

# minding nemo

Julia Duke considers pet sitting a privilege By Vicki Stout

It's likely a toss up as to who is more privileged, Julia Duke, or the pets she tends to. Sole proprietor of The Privileged Pet, Duke left corporate America a dozen years ago and went to the dogs. And the cats.

"I had a great job but a boss from hell. I finally said, 'Enough is enough,'" recalls the marketing director-turned-pet caretaker.

A Nashville native, Duke tends to pets when their families are away or just working. She walks them, feeds them and, most importantly, loves them.

"In my line of work, someone's always happy to see you," says Duke, a lifelong pet lover. "I could grow this into a big business, but then I wouldn't be with the pets. I'd be behind a desk again. I don't want that."

Duke says the majority of her human clients are either folks without children or empty nesters.

"I have clients who live in apartments and clients who live in million-dollar homes. The common thread is they're people who love their pets and want the best for them," she says.

Duke's clients are for the most part limited to the traditional cats and dogs.

"I don't do swine or reptiles. I barely do rodents," she chuckles, adding that she has taken care of hamsters recently.

The Green Hills resident has seen and met all kinds — from multiple species — over the last dozen years.

"I had a client once who had this old

Maltese that was blind and deaf. She was leaving for a trip and I was taking care of the dog. She calmly told me before she left that if the doggie died to put it in the freezer until she returned," laughs Duke.

"Then there was the time a client's key slipped into the dashboard of my vehicle. It was a new client. I just had to figure out how to get in that house and take care of the Dalmatians," she says.

Plan A was to wiggle through the doggie door, into the house and unlock the real door.

"I'm not as dainty as I once was," Duke chuckles. "I got stuck in that doggie door. Those Dalmatians were going nuts. They were new clients — they didn't know me yet — and here I was trying to break in their doggie door."

Plan B was to call a very thin friend who did, in fact, complete the mission and slide through the Dalmatian-sized door.

Like any business, Duke's has its ups and downs.

"My hours are flexible, but I often work 12 to 14 to 16 hours a day, particularly on holidays. I really don't have holidays because I'm too busy taking care of precious pets while their families are away," she says.

On the plus side, she says she spends more time with pets than she does with people — "and that's not a bad thing," Duke laughs. "You know, there's crap to endure and shovel in every workplace. Mine just happens to be the literal kind."

Though the mainstay of her business is holiday and vacation travel, Duke also has regular clients for whom she works daily.

"People who work and can't get home to take their dog out for a walk have me come do that. It's better for the pet certainly, plus the parent doesn't have to worry if he or she is getting home late that night from the office," she says.

Some of her clients have two homes and Duke is often sent to the second home in, say, Palm Springs or North Carolina, to take care of the family pets.

"In this business you've got to be flexible, resourceful, reliable and do what you say you'll do. I've built this business strictly on word of mouth — no advertising," she says.

Watching Duke in action with her pet clients is to know that both she and the pets she loves and cares for are, indeed, privileged.

Julia Duke may be reached at [Julia@theprivilegedpet.com](mailto:Julia@theprivilegedpet.com); the website is [www.theprivilegedpet.com](http://www.theprivilegedpet.com).



Duke holds Gus, a yellow Tabby, while she visits with Woody. The Trickett pets are regular clients. Woody stars in some of his dad's TV commercials for Trickett Honda.