

PET TALES

Turning the page

BY GINA SPADAFORI
Universal Press Syndicate

While 2008 was a bad year for many (and good riddance to it), we don't want to turn the page on the year without mentioning a few books that belong on the shelves of every pet lover.

First up, Marion Nestle's "Pet Food Politics: The Chihuahua in the Coal Mine" (University of California Press, \$19). The Pet Connection team realized early during the 2007 pet-food recall that the numbers of sick and dead pets were in the thousands and that the problem of tainted Chinese ingredients went far beyond pet-food safety. And in fact, the pet-food deaths were the first of many problems with Chinese products — toys, milk products, toothpaste and more.

Dr. Nestle was also among the first to see a large problem, and she turned her attention to the "canary in the coal mine" aspect of the pet-food industry. Her "Pet Food Politics," written for an academic press, is a little dry at times, but the information and its implications are eye-opening. It's a call to action that we can all hope the new Obama administration hears before there's a repeat of the tragedy, perhaps next time with American children as the victims.

Sticking with the academic, Dr. Irene Pepperberg has long been known within the community of bird lovers, but her work became a national sensation only when her research partner, an African grey parrot named Alex, passed away at the age of 31 in 2007.

Pepperberg, a comparative psychologist,

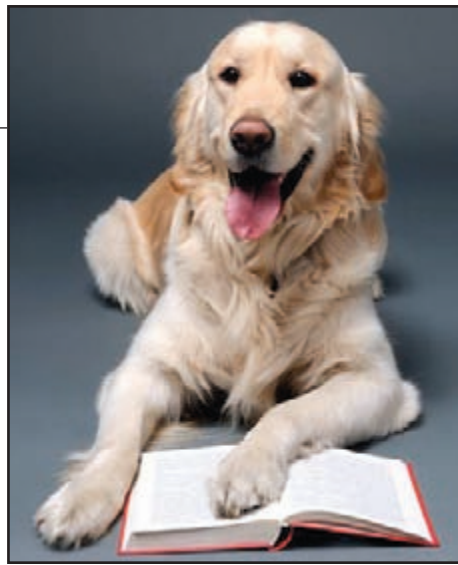
had dealt with the dismissal of her colleagues for three decades regarding the parrot's ability to communicate, not just mimic or respond to cues. Although there certainly remain skeptics, Alex and Pepperberg convinced many that "bird brain" was not a pejorative.

"Alex & Me" (Collins, \$24) deftly blends the personal and the professional, the setbacks and the triumphs, the fight for recognition, and the bond between two souls that could be broken only by death. Alex told Pepperberg he loved her the night before he died. Anyone reading this book will love him, too.

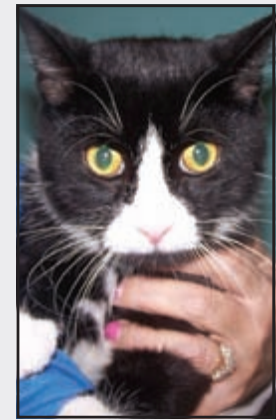
Another lovefest has developed around Dewey Readmore Books, the library cat of Spencer, Iowa, who died of old age late in 2006. I've been a fan of Dewey's since Gary Roma's "Library Cats" documentary came out a few years back, and I'm certainly not alone. Dewey (named for the Dewey Decimal System in a contest by the small town) became a tourist attraction. Like all good animal stories, "Dewey: The Small-Town Library Cat Who Touched the World" (Grand Central, \$20) is really about people, especially librarian Vicki Myron, who wrote the book along with Bret Witter.

Dewey was dumped in the book-return as a kitten in the middle of winter. The throw-away kitten never wanted for anything again and gave much in return. I'm a sucker for libraries and orange kitties, but I defy anyone not to love the story of Dewey. Especially since he's one of a dying breed — between liability issues, allergies and people who just don't like cats, few libraries will ever see the likes of Dewey. And that's a shame.

Public buildings may be increasingly intol-



Pet of the Week



>>Bucky (#428734) is a 9-month-old tuxedo cat whose leg was broken. Bucky made a tremendous recovery and has only a slight limp. He's a loving lap cat who gets along with other pets. All he needs now is a forever family to love him back. Adoption fee: \$75



>>Chester (#185370) is a 9-year-old Lhasa apso who has had a rough time... His coat was matted, and he had a severe flea infestation and an eye infection. Once his coat was shaved off, he socialized with everyone. Although Chester is 9 years old and blind in one eye, he is healthy and active. Adoption fee: \$25

To adopt a pet

There are many dogs and cats available at the Lee County Animal Services shelter at 5600 Banner Drive, Fort Myers. Call 533-7387 (LEE-PETS) or visit www.leelostpets.com. Adoption applications may be downloaded or completed at the shelter, which is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. Please use the animal's ID number when inquiring about it. Adoption fees for dogs are \$25-\$95. Cats are \$25-\$75. Adoptions include sterilization, vaccinations, and license if at least 3 months old, flea treatment, a 10-day health guarantee and more. Loving foster homes are needed too. Go online and click on "Foster Homes".

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