy canine.

The findings are not limited to the adult education field. For the field of anthrozoology, the findings may offer a deeper insight into specific growth-fostering components of the relationship between humans and canine companions, such as spending time together and intuition. The field may want to consider offering workshops or trainings related to learning and connected knowing with canine companions. Intuition speaks to a deeper, almost spiritual connection. Another suggestion for practice would be to increase blessings for the animals or other forms of spiritual activities for canine companions. More information about how to foster the relationship between humans and canine companions could be included on websites or in other education material, such as pamphlets.

For humane education, the findings of this study may provide information about the powerful, shared connections and relationships that can develop between humans and animals. Human societies and other rescue leagues could emphasize the importance of the relationship and connected knowing. The findings may also help to assist individuals in how to establish a relationship with a newly adopted canine companion. A list of things to do to help establish a relationship with a new canine companion could be offered at time of adoption. Human societies and rescue leagues could also use the information to help screen for potential adopters of canines. For example, questions could include: How will you and your family establish a relationship with your new canine companion? Will the canine companion be considered a family member?

These agencies could advocate that relationships with canine companions can build patience, teach about unconditional love, and teach about responsibility and accountability. Human societies and rescue leagues could run ads with adults who have relationships with canine companions and what it has brought to their own lives.

For the psychology field, the findings may help therapists better understand clients who are grieving the loss of a canine companion and may inform therapeutic practices and techniques for assisting these individuals coping with the grief and loss of this relationship. In addition, the findings may help adults who have difficulty forming relationships with others to form a relationship with a canine and/or to promote the use of pet therapy for certain clients. For the field of veterinary medical education, the findings could provide a deeper appreciation of the relationships between owners and patients that will be witnessed in a veterinary care setting.

This section offered ideas that adult educators could implement into practice within a classroom setting and in relating to adult learners who have a relationship with a canine companion. Implications for other fields were also included. The next section offers suggestions for future research.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study has offered a beginning exploration of the relationships between adults and their canine companions and how this relationship fosters adults' personal growth and well-being. Several suggestions for future research arose from the present research. As was mentioned earlier, the notion of connected knowing through touch with animal companions is an area for potential research. The participants in this study ranged in age from 32 years old to 60 years old. From a developmental standpoint, it may be of interest to study the differences in relationships with canine companions across differing adult ages- (for example, younger adults compared to middle aged adults compared to elderly adults). Another area for future research would be to have elderly adults reflect and share narratives about the relationships they had had with canine companions throughout their lifespan. The narratives would story how the relationships with canine companions were similar and distinct at various stages in their life.

Not only would it be insightful to hear how the relationship changed or experienced growth during developmental periods in adults' lives, but it may be just as informative to study how the relationship changed or grew during various developmental periods in the canines' lives. For instance, how did the relationship change or grow when the canine was a puppy as compared to an older canine? Or what did an adult learn through experiencing their canine's lifespan?

Other potential areas for future research would be to study if there were differences in the relationships between adults and their canine companions based on the gender of the canine. This may shed light on whether gender plays a role in the relationships and to what extent it influences the relationships. As well as, it may be interesting to study whether individuals prefer one gender over the other gender when choosing a canine companion.

In this study, a majority of the participants had more than one canine companion. It may be of interest to study how the number of canine companions in a household impacts the relationship. Do the relationships differ when there is one canine companion in a home versus several canine companions?

In this study, there were two participants who were married. It may be interesting to study couples and the relationships each person has with their canine companions. The role the canine companion plays within a couple's relationship could also be studied.

Although culture was not the focus of this study, this would be another potential area to research. It may answer questions as to whether there are cross cultural differences in the relationships between adults and canine companions. Along those lines, it may be of value to also explore the relationships between adults and their canine companions in rural settings compared to urban settings.

All of the canine companions in this study were considered pets or non-working dogs. It may be important to explore the relationships between working canines and their human partners. Police, military, and search/rescue/recovery canine units would all be ideal participants to study, as well as farming or herding canines. Comparing relationships between non-working canines and working canines would further expand an understanding of the relationships that develop between adults and canines. Any findings that may result could inform training and development for working canine programs.

The commonalities that emerged from this study could be further explored. In particular, intuitiveness, filling a void, unconditional love, and responsibility/accountability may offer deeper insight into the relationship between adults and their canine companions. A survey could be developed from the commonalities and used to quantitatively study a larger sample size. One commonality could be chosen for an in-depth case study or one or more commonalities could be studied over the course of a newly developing relationship between an adult and canine companion- (for example, studying an adult and puppy or studying an adult and newly adopted canine of any age). Further exploration into the commonalities from this study may provide a richer understanding of relationships between adult and their canine companions.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This chapter included individual story analysis from each participant and collective findings across the ten narratives. The chapter also discussed implications for relational theory and attachment theory, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research. The dissertation closes with a few concluding thoughts.

When I embarked on this educational journey in August 2008, I had no idea where it would lead me in life. Over the course of these four years, Dr. Tisdell would remind my cohort

that we had “to trust the process.” I have to say she was so right. The “process” took me through interesting coursework and thought-provoking topics, challenging assignments and papers, the establishment of new friendships and mentors, and finally-the process of visualizing and carrying out a research project that would result in my dissertation. I am especially appreciative and grateful for my committee members who provided encouragement, feedback, and guidance throughout the dissertation process.

The journey of the past four years has been amazing and rewarding. I feel I have grown both academically and personally. With juggling motherhood and full-time employment, it was not always easy. My son was three years old when I began the program and I would change my Penn State password each year to reflect his age- kind of as a tribute to each year that I moved forward in the program. Recently, I changed my password for what hopefully is the final time to reflect his seventh birthday. This small, private success carried much meaning to me.

I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity to study the relationships between adults their canine companions. Each one of the participants and the canines in my study touched me and helped me to further understand the special relationships I have with my own canine companions. I am forever thankful for my present canine companions, Aruba and Sangria, and for my past canine companion, Princess, who provided me the inspiration and passion to pursue this topic.

It would be fitting to share a brief story of my own personal growth and learning in the relationship with my canine companion, Aruba. When I adopted Aruba (from the island in which he is named) in 1999, I was told he was about one year old based on the appearance of his bones from a leg X-ray. In 2012, Aruba will be turning 14 years old and weighs in about 64 pounds- a fairly large dog for his age. Smaller dogs are said to live much longer than larger dogs.

Nonetheless, I am so thankful to have him this length of time. For the past decade he and I have grown older together, and interestingly our aging has mirrored one another. We both have graying hair, less energy, stiffer bones and joints, and could nap for hours if left undisturbed. Aruba has shown me how to grow old gracefully and with dignity. As I have watched Aruba age, I am always amazed at his spirit and love for life despite his increasing fragility. He loves walking in the rain even though his arthritis will cause him pain and stiffness hours after the walk. He loves teasing our younger dog with treats even if he really doesn't want that particular treat. He loves sneaking out through the garage door to the front yard in hopes of catching the neighbor's dog doing his business in our yard. He loves being petted and rubbed each night around 10:00pm when our household is finally quiet from the evening's activities. Aruba has taught me to live fully each day and to enjoy it through the simple things in life. And aging and growing old- that is just part of it. Embrace it and enjoy it. He has touched my life and taught me many things through these years. I have no doubt Aruba will continue to teach me about life and living.

As this educational journey comes to a close, I have been reflecting on what my future may hold. I am realizing through the experience in the adult education program that I am ready for a career change away from the counseling/psychology fields. I truly believe the journey of the last four years will lead me to future possibilities and opportunities working with animals in an educational capacity or setting. For this, I am so thankful I embarked on this life changing experience.

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**LORIE R. KRAMER**  
**VITA**

41 Prickly Pear Drive  
Carlisle, PA 17013

(717) 249-3388 home  
(717) 808-8480 cell

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**PROFESSIONAL PROFILE:**

Twenty years combined education and social service experience with demonstrated teaching, training and well-developed presentation skills. Solid background instructing on topics related to child development, adolescent development, depression, stress, resiliency, and grief/loss. Extensive clinical expertise in assessing counseling needs and recommending appropriate mental health treatment. In-depth experience conducting postventions in school and community settings and facilitating group therapy. Proven ability to work independently or as a team member.

**EDUCATION:**

**Doctoral of Education in Adult Education**- anticipated graduation May 2012  
Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg, PA  
**Master of Science in Psychology**- Graduated May 1999; QPA 3.69  
Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, PA  
**Bachelor of Science in Psychology**- Graduated Cum Laude December 1992; QPA 3.36  
University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown, PA

**EXPERIENCE:**

Holy Spirit Hospital- Camp Hill, PA  
**Teenline Counselor**-Teenline Program October 1999- Present  
Department of Education Certified Secondary & Elementary Student Assistance Lead Trainer- 2007- Present

Harrisburg Area Community College- Harrisburg, PA  
**Adjunct Psychology Instructor** January 2001- August 2008

Holy Spirit Hospital- Camp Hill, PA  
**Care Manager**- Maternal Assistance Program May 1997- October 1999

Laurel Springs Center Adolescent Partial Hospitalization Program  
**Therapeutic Staff Support** September 1996- May 1997  
**Mental Health Worker** August 1994- September 1996

Bedford County Employment and Training- Bedford, PA  
Job Training Partnership Act Programs (JTPA)  
**Youth and Older Worker Counselor** February 1993- August 1994

**RELEVANT PRESENTATIONS:**

Sixth Annual Adult Education Doctoral Research Forum, Middletown, PA- December 2010  
Fifth Annual Adult Education Doctoral Research Forum, Middletown, PA- December 2009  
Fourth Annual Adult Education Doctoral Research Forum, Middletown, PA- December 2008  
"Postvention Plus- Dealing with a Death in the Schools"- PASAP Conference, Pittsburgh, PA- March 2007  
"Adolescent Development: Risk & Resiliency"- Student Assistance in Schools EDU450, Penn State,  
Harrisburg, PA- Fall/Spring Semesters  
"Adolescent Depression and Suicide"- Carlisle School District Faculty In-service, Carlisle, PA- November 2006  
"Risk & Resiliency"- Harrisburg School District School Psychologists In-service, Harrisburg, PA- September 2005  
"Adolescent Self-injury"- West Perry School District Faculty In-service, Elliottsburg, PA- January 2001  
"Bullying at School"- Palmyra Middle School, Palmyra, PA- October 2000