

**I SAY** By Melissa Walsh

# Work like a dog



I ran into Duke the police dog at the Dirty Dog last week and congratulated him on his latest arrest.

Graciously, Duke let me get a picture with him. His handler, Officer Tim Harris, suggested I follow him on Instagram. I did.

I'm not one to get giddy around celebrity, but Duke is special.

For his service, Duke is frequently covered in

the Grosse Pointe News and other local newspapers. The camera always captures Duke smiling. He clearly loves his job.

Duke's job: public safety specialist.

A German shepherd finds joy in a job. I know this from personal experience.

I adopted a German shepherd-mix — Paczek — on Paczki Day — while living in Hamtramck in 1996, a year before my first son was born. Paczek bonded with my first-born right away, then with my twin sons, born in 1998 — the year we moved to Grosse Pointe — and with my youngest son, born in 2003.

Paczek was a valuable, beloved member of our family until he died of a stroke in 2009. For me, he was a walking and workout buddy and cuddler. He was my parenting helper and home alarm system.

Paczek had a knack for looking after my babies. He'd go into razor-back mode when strangers came near them until I said, "OK." And he kept close watch over them as they played — cleaning their faces as needed.

Paczek's job: nanny.

Griffin came to us six weeks after Paczek died. The 110-pound German shepherd and 6-year-old retired leader dog imme-

diately found purpose in my pack of boys — a perfect career change into wrestling, playing ball, pulling skateboards and scooters, jumping into the backyard football game or snowball fight, chasing things and getting muddy with boys.

Coincidentally, Griffin was born the same day as my youngest son, Marc. So the pair were my second set of twins. This twin connection led to Marc's ability to translate Griffin's Scooby Doo-like utterances. When speaking with his family, Griffin talked, attempting to enunciate human words. He only barked at strangers.

"What did Griffin say?" I'd ask Marc.

"He said, 'Can I have a treat?'" Marc might reply with certainty.

Griffin passed away last year at age 13.

Griffin's job: brother.

When Griffin died I fell into volunteering to watch friends' dogs when they went out of town. A frequent guest was Raleigh, a large German shepherd. We discovered Raleigh to be an outstanding athlete, especially in lacrosse. He demonstrated great skill in checking a guy cradling a ball across my backyard to knock it out of the net pocket, catch it in his mouth and dart off at a high rate of speed. Raleigh also attempted to capture the heavy lacrosse balls my boys wound up in the wand to shoot on the net, but would stop short of cranking one in when Raleigh leapt into the crease.

Are there lax helmets

for German shepherds?

Raleigh's job: athlete.

Last fall, while camping in the Upper Peninsula with my boyfriend and his dog, Beau, a German shepherd mix, on three occasions Native people stopped to greet Beau, informing us that Beau is a "spirit dog."

"Could it be because Beau has one blue eye?" we wondered.

Shrug. Well, we already knew how special Beau is to us as a peaceful friend and perfect listener.

Beau's job: healer.

Feb. 4 marks the anniversary of Griffin's death. It's time to invite another dog to join my family, perhaps another with German shepherd genes. I wonder what job will suit our new family member.