

# HOW TO TAKE GREAT PHOTOGRAPHS OF YOUR PETS

By

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How to Take Great Photographs of Your Pets

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***Regarding the use of this e-book, I'd like to offer you this direct quote from Seth Godin's 2000 IDEAVIRUS:***

“You have permission to post this, email this, print this and pass it along for free to anyone you like, as long as you make no changes or edits to its contents or digital format. In fact, I'd love it if you'd make lots and lots of copies. The right to bind this and sell it as a book, however, is strictly reserved. While we're at it, I'd like to keep the movie rights too. Unless you can get Paul Newman to play me.”

***Except for the part about the late Paul Newman, please heed the above.***

***Thank you, and enjoy.***



*Dedicated to Tom Kazo (above left, with K-9 Trep and their haul from their first narcotics case; right, with five Golden Retriever siblings), best friend to all animals, my husband, soulmate and partner, still sorely missed by many, whether they have four feet or two;*

*to my daughters, Christianna and Jamie Cannon, for their excellent editing abilities, loving patience, and invaluable assistance,*

*and to Stacey, Seth, and Shannon at The Pet Planet Magazine, who do so much to help our animal companions in so many ways.*

## GREAT DANE, NOT-SO-GREAT PHOTO

Ever since my very first portrait commission in 1973, I've had to deal with resource photos that were often, to put it mildly, rotten. I was being represented by an art gallery and so never met the person who gave a single photo of his Great Dane to the gallery owner and commissioned me to do its portrait. The client wanted a *side* head shot, close up; the photo was of the dog all the way across the room, sitting on a couch covered with laundry *and looking straight at the camera*. As it was a purebred, I was able to use reference photos and breed standards from Great Dane books at the library. If it had been a unique mix, a mutt, I'd have been out of luck! As far as I know, the client was happy. I was paid and thrilled it worked out.



***“Ren” is one of those unique mixes; notice that his ears are even different from each other!***

## THE HEARTBREAKING DISCOVERY

Over the years, I've been privileged to meet a lot of great people and to portray their much-loved animal friends in pastel, oil, charcoal or ink. It's surprisingly often, however, that I meet someone who just lost a pet; a person in pain who would love a portrait to honor and remember this special pal. So, I gingerly ask this question, “Do you have any photographs of him?” and am girded for this heartbreakingly frequent response, “Well, um...maybe... actually, no, we never got around to it.”

Or if they do have photographs, most bereaved owners understandably see their beloved pal through a rose-colored filter. They gaze adoringly at these photos,



thinking of Fifi's wonderful qualities and of the family event where the photo was taken, while I see a lump of carbon with eyes like laser beams. The purpose of a portrait is to accurately represent a likeness of the subject at his or her best, so if the subject is no longer living, without decent reference photos I must regretfully turn down the commission. I cannot guess or make it up: my gift has been to always capture a sensitive likeness of my subject. For that I need solid resource material.

### **LEARN THE BASICS**

The purpose of this paper is to share some basic information about how to take great photos of our animal companions, good enough to serve as resource material for a painter. Even if you never commission a portrait, at least you will have avoided that heartbreaking revelation I just described. Let me add that many people also do not know how to take photographs of their children, and I believe that many of my tips may help you with that important mission.

### **HONOR YOUR YEARS TOGETHER**

Commissioning a full-color, formal portrait of your beloved animal companion, to honor and recall your years together is an investment of your money and the artist's time and you both will be happier if you can work together to create the best representation possible. Even if you never intend to commission a portrait, by taking my advice to heart, you will know how



*One of my truly awful photos for "Harley D" which was taken because her owner wanted her posed on her favorite blanket. I felt jinxed when I took her many reference photos! This one took several sittings from life. Below, her finished portrait.*



to honor your pet's specific characteristics with well-composed photographs. It's worth repeating: when your pet passes on, what will remain of this significant relationship? Let's hope it's more than a shoebox jammed with photos that show only a furry blur devoid of personality. Avoid that tragedy! You will have your memories, but not much else to prove to anyone else what a unique friend you had.

Most people believe that taking pictures is not hard, and consequently they don't put much effort into it. Nowhere does this lack of attention show up than in photographs of their pets. I don't mean to sound grouchy, only experienced and a little sad. What I've learned from shooting thousands of fairly decent photographs is that taking good ones is just a little harder than taking bad ones. It's just a matter of paying attention, really, and learning a few basic concepts. Like most things in life. It's my fervent wish that reading my words will inspire you to learn how to take great photos of your precious pet.

### **PORTRAITS FOR THE PRIVILEGED**

Once upon a time, portraits were commissioned only for the very wealthy, and painted from sittings and preliminary drawings. The artist moved into the client's household for weeks, if not months. The invention of photography changed all that and much more for artists. There still are a handful of portrait painters who follow that time-honored tradition. Who these days has time for hours of sittings, or a mansion and servants to host an artist? Not most of my clients! Only once have I been commissioned and then hosted by a client. She lives in Tennessee and rather

than transport her Clydesdale down to Florida, we decided it would be best for me to fly up there, stay for three weeks and paint the magnificent “Diamond S Buc” on site.

### ADVENTURES IN ANIMAL PORTRAITURE

The ideal combination for me is to meet my subject personally, and take my own photos and special notes. If my client has fairly decent photos I am always pleased to add them to my reference material. Then, during the painting of the portrait, I like to make at least one visit to the client’s home to see my subject for a “sitting,” show the portrait, and absorb comments (good and bad) from those who know my subject the best. These digital days, I may email work-in-progress photos to my eager clients.

As my primary medium is the portable one of pastel, I have been known to set up my travel easel in a barn, in front of a horse’s stall, in the living room, or in the back yard, wherever my subject is comfortable, and paint as fast as I could. When I was painting a K-9 German Shepherd for his police officer partner, my subject would pose in the back of their patrol car, pulled up on the sidewalk in front of my house. Wonder what the neighbors thought?

As much as I enjoy the challenge of painting from life, most



*“Buc” by his barn, ridge cows beyond, Appalachian Mountains in the distance, portrait below. And yes, I was tempted to stay there forever and paint the mountains and farms of Eastern Tennessee!*



sittings have come about because the reference photos I had were just not good enough. Not having good photos has cost me many wasted hours and much anguish at the easel. At least I have had Photoshop for almost ten years! Zooming in on my computer is much better than using a magnifying glass!

One client kept me waiting for a year while he kept sending me photographs of his horse that were blurry, too far away, badly lit, from odd angles, and so on. Back in that distant pre-digital day, I was charging ten bucks to take photos for my clients, just to cover cost of film and developing. Talk about false economy! How many rolls did he take and develop on his own? How much of his own time and money did he spend? When he finally broke down and let me do it, I had what I needed in five minutes.



*Me circa 1980 at the long-gone Walking S Ranch, improvising without an easel. Notice the handful of hay on the car to keep my model's interest.*

### **THE SQUEAKY STRANGER WITH THE WEIRD BLACK BOX**

However, a confession: I don't always take the best photographs for my work, either! Remember, when I visit someone's home for a photo shoot, I am always at a disadvantage. I am seldom familiar with the layout and the best-lit areas. I have to make friends with my subject, quickly get a feel for his personality, and usually have to do the same thing with others in the household. I must soon find the best spot with good light and few distractions. And then once the stranger and the dog's people start doing weird stuff like setting up a camera, playing with toys and



speaking in funny voices, even the friendliest dog may be put on guard and possibly decide I am an intruder. Dogs just don't understand why the stranger puts a big black box in front of her face, with a big eye-like thing on the front of it, while emitting odd squeaks. Why do they have to sit, stay, pose? It's unnatural!

It's up to me to direct the action, to be aware but relaxed, friendly but not pushy, respectful of my subject's personal space. Dogs in particular easily pick up the scent of a tense human. Cats are more likely to come to me if I am polite and don't grab them up when I enter their home. I read my subject's body language and never walk right behind horses I don't know well. Thus far, no kicks, bites, or scratches, only portraits that have made their owners gasp/laugh/cry with delight!

You won't have these problems! You will have an idea where the sun falls at certain times of day and where your pet likes to hang out, and your pet already knows you.

### **DONNA'S FIRST RULE: NO FLASHING**

Here's my First Rule of Great Pet Photographs, and I cannot declare it too strongly: AVOID FLASH PHOTOS OF YOUR PET and pretty much everything else, if you want to really show off its best qualities. Front-on flash photos are flattened, with weird black shadows behind everything and the eyes almost always exhibit the dreaded "red-eye," or "eye-shine." I'll discuss the causes of this phenomenon in a bit.



*The female Tibetan mastiff (on left) growled at me for almost the entire session. Both of these very large dogs were behind me, under control of their loving owner. At least, he told me they were!*

### **DONNA'S SECOND RULE: POINT OF VIEW**

My Second Rule has to do with Point of View. Even though we generally look down at our pets, a photo taken from our elevated vantage point is distorted. Although this comical effect can be used well by greeting card companies, it's completely useless to the animal portraitist. More on POV in a while.

### **VISUAL ATTACHMENTS DON'T ALWAYS MATTER**

Yet here's a seeming contradiction: there can be a difference between taking a photograph for the sake of the photograph and a photo which an artist will use for reference! Actually, this reference photo can break many rules of "good" photography. If a photograph is just stunning in and of itself, turning it into a painting may seem, well, redundant. So the less-successful photo may allow the painter to pull out that well-worn artistic license and make that infamous silk purse from that clichéd sow's ear.

An example: remember when your dad took that picture of Grandma in front of the Christmas tree, and the topper looked as if it were coming out of her head? *As long as the lighting is good*, the portrait painter would not be concerned with a spike appearing to protrude from her skull, only the loving expression on her face. That spike is called a visual attachment, and the painter can ignore it, as well as the garbage can next to an otherwise brilliant photo of the family spaniel. Although Photoshop is frequently used to remove such blunders, careful shutterbugs plan their photographs and do not rely on crutches.



*“Max” was kind of a nervous boy who didn’t care for the camera, and kept looking at me for reassurance. Even though foreshortening his muzzle was challenging, I liked his sweet smile! Notice leash, held by my assistant—his trainer, Tom Kazo—to keep him where I need him to be. His portrait may be seen on my website.*

## SIDE LIGHTING IS YOUR FRIEND

In photography, and in most types of art, *there is nothing more important than the light*. Yet, the powerful noontime sun overhead is almost as bad as a flash for flattening the subject. And please avoid harsh full-front daylight—how many photographs have you seen where the subject was squinting oh-so-attractively into the sun behind the photographer, and the photographer’s shadow was clearly visible? Notice how many movies seem to be filmed either in early morning or late afternoon? That’s to make use of the glorious qualities of side lighting to reveal the form and describe the textures. Repeat after me: “*Side lighting is my friend, no matter the subject.*” Shadows will also soften if the day is overcast. Back lighting can be beautiful, but difficult to handle for the amateur photographer. Usually, the subject has a bright halo surrounding an underdeveloped, too-dark silhouette. Promise me this: wherever you are, you will pay attention to the light source.

## YOU, TOO, CAN BE SPIELBERG OR COPPOLA!

Please, also take the time to learn how to compose your subject. Did you ever see a movie about making a movie, where the actors formed open rectangles with their hands and peered through them? That’s the most portable of viewfinders. Maybe if you practice this in public, someone might mistake you for a film director! When I look through my camera’s viewfinder, I am already composing my painting. You too must be aware of the little world inside the rectangle. Place your subject



*“Sable” had far surpassed the usual life span of a Great Dane when her owner commissioned me to paint her portrait. I felt lucky to catch her in this beautiful shaft of light.*

thoughtfully within its boundaries. At least with a digital camera you have the luxury of reviewing your shot and then taking a better one. Gone are the days of running to the drugstore or mailing off your rolls of film. Remember back in the last century when one-hour photo labs made us all rejoice? Now even that seems so primitive! We have come a long way in just a few short years.

### LEARN WHILE YOU PLAY

Let's get you started on the happy road to successful pet photography; if you have your camera handy, just practice looking through its viewfinder. (I'll wait.) Get familiar with placing things inside a rectangle, and your camera's controls and options. Even though there are probably more selections on today's least expensive digital camera than you'll ever use, you need to know the basic ones that work for you. When the moment comes to catch that great shot, you want to know your camera. ***Great photographs are less about the complexity of the equipment and more about being in the right place at the right time with a camera that is ready to shoot.***

### CAMERAS I HAVE KNOWN AND LOVED

Here's a disclaimer: I am not the world's best photographer, nor do I aspire to be. I am primarily a painter and photos are a tool for capturing fleeting effects and details so I can turn them into paintings. But I've always loved taking pictures! My first camera was a Brownie. In my teens, I owned a Polaroid Swinger; my dad was an early adopter of Polaroid. The camera I learned the most from was a



*The finished pastel portrait of "Sable" shows that at her owner's request, I touched up her graying muzzle a bit. A complicated brindle coat such as hers means I have to practically paint every hair!*

manual, non-SLR (single-lens-reflex) Minolta. No bells. No whistles. No light meter. Only one lens that could not be removed. But it taught me how to compose and attain some great shots. A couple of SLR Minoltas, a Nikon or two, hundreds of single-use cameras and at least ten thousand photos later, I am delighted to now be digital. Since I take so many photos from my canoe to document the deeds of Wildlife Research Team, I am happy to own a seven-megapixel waterproof Pentax Optio.

### **THE JOY OF DIGITAL**

I still have much to learn, such as balancing the tradeoff between speed versus high resolution images. Perhaps one day I'll upgrade to a digital SLR. But I've made a joyful discovery: a lot less light is needed to capture a digital image than to expose film. So, natural indoor daylight, or even lamplight may suffice to grab a beautiful photo. If it's not quite right, there are now many types of photo-imaging programs to correct the image.

Even better: once you import your photos into your computer and wipe the camera's memory card, you are all set for another free practice session! You can now take as many photos as a *National Geographic* photographer without worrying about "wasting" film. My digital camera has paid for itself several times over now that I don't have to buy nor develop film. It's very liberating! So go ahead and play, you have absolutely nothing to lose.



*“Martina” is an American Eskimo dog who, along with her mate, “Valentino,” were my first “digital dogs.” See his portrait, and one of them together, on my website. Fortunately, I love to paint the many colors of white!*

## CAPTURE YOUR CAT WITH YOUR CELLPHONE

The cellphone camera is a hot innovation in photography, especially as the technology gets better and their quality keeps climbing—many cellphones now feature two- or three-megapixel cameras. Wasn't that long ago when expensive digital cameras boasted that many; what are we up to now, eight megapixels, ten? One of my recent portraits was of a cat whose main reference photo came from her owner's iPhone. She emailed me the photo of Luna (at right) and the resolution was of good enough quality for me to print out and hang on my easel. When I needed more detail, I looked at my computer monitor. Well, artists have always embraced technology!

## AVOIDING THE SLAB OF HAM EFFECT

I'd like to walk you through one of my typical photo sessions. Let's start with dogs, as they are so much easier to photograph than cats. We'll work our way up to feline photography. Generally, we shoot outdoors in order to get the best light. I make the appointment for earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon. Why? Side lighting, remember! In the summer, it's also cooler and easier on the animal. There is a very brief window of opportunity for a photo session with dogs as they will soon start panting, their tongues loll out, and then you have what I call "that slab of ham effect" which is less than desirable for a portrait. Then they will usually want to lie down in bored exhaustion, depending on the breed of dog. Some



*"Luna" is my very first "iCat"!*



may need to run a few circles to calm down. I tend to brush up on the breed characteristics prior to my visit!

My ideal situation is to have three people working the shoot: me of course, the owner, and another person familiar with the dog. More than that can be too exciting for our subject, who needs to be happy, yet relaxed. I usually bring a little squeaker with me, and ask the owner to have the dog's favorite toys on hand, but out of sight. I have the owner stand just a bit behind me and to one side. The friend holds the dog's leash. I sit on the ground or a low chair, making sure I am stable, and positioned so that the sun will fall to the side of, and somewhat above, the dog. Everyone speaks in cheery, but calm, voices.

My position relates to the height of the dog. Remember Rule Number Two, Point of View, mentioned earlier? My goal is to be at her eye level, or not too far above, to avoid distortion. Yes, with a dachshund, this means I've had to get pretty low. (Do not wear good pants to a dachshund photo shoot.) Of course, if you look too odd, the dog may wonder what the heck is wrong with you, and become alarmed. Putting a small dog on a table or bench might frighten him, unless he's used to being groomed on a table. Remember the dog's comfort comes before yours. Always ask the owner about his dog's preferences, and use your best judgment.



*The shy and sweet “Alfalfa” was not an easy dog to photograph, even though his best pal, Tom, was next to him for reassurance and his beloved owner, Robert Seitner, was holding his leash. Black dogs are often hard to photograph. Fortunately, Mr. Seitner treated me to wonderful snacks during the several painting sessions! “Alfie’s” portrait may be seen on my website.*

The reason for the leash is to keep the dog from leaping forward to stick her nose into the lens, maybe lick my face, since I've so obligingly gotten down to her level! I want to play, right, right? Unless your dog is obedience trained and will stay on command, and few are. Ask the person with the dog to have her sit between four to eight feet away from the camera, or even further; this depends upon your camera and also the size of the dog. Be ready to adjust your position rather than have the dog moved too much. Keep your session short, maybe only ten minutes at most. Then have everyone take a break but stay in the area; I've gotten my shot during our recess, when the pressure was off to perform. It's always up to the dog, so watch her for signs of distress.

### **THE MOST FLATTERING POSE**

In general, the best pose for a painted animal portrait is a three-quarter view, meaning, the head is turned slightly so you can see one eye completely and the other one just a bit. A side shot can show a noble profile; but really does not do justice to the expression which dwells in a dog's eyes. Life comes into an eye when the light passes through the orb, another reason for careful timing and placement of your subject. Achieving the artistic effect of "foreshortening" a long cylinder in a two-dimensional space can be challenging, although I've done it quite successfully. (This tip also works for horses; was it Jerry Seinfeld who asked a horse, "Why the long face?") However, a full-face view works best for pets who don't have long muzzles; a Pekinese, certain monkeys, or a cat come to mind.



*“Lucky” displays the perfect 3/4 view, with just enough tongue to show off his friendly smile!*



## TENNIS, ANYONE?

The easiest dogs to photograph, in my experience, are retrievers. To get a smashing shot, I've held a slobbery and beloved tennis ball in my left hand and the camera in my right, and, Gotcha! Perfect shot of that eager expression, ears up, happy smile, no prob, as long as he's not launched his slab o' ham just yet. Most dogs look best with their ears up. My little plastic squeaker has worked well to get ears up, although I don't want to paint a startled expression, just an interested one full of life, love and intelligence.

## WATCH THE SLOBBER, BE HAPPY

Some more tips: having the dog look at the owner is the best way I've found to get that loving look in her eyes. Avoid using food as a reward, to keep the dog from salivating. Slobber strings can be a real problem with mastiffs, for example, even if there are no treats in sight. The dog may not be hungry, and some dogs get aggressive when there's food around. Better to have a favorite toy, or even something to toss into the air, or to make a funny noise to get the dog's attention. Remember that the best way to train a dog is by using your tone of voice. Most dogs are happy to be rewarded with praise alone.

Speaking of rewards, what a feeling to know you've gotten that perfect shot! And you will know it when you get it, mark my words! Once I believe I have that good shot for the main pose, I take more photos, some at odd angles. I must record markings on the forehead (*see Sequoia at right for this type of shot*) or feet, an



*One of my typical photos taken to record the unique markings on my model's pretty face. The finished portrait of "Sequoia" is on my website.*

unusual cowlick on the neck. As it's my job to capture the uniqueness of my subject, I must immerse myself in the details. Especially with the luxury of digital!

### **FELINE PHOTOGRAPHY: 80% PREPARATION AND 20% OPPORTUNITY**

Photographing cats is a very different matter. Remember that cats don't "do" anything, unless it pleases them mightily. With cats, there may be a lot of "wait and hope." So all of my advice on preparation of your camera, knowledge of the best-lit areas in your home, and familiarity with your pet's behavior is even more important when felines are to be in focus. This section is also of use to owners of other, less-trainable animals: guinea pigs, rabbits, ferrets, birds, even reptiles.

Never more does the time-honored 80/20 Pareto Principle come into effect than it does here, as 80 percent preparation and 20 percent opportunity.

### **PET OWNERS ARE PREPARED AND PERSISTENT**

Preparation includes teaching your pet, any type of pet, that to be handled is a good thing. At some point in her life, your cat will need to visit the vet, or perhaps the groomer. It *is* possible to train cats to perform, just ask your friendly neighborhood lion tamer! But on a less fearsome level, it's feasible to teach a young kitten how to walk on a leash and ride happily in a car; wish I had photos of my dear departed Spitfire doing both! We could easily take him anywhere. In this regard, as a responsible pet owner, you must add persistence to preparation. When your cat (or bird, guinea pig, monkey, rabbit, reptile, etc.) is used to being picked up and respectfully and lovingly handled, he will also be more easily photographed.

So don't succumb to the myth that cats are not trainable; they only want you to believe it so they won't be called upon to do things, *heavens, how very doglike!*

### **YOUR HOME: A WILDLIFE SANCTUARY**

How do you think all those wildlife photographers get their fabulous shots? Well, of course they spend thousands on their equipment and training, but it still comes down to being in the right place at the right time. They may even employ scouts to seek out where their subjects are most likely to be, as my late husband, Dr. Tom Kazo, was for *National Geographic*. Think of your home as the Serengeti or the Amazon: pay attention to the "game trails" and other photo-likely locations, set up a "blind" where you achieve the best angle to "shoot" your own elusive prey. Get your kids involved, as they are always tapped into their creativity. Your most memorable photos will likely be their interaction with your family's pets. Know what your pets like, especially their favorite toys, as you may be able to set up some great shots. And always keep Point of View in mind when photographing small critters; being eye level with a hedgehog is something everyone should experience!

### **FROM THE SMALL TO THE TALL: EQUINE PHOTOGRAPHY**

Many animals, but horses in particular, are liable to appear distorted in photographs if the head is extended out too far in front of the body. Horses as photographic subjects have much in common with dogs, as both can be trained,



*Double portraits are always a challenge, but especially with horses who are different sizes! In most cases, you must take separate photographs and combine them, so you must pay extra attention to the direction of the sunlight.*

both held for the pose. I like to use the three-person configuration with horses, too.

The owner of the horse will know best what will get those ears up!

*(Although at right, Barbara is not getting much interest out of Sequoia.)*

Again, try not to use food to get the horse's attention, as slobber will ensue and the mouth will be contorted during chewing of the treat. Position yourself so you are somewhat in the front of the horse and to her side with the head well up and turned just a bit more towards you. It's that three-quarter head shot you are seeking, which is very suitable for any breed of horse. Horses have beautiful eyes and I've always enjoyed capturing the expression in the fully-portrayed eye, rather than having a less-interesting profile view.



*Well, so much for my rule of No Flashing!*

## **RESEARCH THE BREED**

As I learned with my very first commission, it's also important for the animal portraitist to research specific breeds of any pureblooded animal before the photo shoot. Arabians have different breed characteristics than, say, Appaloosas or Tennessee Walking Horses. In my experience, proud owners who have invested a chunk of change in a specific breed, are aware of, and want to display their horse's best show qualities. Of course this can be true for dogs and cats, but as most of my

canine clients have been pets, their owners were less concerned with meeting breed standards, more concerned with showin' the love.

### **MORE HINTS FOR HORSES**

Point of View with horses is just the opposite of taking photos of small pets: you are now looking up at them instead of down. But comically-distorted photos will again be the result if you are not careful. Do your best to be at the horse's eye level, even if you have to hold onto a fence; just don't get too close or the result will be skewed. I've used a telephoto lens back in my 35mm days, which allowed me to stay well back from the animal's personal space while acquiring a great shot. Telephoto lenses require more light and possibly a tripod to steady the camera, but are superb to have for a trip to the stable, the pasture, or even the zoo. Always be aware of the angle of the sun as you position yourself and the horse.

### **PREVENT THOSE GLOWING EYES**

As promised, a brief discussion of the annoying phenomenon known as "red-eye" in humans, or "eyeshine" with many types of animals. Well, the good news is that if you follow my First Rule and don't use flash to take your photos, you will never have to deal with it! The strong light of the flash is actually bouncing off the reflective rear of the human eyeball, called the retina, and gains the red color as it travels through the tiny blood vessels which nourish the ocular tissue. The wider the pupil, the more light passes through, and



*Even the meek Alfalfa becomes a monster dog due to eyeshine in this flash photo.*

the larger the crimson-hued zone. It's in a darker area when the camera decides the flash should fire, right? So the pupils of your subjects are likelier to be wide open. Contract those pupils! Add light by opening drapes and turning on lamps. Check to see if your camera has a feature called "red-eye reduction." This means that before the lens actually takes the picture, the camera fires off one or several smaller flashes which effectively cause the pupil to contract. Don't think for a minute, either, that those "red-eye pens" are worth a darn. Prevention is your best solution!

Most animals don't have "red-eye" but they do have eyes which glow fearsomely! Cats, dogs and horses, among others, have a highly reflective tissue called the tapetum lucidum at the rear of their eyeballs, which allows them to see quite well in the dark. Depending on the type of animal, their eyes might shine white, blue, yellow, green, pink, or even red. Remember that the best light for your animal portraiture is natural light taken from the side and slightly overhead, and you will be a happy photographer.

If you absolutely need a flash, then don't use the one on your camera which is so close to the lens. It's the angle of the flash going in and then out of the eyeball, so close to the camera lens which causes the eye to reflect back the intense beam of light. External flash units are available. Perhaps your camera has a flash that can



*"Sandy" seems happy enough with his portrait. I was very happy to have foreshortened his muzzle correctly!*

be rotated to bounce the flash off the ceiling. If you want to go deeper into portrait photography, you'll have to research types of cameras, lenses, external flash units, and other equipment such as reflectors – all beyond the scope of this paper.

### **THERE'S ALWAYS MORE...**

There is so much more about art and photography, far beyond the scope of this simple paper, and the more I write, the more I realize how much more I'd love to share with you. Another time, perhaps? Consider this to be merely an introduction based on my own experiences. I hope it has inspired you, even demystified the process a bit. Just remember that you don't need all sorts of gadgetry to achieve great results. Even though I love good cameras and neat stuff, I'm not one for collecting all sorts of gear. I guess that learning on that manual, fixed-lens, non-SLR Minolta without benefit of a light meter taught me to trust my artist's eye better than any gadget.

Better to just get out there with your digital camera, a few memory cards, and start shooting!

It's now up to you, fellow Pet Lover, to Practice these Principles with your Pets:

***Preparation***

***Placement***

***Point of view***

***Persistence!***

***Remember to have fun! Make the time for you and your cherished pal to create happy memories together: and record them for the years to come.***

Please visit my website, [www.donnamcvicarkazo.com](http://www.donnamcvicarkazo.com). This entire e-book is available to read online, with larger versions of the photographs in these pages. I invite you to enjoy a tour through my Galleries. There you will find some of the critters you've met in this book, and can get a better look at their finished portraits. Space did not permit the inclusion of every portrait for which I've included one or more reference photographs. I've also included some step-by-step demonstrations of my portraits.

Feedback is always welcome! Please feel free to contact me via email: [donna@donnamevicarkazo.com](mailto:donna@donnamevicarkazo.com). I'd love to know if I've helped you, or if you have some tricks, tales, or tips to share.

***Peace and blessings,***

***Donna***



***Here's an example of the slab of ham/tongue sandwich effect. His eyes also lack light. It's a cute enough shot for the family album, but would not work for a commissioned, formal portrait. St. Bernards are also prone to serious slobber issues: remember the "Beethoven" movies?***