

## Keeping Your Dog Happy

**Authors Billy Rafferty and Jill Cahr suggest caring for your dog's mind, body and spirit.**

*By Katy French*

Posted: September 28, 2009, 5 a.m. EDT

Billy Rafferty was born to groom. From his childhood attempts at stuffed-animal styling to his 25 years of experience in the dog world, from grooming dogs for celebrity clients like Oprah Winfrey to becoming a sanctioned show judge and speaking all over the country, he knows his stuff.

Now teamed with animal lover and writer Jill Cahr, the duo is hoping to share Rafferty's gospel of grooming and dog care in their new book "Happy Dog: Caring For Your Dog's Body, Mind and Spirit."

"We set out to teach people how to improve their dogs' lives," Cahr says.

After experiencing first-hand the effects of owner ignorance and being bombarded by misinformation in the many books he's read, Rafferty says he'd always wanted to share his knowledge – and address the many grooming myths and misconceptions he's encountered over his career.

The book covers many topics on overall dog care, including nutrition, safety, exercise, and, of course, grooming. Rafferty emphasizes the importance of grooming both at home and by a professional. "Your vet probably doesn't touch your dog from head to toe," Rafferty says. "I can find so many different things on the dog while grooming it: bumps, parasites, injuries, abnormalities in the skin, for me it's a huge gauge for the dog's health. Vets sometimes call to thank me."

Aside from the health benefits, Rafferty maintains grooming can help you and your dog in many ways. Regular grooming at home can save you money – good news for owners in this economy. "If you brush your dog at home, your cleaning bills will be less," Cahr says. "If you take five minutes a day to inspect your dog, you can even find a health problem before it gets expensive."

It can also help improve your relationship. "When you're touching your dog, you're maintaining his health and bonding with him," Rafferty says. Grooming helps dogs look and feel better, too. Rafferty says he's seen many dogs enter a salon nervous and crouching, but leave with their spirits uplifted and a visible bounce in their step. And when Cahr and Rafferty volunteer to groom dogs at their local animal shelter, many of the dogs are adopted soon after.

The duo wants to help owners provide the best care they can and wrote the book with that in mind. For readers who can be overwhelmed by information overload, the book breaks everything down into an easy-to-understand format, with a little wit thrown in for good measure. Rafferty offers grooming tips and tricks on things you can do at home like bathing and brushing, and let's you know what tasks your dog would prefer to let the professionals handle.

But beyond the basics of grooming and general welfare, Cahr and Rafferty address an essential aspect to dog ownership that is often overlooked. "The spirit is something that a lot of people don't think about," Cahr says. "Spirit is the happiness of your dog. If you want to keep your dog's tail wagging, you've got to nurture him and treat him well."

That means spending extra time and attention on your furry friend. Rafferty, for example, has employed this philosophy in his own life by making his Portuguese Water Dog his new running partner, with excellent results.

"You should include your dog as much as you can in your life," Cahr says.

The pair hopes that owners will benefit from the book and take their new-found knowledge out into the world.

"We want owners to be more connected to their pets and want people to be connected to the community," Cahr says.

Cahr and Rafferty are passionate about giving back to the animal community and are donating a dollar of each sale of the book from their website, HappyDogLand.com, to the American Humane Association.

Katy French is the Assistant Editor of DOG FANCY.