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Animal Assisted Play Therapy™

Risë VanFleet

Tracie Faa-Thompson



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FOREWORD BY AUBRY H. FINE

“Sometimes just sitting close to her makes me feel so much at ease. Putting my hands on her back and rubbing her soft fur help me open up. The more I rub Ketzy, the happier she looks. She just sits there very patiently. When I stop, she quickly looks up at me, letting me know how much she wants me to continue.” This is just one type of comment that I hear on a weekly basis when my therapy dogs interact with the children they work with. They act as the catalyst that motivates many of the children to do things that they may otherwise be less willing to do.

The field of animal-assisted interventions is undergoing a metamorphosis at this time. The growing pains are challenging for the young field, but the growth spurts are worth the discomfort. Over the past 50 years, we have witnessed a tremendous transformation in the area of human-animal interactions and the general public’s awareness of the value of animals in our daily lives. The field is now at a crossroads where science appears to be catching up with what many of us have known for years: animals are good for our well-being.

The early pioneers in AAI such as Boris Levinson and Elizabeth and Samuel Corson serendipitously discovered the therapeutic power of the human animal connection. Just like those early pioneers, I too stumbled upon the tremendous value of incorporating animals in my work with children with developmental and learning disorders. The year was 1973 and I was directing a social skills training program for children with learning disorders. Who would have fathomed that a small gerbil would’ve helped me witness the power of this dynamic connection between a child and a companion animal? I was amazed to watch a typically very restless, fidgety young boy sitting still and staying focused while the gerbil gently moved within his palms.

The Corsons were the first to coin the interaction between a person and a therapy animal as a “social lubricant.” They observed the warmth that was generated in the interaction and believed it acted as the most critical ingredient in forging the relationship. Dr. Corson was

a Professor of Psychiatry at Ohio State University in the early 1970s. He initially worked at the University Psychiatric Hospital studying the effects of stress on dogs. Corson happened to observe a teenager reacting to a dog that was barking. The animal seemed to act as a catalyst and helped the boy become more comfortable in expressing himself. This was the first time that the staff noticed that the boy had spoken. After that initial encounter, Corson began to study the effects of using dogs to help other patients who seemed to be unresponsive to traditional treatments. Similar to the outcome of his initial observation, Corson found that the young adults opened up much more quickly when the dog was present and was engaged. It was this initial discovery, as well as the work of Levinson, that got the professional mental health community to consider the value of animal-assisted interventions. Over 50 years later, these seminal insights are still at the cornerstone of why animal-assisted interventions are considered valuable. The animals provide a source of comfort that promotes a warm therapeutic environment.

Of course, some things have changed since that time. We now see so many more people attempting to therapeutically incorporate animals in diverse therapeutic settings. What was once primarily applied only by mental health professionals, animal-assisted interventions are now initiated by a vast multidisciplinary group of professionals who also recognize the value of animal-assisted interventions in their own disciplines. They often apply AAI as a complementary form of therapy. This rich landscape of professional applications is now in need of more evidence-based best practices. These data-driven practices will help professionals develop protocols that will employ animals effectively with a diverse population.

Perhaps one of the most significant misunderstandings of human-animal interactions is the potential misrepresentation of the impact of animal-assisted interventions. This overemphasis, perhaps unintentional, may also be due to the media's spin attempting to sensationalize the relationship between animals and people. Ever since the early 1980s, a period of initial research that correlated the presence of friendly dogs with a positive impact on anxiety, people have become infatuated with the animal/pet prescription. Although I truly see myself advocating for these relationships and explaining the therapeutic benefits that can be derived, I am extremely realistic and cautious in not exaggerating the inherent impact of these interactions.

Although scientists today argue that we do not have a clear understanding of the long-term effects of AAI on humans, as well as a clear picture on the physiological mechanisms that impact these outcomes, I am convinced that these interactions are helpful. That is to say, that animal-assisted interventions should not be considered as a panacea, but should be considered as a valuable life opportunity that can make a difference. Unfortunately, the status of human-animal interactions has become so sensationalized by the popular press that the outcomes have become ambiguous. I have become more tempered and realistic in my explanation of the efficacy of AAI, especially when the outcomes are effectively planned for. However, leaders in the field must be cautious with their interpretations and not misguide the public in supporting outcomes that aren't clearly validated. So as can be seen, we truly are at a crossroads of balancing our anecdotal comments with scientific explanations and evidence.

This book will provide its readers with a tremendous source of recommendations and suggestions of how to apply animal-assisted interventions in play therapy. The book is very comprehensive. It not only provides a strong foundation for its readers but also provides sound advice of how to incorporate animals safely and effectively into a therapeutic setting.

I'm often asked what the future for animal-assisted interventions will look like. I initially discuss the landscape where there is a definite need for more empirical evidence demonstrating the efficacy of animal-assisted interventions as a whole. I have already laid down some of the arguments that now plague this field. Much of this void is due to the lack of resources that have been made available to study the impact of these interventions in very specific settings.

Beyond the need for more balanced scientific scrutiny, one of the major changes that I believe will occur in the next couple of decades pertains to the need for more public policy modifications. These alterations could help foster a more positive climate that could more effectively support human-animal interactions in our communities and in health care. Additionally as noted earlier, there is a strong need to develop clearer evidence-based protocols that support the use of animals as a complementary form of therapy. It is imperative that we learn how to better implement strategies that are more suitable for specific populations. We are now witnessing an explosion of various professionals beginning to apply animal-assisted interventions in diverse

settings. Developing and investigating best practice approaches are critical for the field to flourish.

When I began working in animal-assisted interventions, there were really very few resources made available on what one needed to consider to do this work safely and properly. I was forced to use what I considered common sense, but quickly realized that there were so many other areas that I needed to consider to best incorporate animals into my clinical regime. Over the past 40 years, I have spent time investigating, studying, and problem-solving various mechanisms where animals could be incorporated to enhance the effectiveness of my interactions with my clients. Learning to think out-of-the-box and applying problem-solving methods conceptualizing how AAI could be helpful to our clients are perhaps the first steps that need to be considered. It is also critical when applying animal-assisted interventions to consider not only the benefits that animals provide for humans but also the attention required to address the welfare and safety of all animals engaged. To conduct AAI effectively, one must be considerate of the animals that are involved in the various treatments. Without doing our due diligence to foster a safe environment for all involved, we are not doing our jobs well.

VanFleet and Faa-Thompson have put together a wonderful resource for professionals who are interested in incorporating animal-assisted interventions in the play therapy environment. After reviewing the book, I was very impressed with the practical suggestions that the authors provided while also providing a sound theoretical framework. The book is quite easy to read and is very comprehensive. The authors provide not only a rationale for incorporating animals in a play therapy environment but also clear guidelines on how to initiate AAPT.

The chapters in the book flow in a logical progression. In Section One, the authors present an overview of what is Animal Assisted Play Therapy and define the terms that need to be understood. Sections Two and Three provide very practical discussions that expose the reader to issues that must be considered to integrate AAPT professionally. The authors take great effort to explain the competencies that should be expected not only in the therapist but in the animal as well. The Third Section has several chapters which present practical ideas of how to incorporate animals directly into Animal Assisted Play Therapy. Clearly written examples and valuable scenarios are also integrated throughout the chapters. The scenarios provide a glimpse into how the applications make a difference. Within the final section, the authors

discuss numerous professional issues, including the topics of ethics and animal welfare. All in all, I believe that this book provides an excellent overview for readers interested in this very specialized area.

It is evident that the field of animal-assisted interventions is at a crossroads in bridging the gap between current practices and more evidence-based best practices. This book provides readers with a clear direction on not only how to employ AAPT but how to do this correctly and ethically. I have always believed that therapy animals help clinicians go under the radar of children's defense mechanisms and help foster a more therapeutic relationship. Integrating animal-assisted interventions and play therapy synergistically should make a tremendous difference in the lives of many needy children and be supportive in their journey of healing.

Aubrey H. Fine, EdD
Professor and Licensed Psychologist
CA Poly State University, Pomona
Author, *Our Faithful Companions: Exploring the Essence of Our Kinship with Animals* and numerous other books
Editor, *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Foundations and Guidelines for Animal-Assisted Intervention* (all 4 editions)

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FOREWORD BY PATRICIA MCCONNELL

A classic tenet in ethology is that an animal's welfare can be evaluated in part by observing whether it plays or not. The absence of play in otherwise playful animals is an important indicator that something is terribly wrong—the animal is sick or so stressed that all impulses to play have been suppressed. Play is not, however, a trivial pursuit engaged in as a luxury. It is an essential part of living, growing and surviving. As Risë VanFleet and Tracie Faa-Thompson remind us in this important book on Animal Assisted Play Therapy, “Play is now viewed as essential to the survival of many species, including our own.”

In spite of the importance of play, play often gets a bad rap as being something done by children, a charming yet foolish behavior left aside as one moves on to more important things. Except, we adults pay as much attention during the nightly news to the fate of a ball (be it basketball, football, tennis, etc.) as we do to world events. This is but one of many indicators that play is important to our health and well-being, and is an integral part of who we are as a species.

We now know that childhood play is critical to normal and healthy development. No wonder play therapy, described as “the language of childhood,” has come into its own in the past few decades as a window into a child's mind and a way of providing children opportunities to heal and grow within a safe environment. What would be more logical then, than combining a child's love and connection with animals with their ability to use play to express themselves, and to use play to progress into a safe environment?

Logical yes, but as the authors remind us, Animal Assisted Play Therapy (AAPT) is a serious endeavor that requires skill and expertise. As a veterinarian pharmacist explained to me once when talking about medications, anything with the power to do good also has the power to do harm. That is equally true of AAPT, and the reason this book is

so important. Dr. VanFleet and Ms. Faa-Thompson take the profession of AAPT to its highest level, describing both the scientific theories and research behind AAPT, the field's best practices, and a bounty of case studies to provide context and the all-so-important details.

An emphasis on compassion and benevolence shines throughout the book, emphasizing the importance of relationship between animal and therapist, therapist and client, client and animal. This book provides a bounty of information to anyone interested in any form of animal-assisted therapy and interventions, and no doubt will become a classic in Animal Assisted Play Therapy for years to come.

Patricia B. McConnell, PhD, CAAB
Author of *The Other End of the Leash* and
The Education of Will and numerous other books and resources

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PREFACE

When we embarked on this journey to practice and teach Animal Assisted Play Therapy™ (AAPT), we didn't realize just how different it was from other forms of human-animal interventions. We knew we were emphasizing the play component in order to enhance emotional safety for clients of all ages, but as more and more people came through our training workshops, they often commented on how much it differed from other animal-assisted programs in which they had participated.

Over time, we built upon the core principles we thought deserved greater attention by professionals involving animals in their work. This book reflects our desire to share the field of AAPT with a broader audience.

AAPT is different on several dimensions. First, it adds the elements of playfulness, humor, and lightness to the therapeutic process. This puts clients of all ages at ease, and it can make the process enriching for the animals, too. In addition, for child clients, play is a primary way that they express and work through their needs. Second, it focuses heavily on relationships—and how the relationship between therapist and animal must be developed in positive, mutually respectful ways in which the animals have a voice and choice whenever possible. This relationship provides a model for clients so that they can strengthen their own relationships, not only with therapy animals and their own companion animals, but within the human relationships in their families and communities. We have also defined the nature of the human-animal partnership in AAPT rather specifically, and include numerous ideas on how to achieve that. Third, the principles that guide AAPT are inclusive of different species of animals. Very often, the field of human-animal interventions seems segmented into those who work with horses and those who work with dogs and other animals. While we strongly believe that practitioners must learn everything possible about the species with whom they work, we discuss in this book how the principles and practices of AAPT can be readily applied to dogs, horses, cats, and others. Most of our examples focus on dogs and horses because they

are quite different from each other as species, but we hope that readers will see from this how AAPT can work with other species just as readily. Fourth, AAPT provides a different model of risk management that allows animals greater freedom to make choices throughout the process without being pushed into interaction with clients. It is not uncommon in AAPT for the animals to suggest alternative activities which, coupled with therapist facilitation and processing skills, can enhance therapeutic outcomes! This freedom benefits animals as well as clients, as we illustrate in several places in the book. Fifth, AAPT includes an ever-present attentiveness to the animals and their well-being. This takes considerable awareness and skill in understanding animal body language, interactions among animals, interactions between clients and animals, and knowing one's animals extremely well. The importance of animal welfare is stressed throughout the book, as is the idea that this emphasis is also good for the therapeutic process. Sixth, AAPT values the natural environments of animals, and the process encourages the expression of natural behaviors by them. This enhances the mutuality of relationships developed and the impact of the interventions, as well as the parallels that can be drawn between the animals' lives and behaviors and those of our clients. Seventh, AAPT can be applied across the lifespan. Play is not just for kids! Animals appeal to those of all ages. Putting the two together can be helpful for clients from young to old. The practice of AAPT and application of its principles are limited only by the creativity of those who use it! While all of these elements can be found in different animal-assisted interventions, they are combined and emphasized uniquely in AAPT, and that is the focus of this book.

This is a book written for therapists and the associates who work with them. We very much appreciate the many volunteer and visitation programs that bring animals to provide social support to those in need. There is much information available online and within many valuable organizations for those types of animal-assisted interventions. We believe, however, that including animals in our professional work requires a somewhat different preparation, partly because of the ongoing nature and intensity of the relationships, as well as the need for creativity in helping clients meet challenging personal, interpersonal, rehabilitation, and learning goals. The role of the animals shifts with professional work. While the thrust of this book is on mental health professionals, the approach and methods we cover can easily

be adapted for use by allied health professionals, such as physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and recreational therapists, among others. Furthermore, it has many applications in the educational world as well, and teachers and school counselors have found that AAPT offers more ways to work with animals that assist the educational process. We have had the opportunity to train and learn from professionals in all these fields, and the excitement they have expressed about facilitating therapeutic and educational goals through AAPT has fueled our own.

This book was written with professional practitioners in mind, as well as the paraprofessionals who work in tandem with them. We have provided details about how AAPT is conducted and the considerations that go into using it to meet various goals. We have not duplicated material about the field of animal-assisted interventions that is contained in other key volumes, but we have referenced those works for therapists to read. The practical nature of the book might be useful for academics who teach about animal-assisted therapy and researchers who are interested in conducting much-needed studies as the intersection of animals with therapy continues to develop. We have included many illustrative case examples that are offset throughout the book by smaller typeface and indentation. We hope that the book will stimulate greater understanding of AAPT, paving the way for more program development and research to come.

This book is the culmination of our combined 75 years of experience working with animals and conducting therapy. We both have been accompanied along our own journeys by remarkable animals, colleagues, and clients. Our current and recent animal friends, whom you will meet in these pages, have accompanied us as we thought about what to write, as we wrote it, and as we revised it, realizing that there are always more things to say. They provided us with amusing distractions as we played with them, and they offered some nudges and licks that encouraged us. Along our own individual paths, and certainly in our combined journey, we have done our best to listen to animals—not only our dogs, horses, and cats, but the others with whom we have worked, and even the farm animals and wild animals we have encountered on our life adventures. They are the true authors of this book because they have inspired us and given us new perspectives and ideas. They have shown us what is possible when people rediscover nature and our fellow animals living within it and learn to accept them for who they are.

Parts of this book come from my (Risë's) book published by Professional Resource Press in 2008, *Play Therapy with Kids & Canines*. That book received the Dog Writers Association of America special award for best of all books about therapy and assistance dogs for that year, the *Planet Dog Foundation Sit. Speak. Act. Award*. Much has been learned since that time, and this book extends that understanding, including what has been learned and how AAPT works with dogs, horses, and other animals. We fully realize that we will be learning much more after this book goes to press, but we are hopeful that we will be joined by many who resonate with our ways of approaching our lives and work with animals and clients.

Because this field is developing rapidly, we have created a website section in which we include articles, photographs, videos, and other information that extends and supports what we have written in this book. We will continue to update this website section with resources we consider to be useful for achieving the competencies needed for conducting AAPT responsibly, effectively, and with humility. This section can be found at www.iaapt.org and is available to everyone.

Readers may not be able to use all of the suggestions in this book because animals have different personalities, capabilities, and interests. The exciting and flexible aspect of AAPT is that the involvement of individual animals and the development of specific interventions are drawn from the unique characteristics, strengths, and needs of both the therapy animals and the clients. As therapists develop the competencies for conducting AAPT, the world of possibility opens up. Our case examples throughout this volume are to share glimpses of that world, and how AAPT can be conducted in a way that is beneficial to clients as well as animals. In all examples provided, identifying information has been changed to protect the privacy of clients. At times, composites of several clients or families are used, but the examples represent realistic descriptions of AAPT at work.

We are pleased for this opportunity to share AAPT with you, and we are always open to feedback, inquiries from researchers, and new ideas. We hope you find this work of interest and that it will facilitate dialogue as theory, research, and practice in AAPT evolve.

Risë VanFleet
Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania, USA

Tracie Faa-Thompson
Hetton Steads, Northumberland, UK
September 2017

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PART I
THE FIELD OF
ANIMAL ASSISTED PLAY THERAPY™

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Chapter 1

BEGINNINGS

Even the expert was once a beginner.
–Unknown

Both of us have lived with animals all our lives. Before we met, we followed our own paths into what is now known as Animal Assisted Play Therapy™ (AAPT). When a field is relatively new, the paths that lead people to it vary greatly. We thought it might be of interest to share our own journeys, both our separate ones that led us, unbeknownst to each other, to combine play therapy with animal-assisted work, as well as the path that brought the two of us together in our long-time collaboration in developing this field. We hope that this book will provide a context for the ways of working with animals in therapy. We have learned from many sources, not the least of which are the many animals and the many clients that have been part of our lives. We have also learned from each other and the many colleagues with whom we have shared this journey thus far.

THE MAKING OF A PLAY THERAPY DOG (RISE)

*Whenever we ask anything of our animals, we need also
to ask ourselves two questions: “Why?” and “How well have I
considered my animal’s point of view?”*
–Risë VanFleet

Kirrie

Tippy Cat was just 6 months old when he showed up on our property nearly starved to death. As we fed him, he came closer to the house and eventually moved into our mudroom on cold nights and during the

winter. Our relationship with him was mostly functional. He tolerated us as long as we took care of his basic survival needs. He avoided physical contact, and he quickly ran away from other people. The extreme neglect from his early life seemed to interfere with his ability to bond with us. Even when another stray cat, Bart, decided to live with us, Tippy Cat tolerated him but avoided most interactions. Although he did not seem afraid of our two Beagles, Tippy Cat had little to do with them. I jokingly told colleagues that Tippy had an attachment disorder.

After 5 years like this, Kirrie, a 1-year-old mixed-breed rescue dog (Border Collie and Beagle) joined the family. She had the energy and persistence typical of Border Collies and the happy-go-lucky temperament of Beagles. She was exceptionally playful. One day, I heard the usually quiet Tippy yowling from a room adjacent to where I was working. I assumed that Kirrie was pestering him to play and prepared to go stop the dog. To my surprise, the scene yielded something quite unexpected. Kirrie was taking the play bow posture and then bouncing around the room. Tippy watched Kirrie for a while and then chased the dog, eventually retreating to a safe place under a chair. The cat reached out a paw to swipe playfully at the dog, and the cycle was repeated. Following Kirrie's persistent play invitations, Tippy Cat initiated the chasing play. I watched, photographed, and videotaped the play for about 20 minutes. This was the first I had ever seen Tippy Cat play. Immediately thereafter, Tippy Cat jumped into Kirrie's chair and curled up to sleep. Kirrie, who outweighed the cat by at least 40 pounds, carefully stepped onto the chair and curled up behind the cat. The cat nuzzled the dog and they slept together in the "spoon position" for nearly half an hour. This play-then-nap-together cycle became a daily event for Kirrie and Tippy. Within 2 weeks, Tippy Cat was spending more time in our family room, playing with Kirrie, rubbing against people's legs, and eventually spending brief periods in our laps. In the ensuing years, Tippy Cat and Kirrie played together frequently, and their play times often were followed by a nap together. Whenever I went outdoors to play ball with Kirrie, Tippy invariably appeared within 5 minutes to watch the game. He watched everything that Kirrie did and frequently initiated expansive outdoor chase games with Kirrie at dusk. They remained friends until Tippy Cat's death at age 16 in 2015. Tippy had become sociable with not only Kirrie; he had become sociable with all people, dogs, and cats for the remainder of his life.

As I watched this remarkable and sudden transformation of our reticent cat, I strongly suspected that the cross-species play had much to do with it. The play had seemed to facilitate an attachment—between the dog and the cat, and eventually between the cat and the humans in the family. It was then that I began to think more seriously about training and involving Kirrie as a play therapy dog, and about the potential for such work with traumatized and attachment-disrupted children.

For 2 decades prior to this event, I had periodically involved animals in a variety of ways in conjunction with play therapy. Of course, I had animal miniatures and puppets in my playroom since the start of my play therapy work. As an avid nature photographer specializing in Alaskan wildlife, I had some of my photographs of Alaskan brown bears, Dall sheep, and sea otters on the walls of my office and playroom. My inclusion of animals seemed natural enough, given children's great interest in them, but I had never involved live animals for great lengths of time or in particularly systematic ways. In fact, I felt a bit sheepish about involving the animals, as somewhere in my professional development I had gotten the impression that this would be an inappropriate way to conduct therapy. In retrospect, my professional interest in animals and the human-animal bond extended back even further to my graduate school days when I took a number of courses in animal behavior and ethology, assisted with some animal research, and read every book I could find on dogs.

In those earlier days of my career as a child and family psychologist and play therapist, it was children's interest in my companion animals that prompted me to include animals in the first place. I had an office and playroom that adjoined our house, and the animals were usually outdoors when I saw clients. On rainy days, however, the dogs were kept in the kitchen where they usually stayed quiet during play sessions or parent meetings. Children and adolescents frequently asked if they could meet the dogs. With their parents' permission and under my supervision, I let the children give treats to the dogs, pet them, and even taught the children a few cues and tricks that the dogs knew. The children never failed to ask about the dogs or request a short playtime with the dogs once they had met them.

My black cat, Bart, became involved in a different way. He had been named for the marvelous children's therapy book about trauma, *Brave Bart* (Sheppard & Manikoff, 1998), mostly because he was completely black like the story's main character. His personality more resembled

that of Bart Simpson, but I took his photograph sitting with the *Brave Bart* book, and we gave it to children and adolescents in our practice who had loved and benefited from the book. A 6-year-old girl asked to meet the Bart in the photo, and she often played with him while I met with her parents in an adjacent room where we could still watch the pair of them for safety purposes. The child had originally come with her parents for Filial Therapy (FT) sessions after she was traumatized by her father's military deployment immediately after the 9/11 attacks. Filial Therapy worked well to alleviate the family's distress, and they quickly shifted to home play sessions and discharge from therapy. Her parents told me later that when her father was deployed to dangerous regions of the world for a second time, she told them that she needed to "go see Bart again." Around the same time, a reticent and oppositional 18-year-old girl who resented being referred to therapy by her parents, asked to hold Bart during a session. Bart, who is a very sociable cat, seemed delighted and curled up in her lap for the entire hour, purring contentedly and stretching as she petted him. The girl dropped nearly all of her defenses and began telling me her feelings about a number of difficult situations in her past and current life.

Until the playful relationship between Kirrie and Tippy Cat altered my thinking, I had only considered the inclusion of animals as an adjunct to therapy—a brief transitional interlude as families were departing. After I had completed a considerable amount of training with Kirrie, I began working with her more systematically within play therapy sessions. I began reading more and attending seminars on the human-animal bond, animal play, aversive-free dog training, and animal-assisted therapy. Kirrie's first clients were foster children with long histories of challenging behaviors. Although the children typically did well with play therapy and FT, their histories of abuse and neglect, coupled with frequent and unexpected moves within the foster care system, often made the attachment process difficult, with many setbacks. Their responses to Kirrie were dramatic. The foster parents saw it, too. I knew that something was happening that was more than a momentary experience.

I broadened my work with the dog and began an exploratory survey study of the involvement of animals in play therapy. I immersed myself in the literature and had conversations with play therapists, animal behaviorists, positive dog trainers, animal-assisted therapists, veterinarians, biologists, educators, canine search-and-rescue handlers,

and animal lovers. I tried new ideas of my own. I discovered that there was a great deal of conceptual, empirical, and pragmatic literature available as I wandered into fields beyond mine. I realized almost immediately that despite my living with dogs my entire life, I had much more to learn. I attended dog training and behavior conferences, workshops, and trainers' seminars. I volunteered my time to help dogs with behavior problems in local rescues, and eventually met the requirements to become a Certified Dog Behavior Consultant qualified to train dogs and work with those who had a range of problems. I discovered that the more I learned, the more I had to learn! I continue this process of learning, and it now includes learning about horses, cats, and other animals. An entire room of my house is a library of hundreds of books and videos about animal-related topics.

After a 10-year career as a play therapy dog, Kirrie retired when she was 11. Although she still loved the work, I noticed that she showed more sensitivity to environmental stimuli, flinched when touched unexpectedly, and startled to sights and sounds that previously had brought no reaction. Arthritis began to create some stiffness and occasional pain. During those 10 years, however, she did some remarkable work, and she taught me a great deal about the endless possibilities that AAPT brings to clients. Some of her work is described in this book.

Other Dogs

Through the years, I also involved two of my Beagles in AAPT sessions, and with their own unique personalities they added other elements to the work. When I retired Kirrie, I took my time in selecting and preparing another rescue dog to be involved in AAPT. Murrie was found with his mother, a Border Collie, and five littermates as strays along a busy road. He was 8 weeks old when they came into the rescue where I volunteer, and they were all infested with parasites. They were placed in a foster home before I saw them. When he was 7 months old, he came back into the rescue where I met him and assessed him as a potential companion for our family and for possible play therapy work. I adopted him and spent the next 17 months working with him and simply enjoying him. He began helping with professional workshops on AAPT when he was a year old, and began his play therapy career when he was two. Based on his behavioral traits, he is likely mixed with Beagle and Greyhound. Although he is in the early stages of his

play therapy work, he has already given me new ideas for AAPT and will continue to teach me new things.

Most recently Josie Patches, a Beagle mix, has joined our family and I am building my relationship with her and preparing her for AAPT work. She was a stray who delivered five puppies after being brought into rescue, and she and the pups were fostered by a dog-training friend. She is 2 to 3 years old with a sociable, lively, and curious personality. She is playful, has helped with her first workshop, and is expected to start AAPT work in 6 months.

HORSES IN PLAY THERAPY (TRACIE)

I have spent most of my life hanging out with horses. . . .

The rest of my life I just wasted.

–Tracie Faa-Thompson

A Unique History with Horses

I am from a Scottish Traveller background, and my family and ancestors have kept horses for centuries. There has never been a time when they were not a part of my life. As a Traveller, I did not have good school experiences due to the restricted curriculum and biases about Travellers, but I always had the horses to come home to. Still wearing my school uniform (much to my mother's dismay), I would lie on their backs in the field and tell them about what happened at school that day. I had no idea at that age about therapy or what it was, but I always felt so much better after having spent time with the horses.

Every year from the age of 7, I was given a horse of my own to play with. These horses had never been ridden, and the real intention was for me to work with the horses so that my father could sell them again the next year as part of the family business. To me, it was play, and every year I fell for the promise that I would be able to keep this one. My father wasn't being intentionally cruel; that was just the way things were. Once a year, then, my horse would be sold to some other girl who had seen and wanted the horse, and my heart would be broken. It was soon mended, however, when I chose another horse at one of the many horse sales that were prevalent when I was a child.

When I was 10, I met two girls who became lifelong friends. They were also "horse mad." One of the girl's parents had a riding school,

and we used to play with the young horses mostly on the ground or sometimes jumping on them bareback. She, too, used to suffer from her parents selling her favorite horses, so we became kindred spirits. We had a great deal of freedom and fun and spent hours lying about with the horses, loose, grazing alongside us. I also spent a lot of time after school, on weekends and holidays, and during times when we were traveling with horses as my main friends. I wasn't lonely, bored, or sad. I also had many human friends and a lovely big brindle Greyhound mix dog who was my constant companion.

Looking back it was the mix of good friends, horses, and dogs combined with a feeling of full acceptance for who I was (including being a Traveller) that shaped what I would become. We are much more able to accept and celebrate differences in others if we have experienced the acceptance of ourselves. I am blessed in my adult life to have a similar existence to that of my childhood, except that when horses come to me, they stay. I do not sell my horses, as is so often done in the UK when they do not fulfill their owners' ideas and plans. The following quote relates to the thinking behind this common practice:

*You expect them to do your bidding . . . because you think
you own them; you forget they are alive, they have an
intelligence of their own, and they may not do your bidding. . . .*
—Michael Crichton (*Jurassic Park*)

Horses often have many moves in their lives, and no one says it more succinctly than the author of *Traveller* (Richard Adams, 1988) in his fictional story about the American Civil War told through the eyes of General Lee's horse, Traveller, to two stable cats: "Horses are forever saying goodbye" (p. 86).

School did not fulfill all my learning needs, so when I left I worked with horses in a big trekking yard on a holiday camp site (similar to a trail riding yard). I taught riding lessons. I found myself drawn to children who came from multiply deprived backgrounds and impoverished urban areas, including those dealing with domestic violence, drugs, alcohol, and poverty. I gave them free lessons and rides in return for helping with the horses. The children were always eager to help out and didn't complain about the hard work. It was fascinating for me to see the change in them over the 2 weeks they were on holiday. They taught me a lot about human nature as well as some swear words I had never heard before!

At 23 I had a job working with adults with learning disabilities, and from there I started my own Riding for the Disabled (RDA) program. I was, at the time, the youngest RDA chairwoman in the UK. In addition to riding, we did horse management and spent time simply hanging out and building relationships with the horses. This was unusual for that period of time, as most RDA programs offered little interaction between horse and human other than riding. We spent whole days there, setting the horses loose and sharing our lunches with them, even though the sharing was mostly one-way as the horses only had hay and grass to offer in return.

Sailor

I met my husband and taught him to ride bitless on a lovely big horse loaned to us. History repeated itself, and after 4 years of our having this horse the owner wanted him back. She had seen how much he had changed from a reluctant horse who didn't like people to a lively engaged animal. Unhappy with this state of affairs, I returned to the trekking yard where I had previously worked, knowing that they sometimes loaned horses out for the winter. They offered me a 3-year-old Gypsy Cob named Sailor to "sort out" as he was "throwing everyone off" and was deemed dangerous. He came home with me and quickly formed a partnership with my old rescue Arabian, Sabii, despite the age difference.

Very quickly we realized just how special Sailor was. He had a kind soul and was playful and interested in people. We realized that his "throwing people off" was merely the exuberance of a young horse who enjoyed life. Such was his curiosity and love of humans that when we were out riding in the countryside and a car driver stopped to ask directions of us, Sailor inevitably inserted his huge head into the car window, much to the alarm of many an unsuspecting driver. At the end of the loan period, I sold my beloved Land Rover vehicle and bought Sailor as a surprise for my husband, presenting the receipt in a Valentine's card. He has never had such a grand gesture since.

At the age of 27, I trained to be a social worker and specialized in adoption work. Realizing that I needed more specialized training and expertise to help the very traumatized children with whom I worked, I entered an intense 3-year training program in nondirective play therapy at the University of York. At the same time I worked as a social worker and ran my RDA program. I involved young people with abuse histories

in groundwork with horses as a way to help them think about personal safety and self-esteem.

Sailor and Sabii were integral to the work. At first the children were disappointed as they thought they were going to ride the horses. That changed quickly when the children saw how much the horses wanted to engage voluntarily with them. The children reported feeling good about themselves and that they felt wanted. My dogs hung around with us, too. The children leaned on the horses as they grazed or sat in the fields with them while making daisy chains, totally unafraid and trusting of the horses and dogs, in contrast to their distrust of humans. Their trust in my animals eventually transferred to trust in me, too, and the young people disclosed to the animals and me many instances of sexual and emotional abuse that professionals working with them had long suspected. I knew that these experiences were extremely valuable, but I did not consider it therapy. Nor did I attempt therapy until I was fully qualified in nondirective play therapy and could introduce informed therapeutic interventions with clients.

Like Risë, I have read extensively and attended a wide range of equine conferences and trainings (ranging from “Classical” to “Traditional”). I have had healthy doses of equine ethology and behavior. I am familiar with the many manifestations of “Natural Horsemanship.” Some instructors have been good, some indifferent, and some bad. I have also trained in “Equine Touch” (www.theequinetouch.net), continuously observing my own and many other horses for thousands upon thousands of hours. In 2004, I completed the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association’s (EAGALA; www.eagala.org) training programs, and from there formally began conducting equine-assisted play therapy. My greatest teachers have always been the animals and the clients.

Adding Buster

Sailor, as usual, was the star in all my work. As Sabii aged, we bought an untouched 4-year-old Arabian colt named Buster who had been living alone and semiferal as part of a prolonged divorce settlement. He was not used to being around other horses, so Sailor taught him how to interact through play. Play in horses can appear quite rough, with both horses nipping each other’s bottoms and legs and rearing up high, but it was normal play that allowed Sailor to help socialize Buster.

First there came a lot of groundwork with Buster. He was then gently introduced to the wider world and many novel items with Sailor's wise and kind presence by his side. When it was eventually time to ride him, I did so with very loose reins, often allowing the horses to choose their own path. As Buster and Sailor walked side by side, they often engaged in spirited mouth play. This involved playful nipping or if one had a long bit of grass in his mouth, the other attempting to snatch it away.

Sometimes the play was exuberant. One instance when I rode Buster and Risë was bareback on Sailor, the two horses began to play. Buster started rearing up a little and grabbing Sailor's neck with more mouth play. We had to stop that game before he got too carried away. Risë was surprised when I told her that most horse riders would not allow horses to do this as they would deem it dangerous. Risë could clearly see that it was play and that the horses were enjoying their outing as much as the humans. For both of us, that experience speaks to the fundamentals of AAPT: "Leave the horse in the horse." It is a hallmark of the approach that as long as safety is assured, we accept and celebrate natural playful behaviors and ensure that all parties enjoy participating in the process.

Recent Changes in the Herd

We have since added to the herd another rescued Arabian, Lord Charles (Charlie), and a young Gypsy Vanner, Purdy. More recently, two young mini-Shetlands, Rambo and Madonna, have become AAPT assistants. All the horses are geldings, despite the one name that might imply otherwise.

We had a loss shortly before the writing of this book. Due to his being ridden too early in his life (before he came to us), Sailor developed severe arthritis. He was so sociable, remaining engaged with children and adults alike, perking up when clients arrived, always the first to greet them. He clearly loved being involved with people and with AAPT. As his arthritis worsened, he struggled when getting up from lying down and he became increasingly stiffer. After a long consultation with our veterinarian, on a bright and sunny day we had him put down. He was surrounded by his equine, human, and canine friends, who watched the ceremony at his graveside. In later chapters we discuss how to manage the death of a therapy animal, both in terms of our own emotions and those of our clients, many of whom have suffered numerous losses.

In summary, I have been with horses and dogs steadily my whole life and I have engaged in activities involving humans and horses that people have found beneficial since I was about 13. I was not a qualified therapist, however, until 2004, after which I have been offering equine-assisted play therapy on the large estate where my husband serves as farm manager.

A PARTNERSHIP FOR AAPT

We (Tracie and Risë), the authors of this book, are both mental health professionals as well as credentialed play therapists. We first met when I (Risë) was doing a presentation in York, England in 2004 on Filial Therapy, a form of family intervention in which parents are involved in conducting nondirective play sessions with their own children under the tutelage and supervision of the therapist. A couple years later, Tracie attended a more intensive training on Filial Therapy that I conducted in Edinburgh, Scotland. At that training, we both realized that the other was very interested in animals, so we went for a coffee at the end of one day. What became immediately apparent was how similar our attitudes and beliefs were about the role of animals in our lives, and our values about the level of respect and attention to their welfare that needs to accompany any human pursuits in which animals are involved. Beyond that, we both shared a conviction that relationships were the most fundamental and most important aspects of therapy as well as life and work with animals. At the end of that workshop, another play therapy colleague and I drove down to Tracie's farm, met her horses, and we talked some more. We decided to hold a workshop on AAPT together in the UK the following year, which we did. The consistency in our ways of working was so clear, even though Tracie focused on the horses and I focused on the dogs, that we continued working together with annual workshops in the United States and in the United Kingdom ever since. We have also spoken at conferences in a number of countries, written chapters together, and created online courses. The partnership had been born, and our collaborative beliefs and practices are reflected in the pages of this book.