

# Tail-waggers share a love of farms

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN  
Capital Press

GRAND RONDE — “Away!”  
At the command, “Marc,” a 3-year-old border collie, bounded left, driving a flock of Polypay sheep across the hill’s ridgeline.

Water droplets dappled pastures and low-hanging clouds formed a garland around the trees. The morning air smelled earthy.

“Down. Good boy.”

The voice belonged to Piper Klinger, Marc’s owner, who runs this sheep ranch with her husband, Bob Klinger.

Bob, 77, has worked with sheep for more than 50 years and made his name as Oregon State University’s sheep herdsman for decades before retiring to full-time ranching.

Publicly, the Klingers are known for high-quality Polypay sheep, innovative pasture management and “agrivoltaics,” meaning grazing sheep under solar panels; privately, they say one of the most significant features of their farm is their dog, Marc.

One common thread many farmers share is their love for dogs. The farm dog, some say, is the “unsung hero,” “part of the family” and one of the most important parts of rural life.

In December and January, the Capital Press solicited stories from readers about their dogs. Some rescued animals or protected crops; others have simply brought joy to their owners’ lives. These are a few of their stories.

## ‘Marc’

“Been doing sheep for some 50 years. Never thought I’d have a dog this good,” Bob Klinger told the Capital Press.

An old friend gave Marc to the Klingers last summer, when the dog was 2 1/2 years old.

The Klingers say Marc is the ideal working dog. Piper said he learned the commands to herd sheep in no time at all. Bob said Marc “works the sheep in the chute like a pro” for sorting and vaccinating. When the Klingers need to pass through a section of electric fencing, Marc keeps the sheep from escaping through the gap.

He intuitively knows which critters are friends and which are foes, they say; he hunts down mice and voles, but he lets the farm’s chickens climb on his head, and he recently befriended an otter in the creek.

Plenty of border collies are good working dogs, said Piper. What makes Marc unique, she said, is that although he enjoys herding, he’s not obsessed with it. Instead, he’s gentle, affectionate and sticks close to Piper’s side.

Piper smiled, scratching Marc’s head, as she described their first day together.

“When he hadn’t even been here an hour, he walked over to me, put his foot on my leg and looked at me like, ‘Here I am, I’m yours.’”

## ‘Sally’

Pete Paradis scooped his 3-year-old grandson, Elias, off his lap and slid out of his truck. As the two approached the mouth of an alleyway that sloped through the vineyard, three white Maremma sheepdogs sauntered toward them.

Paradis said the smartest of the three — though a bit people-shy — is “Sally.”

“She’s not the nice little dog that comes up on your lap. This is about as far from that as you can be,” said Paradis. “She’s more like a farm animal, a domesticated wolf, if you will.”

Sally is a working dog, and she does her job well.



Bob Klinger, left, with his wife, Piper Klinger, and ‘Marc’ in between.



Linda Bangs, left, and her husband, Mike Guebert, with their dog ‘Athena.’

Her main role is to protect the Silverton farm’s 100 or so Boer meat goats against predators. Alone, she faces off coyotes. Alongside the other two dogs, Paradis said she can make cougars think twice.

Sally’s deeply bonded to the goat herd. That she was down near the vineyard this winter morning, in fact, was because she had heard the maa-a-a-a of goat kids in the nearby barn.

“Isn’t that right, Sally?” Paradis said.

Sally looked up.

Paradis said Sally’s intelligence startles him.

At dusk, she leads the goats to the barn or underneath trees. When it’s her dinnertime, she takes turns with the other two dogs, making sure one is always on watch duty.

Although her first duty is to her goats, Sally has also protected the vineyard. Paradis recalls one night, a storm-downed tree ripped open a fence. The goat herd could have entered the vineyard block and destroyed it, but Sally guarded the hole until her master arrived in the morning.

“Sally sat on the inside of the fence, looking at me like, ‘It’s about time you got here,’” Paradis said.

## ‘Athena’

Mike Guebert and his wife, Linda Bangs, co-own Terra Firma, a small farm producing pasture-raised meat, eggs and milk in Corbett. They run a Community Supported Agriculture

program.

Ironically, Guebert and Bangs, who now run a meat operation, were once urban-dwelling vegetarians before they were exposed to humane livestock production methods.

The couple’s Great Pyrenees, “Athena,” guards their pasture-raised dairy cows, goats, pigs, poultry and waterfowl.

The couple recall that one night, Athena woke them up with persistent barking. Guebert said he threw on his boots and ran outside. There, he found two injured coyotes near the turkey pens, pieces of coyote skin and fur scattered about and Athena “sitting as if she’d been there the whole time.” Athena even showed her owners a portion of the fence that needed repair.

“She’s an amazing protector, and she’s also just the sweetest dog,” said Bangs.

Bangs squatted down, running her fingers through Athena’s white fur. They were on a green hill inside a multi-species grazing paddock where dairy cows and meat goats munched together.

The couple were so pleased with Athena that they wanted to pass on her genetics, so they bought a male dog, “Zuri,” and across about six months, Athena had two litters, 20 puppies total.

“She’s an amazing mom,” Guebert said.

## ‘Kit’

Liana Livingston, 18, and her sister Emmeline, 11, say their dog “Kit” — named after American frontiersman Kit Carson — is one of the best parts of farm life.

Kit, a border collie-McNab shepherd cross,

helps drive 120 or so beef cattle at a time on the family ranch in Starkey.

“It saves a lot of time when he helps move the cows,” said Liana Livingston.

The dog also scares away coyotes and even had a battle with an angry badger.

Although Kit’s a working dog, the girls say it’s his fun personality that makes life colorful.

Kit is 5, but the girls say he still acts like a puppy. After the Livingstons feed the cows and are about to put away hay strings, Kit likes to grab the strings’ ends and pull them for a game of tug-of-war. He also loves catching rocks and snowballs, and can shake hands and play dead.

When it snows, the Livingstons say, Kit is “very skilled at hooky bobbing.” The girls’ parents drive their truck through the snow, and the girls, along with their siblings and Kit, hook onto the bumper and squat down for a ride.

The only problem, Liana said, is that sometimes Kit grabs her pants while she’s holding onto the bumper.

“He definitely keeps farm life light-hearted,” she said.

## ‘Poppie’

Robin Wylie, 64, who owns a ranch in Nampa, Idaho, and manages several farms across eastern Washington state, said her dog, “Poppie,” fills a hole she didn’t think anyone could fill.

When her previous dog died, Wylie was devastated.

“I said to my friend, ‘I don’t want to get another dog yet,’” she said.

But her friend ignored her comment and called her the next day to say she found another dog for her, a 10-month-old crossbreed that a cattle rancher was giving away.

“We really bonded,” she said.

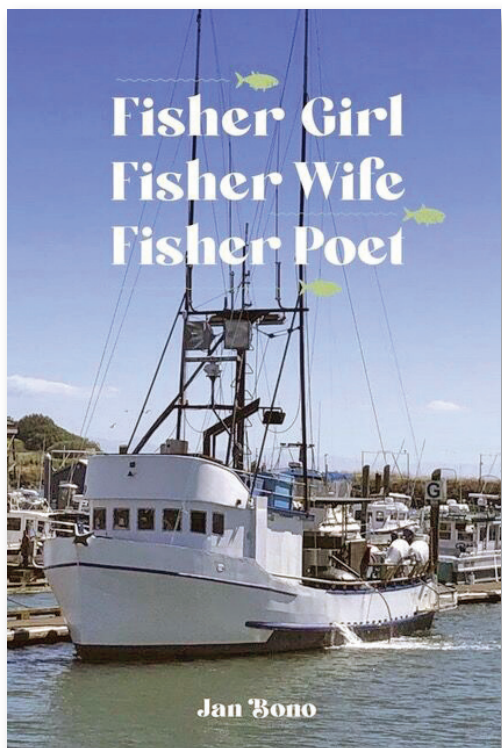
Wylie said Poppie is incredibly smart and even knows the days of the week. Wylie’s daughter visits every Monday at 9 a.m. Each Monday just before that time, Poppie waits by the door for her arrival.

“How can she know what seven days is?” said Wylie.

Poppie helped Wylie’s heart heal after the loss of her previous dog, and she also brought life and laughter to the farm. She’s interested in everything and often sports a green manure mustache. She’s gentle with Wylie’s grandchildren, but she’s tough when she needs to be, driving away skunks, stray dogs and coyotes. When inside, Poppie often curls up under Wylie’s desk, keeping her owner’s feet warm. Poppie has some English shepherd in her, which Wylie suspects makes her a good “all-purpose farm dog.”

“She’s the most perfect farm dog I’ve ever had,” said Wylie.

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On Wednesday, March 3 at 6 p.m., Long Beach Peninsula author Jan Bono will discuss her new book, “Fisher Girl, Fisher Wife, Fisher Poet,” with Coast Weekend editor Alyssa Evans.

Bono has lived by the water and maintained a strong connection with fishing throughout her life. The book features fishing-inspired poems.

Catch the interview at [facebook.com/coastweekend](https://facebook.com/coastweekend) or [zoom.us/j/99950024448](https://zoom.us/j/99950024448) (enter meeting ID 999 5002 4448).



Readers can ask Bono questions during the event. Anyone is welcome to join.

Copies of the book are available to order online at [janbonobooks.com](https://janbonobooks.com).

Questions? Email Evans at [aevans@dailyastorian.com](mailto:aevans@dailyastorian.com)

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