

## 9/11 Hero Dog Lives on in Clones

**Five genetic duplicates of search-and-rescue dog now belong to Trakr's owner.**

*By John Schwartze*

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James Symington holds five clones of Trakr, his late search-and-rescue dog. At right is Lou Hawthorne, chief executive officer of BioArts International.

How do you replace the irreplaceable? As science moves into the realm of cloning and all its possibilities, the term "irreplaceable" is becoming somewhat subjective.

With an average price of \$144,000, cloning pets is regarded by some as a luxury for people wanting to relive the company of a previous pet. One company recently tried to redefine the perception of this practice with a unique offer.

In 2008, BioArts International of San Francisco launched its Golden Clone Giveaway contest in which anyone could submit an essay explaining why his or her dog was worthy of being cloned. "This is a controversial topic. We heard from a lot of people who felt we should do something for those who couldn't afford it. We felt a contest was the best way to satisfy everyone," says Lou Hawthorne, CEO of BioArts.

Symington and Trakr take a rest from searching after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

James Symington, a former officer with the Halifax Regional Police, wrote in about Trakr, a German Shepherd Dog who lived and worked with Symington as a search-and-rescue dog for 14 years.

Trakr had an impressive résumé during his tenure. He sniffed out over \$1 million in stolen goods, located the last survivor of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, and received an extraordinary service to humanity award from famed chimpanzee researcher, Dr. Jane Goodall.

His exceptional story caught the eye of Hawthorne, who notified Symington in June 2008 that Trakr was the winner. "Mr. Hawthorne came by my house and surprised us with the news. The opportunity to have Trakr's search-and-rescue legacy live on was one of the greatest gifts I ever received," Symington says.

Shortly thereafter, biopsy materials necessary to produce the clones were taken from Trakr and the process began.

The exact number of clones that would be produced couldn't be determined, although BioArts could aim for a probable target. Hawthorne and his staff felt the world would be better off with more than just one since Trakr was "a grade-A dog," according to Hawthorne.

The cloning process took place in South Korea where a native dog breed served as surrogate mothers to the five successful embryos. The first puppy was born December 8, 2008, and the last on April 4, 2009, and all are said to be in excellent health.

On June 14, 2009, Symington was presented with five perfect replicas of his beloved Trakr, whom he plans to keep and continue using in the same capacity as their predecessor. "It was very emotional and exciting. I know these puppies cannot replace Trakr – he was one of a kind – but knowing that someday they may play an important role in other rescues is truly a remarkable gift," Symington says.

Unfortunately Trakr never met his clones, as he passed away of old age at 16, a few weeks before the five puppies were presented to Symington. When it came to naming the five clones, Symington chose to pay tribute to Trakr by giving a nod



to the dog's combination of qualities: Trustt, Solace, Valor, Prodigy and Déjà Vu.

"The latter symbolizes the fun and joy Trakr brought into my life," Symington says.

When asked how he tells the dogs apart and how similar their dispositions are to Trakr, Symington stated that he used different colored collars, but that each pup seems have his own unique personality. "They are very alert, curious, determined, and starting to demonstrate the unique ability to problem-solve – all characteristics that contributed to Trakr's success as a police and search-and-rescue dog."

To learn more about the Trakr clones and their story, visit them on Facebook.

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