

Chicago Tribune

Sunday

Love Notes

Teacher's mixed signals put romance on a learning curve

Candid Candace

Students take a star turn at Columbia College gala

Say 'Woof!'

Pet photographer Sheri Berliner helps homeless animals find permanent homes

Hips Don't Lie.

Listen to your body. If you've got hip pain,
The Best Minds in Medicine are here to help.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO
MEDICINE

Orthopaedics Center

1-888-824-0200 uchospitals.edu/ortho

Sheri Berliner

Her polished portraits, tireless advocacy have helped thousands of animals find happy homes

BY NARA SCHOENBERG
Tribune Newspapers

Sheri Berliner's handsomely restored North Side greystone has the usual vintage light fixtures, framed art and updated kitchen, but when you climb the stairs to the second floor and peer down the hallway, you're greeted by five tightly closed doors.

Berliner's upstairs rooms and oversize bath are doubling as luxurious semi-private accommodations for some of the 16 homeless cats she is sheltering until they can be adopted.

She is also providing temporary refuge for two hamsters and caring for her own (rescued) menagerie: three cats, two dogs, a rabbit, a bird and 14 goldfish.

A professional photographer and tireless advocate for abandoned animals, Berliner, 51, is best known for her polished photographic portraits of homeless dogs, cats, birds, rodents and birds.

By distributing her photos through shelters, her own Petraits Pet Photography website, Facebook, animal adoption websites and her email list of 6,000 friends and fans, Berliner has helped thousands of down-on-their-luck pets find permanent homes.

The following is an edited transcript.

Q: How did you get interested in homeless animals?

A: I was at work for one of my previous jobs — I worked as a creative manager for a trade association — and I overheard (that a) woman's husband was going to come home that night and drown the litter of kittens that had wandered onto her roof. I'd never had a cat, never really liked cats, never really thought about them, but this idea just ate away at me. I took (two kittens) home, and one lived 20 years and one lived 18 years, so it kind of started me on this realization that there are animals that need help.

Q: What about the photography element?

A: I had huge photos of my own pets all around my previous home, and my friends said, "You really should start a business." I was like, "Who's going to hire me to photograph pets?" And as it turned out, shelters started hiring me and people started hiring me to photograph their own pets.

Q: How do shelters pay you?

A: It's typically their fundraising arm or their volunteers, and it's not my full fee. I used to volunteer my time, but if I'm going



ANTONIO PEREZ/TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS PHOTO

Sheri Berliner uses her connections, and photos, to be an advocate for animals. On the table is a poster of cats Berliner has rescued; she uses it to advertise her business.

Drawing inspiration

Sheri Berliner picked up an old hobby to find inspiration. After not having done a sprint triathlon in 15 years, she returned to the sport two years ago. "I was completely out of shape," she says. "I couldn't even run a mile. So I started doing it, and it kind of draws you in. It's very addictive. I figured if I don't do it now, I'm never going to do it again in my life."

to continue and support my own animals, I have to charge something. When I did it for free, they would call me every day, and I had no time for anything else.

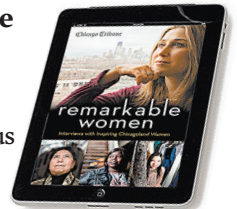
Q: What was the hardest animal to place?

A: One of the toughest ones I ever took in was a black lab puppy, absolutely gorgeous, picture-perfect, but he was basically bought and put out in the yard. By the time I got him, he was an adolescent,

no training whatsoever, no housebreaking, a nipper. He just had no manners. I think I adopted him out probably four times, worked with half a dozen trainers, sent him away for training twice to different facilities. He went through the Prison Tails program, where prisoners actually had him (in training) for two months. I worked so hard on that dog. I was like, "I am *not* going to euthanize you. You are going to be a good dog!"

Nominate someone remarkable:

Know someone we should feature in this weekly column? Tell us about her at **sunday@tribune.com**. And check out our e-book, "Remarkable Women: Interviews with Inspiring Chicagoland Women," at **chicagotribune.com/ebooks**.



Q: Where is he now?

A: He has a home, and the guy loves him, sends me updates all the time. It's the happiest thing to hear that someone who was so difficult is doing so well now.

Q: You don't do reptiles, do you?

A: I used to have a leopard gecko that I rescued myself, and I decided to keep her. She was really sweet. I've (found homes for) hermit crabs, turtles, birds, mice, rats, hamsters, rabbits, cats, dogs. I've even sent out (photos of) horses. Its a rare occurrence, but I have.

Q: Did you have animals as a kid?

A: My mom loved animals, so I remember we were in a parking lot, and there was a puddle, and there were frogs jumping around, and she brought home these frogs and we took care of them. We had the little turtles with the little plastic island, and then my parents got me a rabbit, and we had a succession of dogs. When we moved to Chicago (from New Jersey), my grandparents said, "Here's money, take (the kids) to a shelter, get them a dog." So we got a dog when I was 13, and it kind of started my photography of pets because I photographed him in every room of our new house.

Q: That's an early start.

A: My folks have a funny story about me. (When Berliner was 4) I think we were at the Jersey shore. We were at this restaurant, and all these horseshoe crabs had come up on shore and they had flipped over, and I was like "Look! They can't turn over! What can I do?" I left the restaurant, went down to the beach and flipped them all over. Everybody in the restaurant was clapping.

Check out Sheri Berliner's photos and the many deserving animals in need of homes at her website at **petraits.com**.

nschoenberg@tribune.com