

The Voice of Westminster Dog Show

Meet David Frei, the man who gives the venerable dog show its voice.

Steve Dale

Surprisingly, Frei never had a dog as a kid. It wasn't until after college at Oregon State University (with a bachelor's degree in animal science) that the Frei family adopted Morgan, a mixed-breed dog. David says his parents weren't "dog people," until they met Morgan. Frei moved out on his own in 1969, but Morgan stayed. "They certainly had the better part of the deal," Frei says with a laugh.

He began showing Afghan Hounds in the early 1970s. "Aside from liking the dogs, I liked the competition," he says. "After all, I grew up in a sports-minded family."

David's late father, Jerry, was head football coach at the University of Oregon, and an assistant coach and director of college scouting for the Denver Broncos. David is a great sports fan. He worked in public relations for the San Francisco 49ers, and ABC Sports. He also operated two sports bar/restaurants in Seattle, where he ran his own public relations agency.

Frei later became a persistent and dogged competitor in the show ring. While he wasn't an overnight success, he earned respect over the years. He and his first wife, Sandy, campaigned Ch. Stormhill's Who's Zoomin Who to the number one Afghan Hound in 1989, and retired her as the (then) all-time top-winning bitch in the breed. Ch. Calais Sunrise at Stormhill won the 1999 Afghan Hound Club of America National Specialty. By now, Frei was well established in the dog show world.

In 1999, Frei took over as public relations director for the Delta Society (a not-for-profit agency supporting ways to improve human health through service and therapy animals). That's when he first got hooked on animal-assisted therapy, and met another fan of AAT, Cherilyn, who became his wife in 2000.

It wasn't typical love-at-first-sight. "I had heard him talk about animal-assisted therapy on TV," says Cherilyn, "and David is so incredibly passionate about what he does ... I found that attractive." She laughs, adding, "I'm serious. My dogs became immediately attached to Dave. For them it was love at first sight. So, I suppose, I had to fall in love too."

Cherilyn has a master's degree in chemistry, and another in theology. "You know who obviously has the brains in this family," says David. With Cherilyn, David discovered a newfound spirituality, which was further expressed with the 2002 publication of *The Angel By My Side*, a memoir co-authored with Mike Lingenfelter. The book is about the intense relationship Lingenfelter had with his dog Dakota, who could predict heart attacks. Among other honors, *The Angel By My Side* earned the 2004 Best Book award from the Dog Writers Association of America, and also the Merial Award for work best highlighting the human/animal bond.