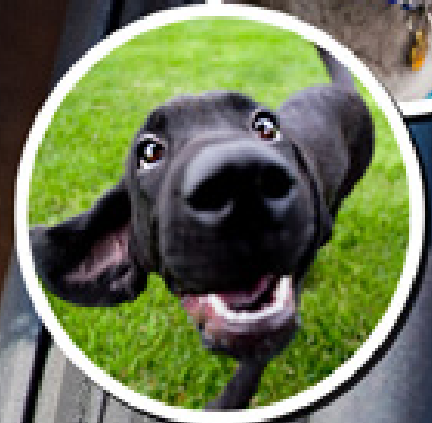
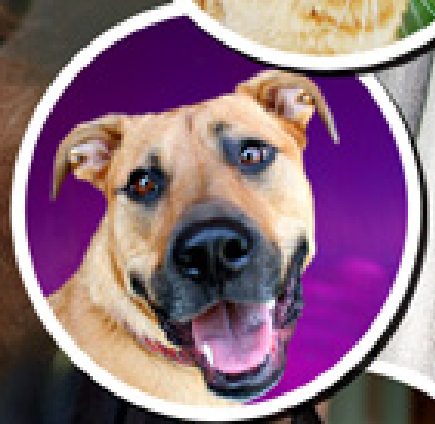


# Beautiful Beasties

A Creative Guide to  
**Modern Pet Photography**



**Jamie Pflughoeft**

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John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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## About the Author

Born to an artist mom, in a family of animal lovers, one could argue that pet photographer Jamie Pflughoeft's path was predestined. A self-professed dog fanatic, Jamie became passionate about photographing pets in 1999 after seeing never-ending camera-worthy moments happen in front of her while working as a dog walker and pet sitter. She attended the University of Washington as an adult student studying animal behavior as part of her psychology major, Jamie was able to take the knowledge she gleaned from her university classes and apply it to her photo shoots with animals. Jamie graduated shortly after September 11, 2001, into what was a poor job market in which she was competing against Ph.D. holders for entry-level positions, a friend recommended that she turn her pet photography hobby into a business. "Is that even a job?" Jamie asked. After a little bit of research, a six-week business training class, some homemade business cards, a \$500 loan and a switch from a film camera to a digital camera, in July of 2003, Jamie's business, Cowbelly Pet Photography, was born. Jamie established the business to meet a growing need of pet owners to have high quality photos captured of their pets for posterity.

Since the inception of Cowbelly Pet Photography, Jamie has worked with over 500 private clients and has provided commercial and editorial photography for several large companies and magazines. Editorial clients include *The Bark Magazine*, *Modern Dog Magazine*, *Cesar's Way Magazine*, and *CityDog Magazine*. Some of her commercial clients include Purina, Wal-Mart, Nutro, PetSafe, ABC Studios, AAA, Signature DNA Unleashed, Pinnacle, and more.

Along with blogging on topics such as photography, digital editing, business, dog-friendly travel, and more, Jamie has taught 14 workshops to over 150 budding pet photographers in cities around the United States, with plans to teach internationally starting in 2013. Jamie has developed a large following on Twitter, Facebook, and the Cowbelly blog, and sold out a Master Class at WPPI in 2011. She is largely considered one of the foremost leaders in the pet-photography industry.

When not photographing dogs in Washington and California, you can find Jamie with her beloved Lab-mix pooch, Fergie, by her side, enjoying all that the Emerald City has to offer.

Like the dogs she photographs, Jamie believes life is best lived playing, sleeping, eating, loving, daydreaming, having regular adventures and being sure to feel plenty of joy every single day. “A Picture is Worth a Thousand Woofs”™!

You can connect with Jamie on Twitter at @cowbelly; on Facebook at her page for pet photographers, [www.facebook.com/BeautifulBeastiesByCowbelly](http://www.facebook.com/BeautifulBeastiesByCowbelly); or her website for pet photographers, [www.beautifulbeasties.com](http://www.beautifulbeasties.com). You can see more of her work on her portfolio site at [www.cowbelly.com](http://www.cowbelly.com), which she tries to update as frequently as possible with photos of cute, funny animals just being awesome.

By the way, the name Pflughoeft (pronounced “flew-hoff”—you’re welcome) is of German origin. It is used as a nickname for farmers.



*Jamie and her dog, Fergie.*



# Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Bill and Nat of Photo Lab Pet Photography for providing input on the cover design as well as the information about twentieth-century photographers who captured pets. A big thank you to Moira McLaughlin of Dog Art Today for also providing information on twentieth-century photographers who trained their lenses on animals.

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Thank you to the many Cowbelly Pet Photography clients with whom I've worked over the years, for entrusting me with the honor of creating memories of your beloved animals. Working with you and your pets is the best part of my job, and I wouldn't have a business were it not for you.

To my many fans and colleagues on the Cowbelly blog, Facebook fan page, and beyond, thank you for entrusting

me as your guide and teacher. I will always feel humbled that you look up to me as a leader, because the way I see it, "I'm just a girl."

To Denis and Robin's late pooch, Scout, thank you for being my muse for this book, and reminding me during the most challenging time in the process of just why I do what I do. The photo of you in your booties and red vest with your mom holding you touched my heart right at the moment it needed touching the most, and you made me realize a profound purpose behind writing this book.

To my mom, who I felt was looking down over me during the process, saying "you can do it kid," and who always believed in me, no matter what I did. I know you never got to finish your own book before you left us, but hopefully, now you can enjoy being a published author vicariously through me. I love you and miss you, and I hope I made you proud.

Thank you to my incredible father, Larry, for coming over every weekend to mow my lawn, bring me food, and check on me to make sure I was still alive. You are the best Papabear any girl could ever wish for.

Thank you to my super-sweet sister Michelle, for listening to me drone on and on about work and book stuff; for smiling and nodding your head politely when I knew you had stopped listening long ago. Those epic chats were like food for my soul, and your support of me during the process was invaluable.

And last, but certainly not least, to my furry girl, Fergie. I have no words to express the impact you have had on my life. You are the true love of my life, and every day I get to spend with you is an absolute gift. I love you with everything I have and everything I am.

*This book is dedicated to my mother, without whom I would not be an animal lover, an artist, a teacher, a nature lover, a business owner, a photographer, a writer, a student, an adventurer, or a compassionate and loving person who finds pure joy in the simple things in life. Thank you immensely for all of these gifts that you gave me, for your unwavering support of me and my business, and for always accepting and loving me for who I am. I love you with everything I have and I miss you every day.*

*This book is for you, Mom.*

# Introduction

I'll never forget the day that started my journey on the path of pet photography. The year was 2000, and I was working part time as a dog walker and pet sitter while finishing my animal psychology degree at the University of Washington in Seattle. The place was a pet-sitting client's house. I was sitting on the carpeted floor in a hallway with their giant, ancient, goofy mutt and frisky young kitty. This unlikely pair were playing, and cuddling, and teasing, and loving each other, and I watched silently in awe of their special relationship. "Man, I wish I had a camera," I said out loud under my breath, feeling a familiar and characteristic urge to create things that I had felt since I was born. I wanted to create visual memories of the interplay between the dog and cat. I wanted to capture for all eternity, this special moment caught between two creatures that could not have been more opposite; to pay tribute to the relationship they shared, and be able to show people what I had witnessed. I wanted to capture the expressions, the emotion, and the personality of these two animals. Ultimately, it was as simple as just wanting to document what I saw and share it with others.

I ran home and returned with my old, full-manual Pentax P3 film camera that I learned how to use in the sole photography class I took in high school in 1989. I loaded it up with some black-and-white film and started what was to be the beginning of a surprising and rewarding career.

Shortly after my impromptu photo shoot, the big 'ol mutt passed away, and to say that the photos that I captured of him were meaningful to the dog's owner would be an understatement. In those simple moments, in that hallway in the dying light of a summer afternoon, I was able to capture a moment in time that was forever lost when the

dog passed on. What I gave to its owners was a profound and powerful gift: a gift that I now have the incredible honor of sharing with clients, friends, and family every time I go to “work.”

My hope is that by reading this book, you too can learn to develop the skills to offer that same gift. A gift that will bring you more joy and more of a sense of meaning and reward than you could have ever imagined. It’s a gift that literally changes people’s lives. To some, it might seem to be “just a dog” or “just a cat,” but to those of us who deeply, truly love the animals with which we share our lives and our homes, great photos of our furry family members are beyond any meaning that one can put into words.

Although I was excited about my newly chosen *métier*, within a few years of starting my little pet photography business, I felt quite alone in the world. Pet photography as a business was still in its infancy. I had no educational resources or anywhere to turn for knowledge about photography as it applied to domestic animals. Sure, there were some books for consumers on how to take cute pet photos, and forums filled with cheesy, horribly lit pictures of kittens and puppies in baskets with fake flowers in front of muslin backgrounds, but there was nothing for the aspiring pet-photography professional wanting to do more polished, contemporary work. No workshops, no PDF guides, no comprehensive manuals, no forums or networks. So I continued to trudge along on my own, learning how to position my body and my camera in relation to the animal, figuring out to hold treats in my hand, and determining what pet owners wanted and what they liked for shots. I began to understand how to use my knowledge of animal behavior in a shoot to capture ever-more interesting images, and then eventually, I figured how to price those images and other products so that pet owners could and would buy them. I found ways to market my business,

discovered creative locations in which to feature pets, established the best kinds of lenses to use during the session, and on, and on, and on. I did all this without a guide, without someone holding my hand and showing me how it was done. It was tough, and I learned it all the hard way. In some respects, I am grateful for that hard road; in others I wish it had been far easier.

Since I started my business in 2003, pet photography has not only become a popular form of photography, but a very viable business model, as well. No matter where you are in your journey, my hope for you through this book is to be that guide, that person holding your hand, showing you how it's done: a good friend answering your questions and helping you out along the way. In fact, you even "ask" me questions (you'll see them in quotes) throughout the book. My hope is to provide you with the knowledge that I was desperate for when I started; knowledge that has accumulated from an all-encompassing love of photographing pets.

Pet photography is still a nascent industry, and that makes it challenging in many ways. There is still so much to be learned. But it's exciting at the same time. It's a time when photographers who point their lenses at dogs and cats and horses and birds and frogs can pave new paths and truly help shape an industry that is still in its youth.

Pet photography for me goes so far beyond taking cute photos of pets. In psychology, there is a term called "flow," which is used to describe when a person is feeling their happiest: when everything seems to just *flow*. For some people, it's gardening, for others it's playing music, for me it's pet photography. I get lost in it. It gets me out of my head. It enables me to create and express the love I have for these amazing creatures that grace the space in front of my lens. And the fact that the owners of these special

animals are moved by the images is just icing on an incredibly large and delicious cake.

If someone had told me back in early 2003, that someday I would run a successful business photographing dogs and cats and sharing my passion with other photographers, I would have looked at them, rolled my eyes and said, “Yeah, right.” Even though it took a lot of hard work to get where I am today, I still feel supremely lucky. Lucky that I get to be paid for something I am so passionate about, including turning around and sharing that passion with others. It’s a privilege for which I am eternally, deeply, profoundly grateful. Thank you for allowing me to share my passion with you. I hope that you find this book to be a rich resource of information and knowledge for you that you can return to and use again and again.

## **Getting the Most Out of This Book**

First, you might be asking yourself, “Who is this book intended for?” I wrote this book for passionate hobbyists and professional pet photographers alike; those with a little technical knowledge and a lot of desire to make great photos of your own pets or those belonging to clients. My goal is for this book to be just as valuable for the professional pet photographer as it is for those practicing pet photography as a hobby.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the history of pet photography and the modern day influencers. If you are super passionate about pet photography and are either involved in the industry as a professional or hope to make it a career, you’ll enjoy taking a read through this, and you’ll probably learn something new about the industry.

If you already have all of the equipment you need and are happy with how it performs, with no plans to upgrade, you can skip over Chapter 2, which covers the equipment you need to do a great job capturing pet photos. You might want to take a read through the lens section, nonetheless, because it provides some detailed information on the advantages and disadvantages of using certain lenses for pet photography. If you are a casual shooter, never fear, I talk about “prosumer” (translation: affordable) cameras that will get the job done, and I explain that you don’t need fancy gear to create beautiful images.

Chapter 3 delves into how to work with animals from a behavioral standpoint and instructs you as to what to look for when it comes to desirable appearances for various animals. It also explains how to avoid capturing photos of them when they aren’t at their happiest or most relaxed, regardless of the type of animal. I also look at the unique challenges of photographing your own pets, and how best to approach this for optimal results.

Chapter 4 goes over your pre-shoot inventory; the process and steps you should take prior to each shoot to ensure that each shoot goes smoothly. Along with this, I go over the importance of using shot lists, and give you examples of how to creatively develop a shot list and define goals for each shoot.

Regardless of your level of experience, and especially if you have minimal experience with the technical aspect of photography, you should read through Chapter 5, and then re-read and re-read it again. One thing that is very important to keep in mind is this:

*The quality of your results can be directly measured by the breadth and depth of*



## *your knowledge of the technical workings of photography.*

In other words, the less you know about how aperture, shutter speed, and ISO settings work, the harder it will be to produce quality results. Sure, you can pop your camera into Auto mode or a preset program, but it will be a lot harder to produce professional-looking images that way. Knowing how cameras work from a technical standpoint opens up doors so that you can be more creative and confidently handle lighting and situational challenges. Although I have been photographing pets for more than 12 years, I learned some new information just writing this section, so I hope the technical information I share helps you see the left-brained stuff in a whole new light.

Chapter 6 addresses lighting; from natural light sources to auxiliary lighting, including flash and studio lights, plus all of the accompanying accessories. I present the pros and cons of each type of lighting, and give you examples of when to use each type. I also show you what to avoid when it comes to lighting and give you tips on how to light difficult situations and avoid the lighting PET-peeves.

The fun really begins with Chapters 7 through 10, in which we delve into the creative aspects of pet photography, and learn how to allow your personality and those of your subjects to really shine through your work, both while you are photographing them and during image post-processing. You will also learn how to handle the many challenges that can arise when photographing pets, including the dreaded “black dog/white dog” issues. Chapter 7 includes tons of eye-candy, and gives you more ideas on how and where to photograph a pet than you will be able to do in a lifetime. Chapters 7 and 9 both lay out lists of pet photography “don’ts,” which are compendiums of things to avoid, both

while shooting *and* in post-processing. These are the mistakes many new pet photographers make that should be avoided. In chapter 10, I give you tips on how to define and develop your own style (I call this “Photodogstyle”), and how to edit your photos to match your style. I also show you how and where to find inspiration for your work.

Lastly, Chapters 11 and 12 are designed for the professional and are filled with business information that you need to know in order to make your passion profitable. There is information on how to build your portfolio for those who are still working on developing saleable skills; expenses that show you how much you can expect to invest in your business now and into the future; information on pricing and branding and marketing; and a detailed list of the top-five biggest keys to success. With the technical, creative and business information in this book, you should have all you need to make your business flourish.

Be sure to read the captions under each photo in the book, as oftentimes I include information that tells you how or why I got the shot.

The technical information under most of the images in the book includes the camera settings and the lenses I used, which I think can be very helpful in understanding how a photographer created an image. (You’re welcome, ha!)

There are exercises at the end of each chapter, and I recommend that you set aside time each week to do each of these exercises because they are all designed to help you improve on your skills and learn and grow experientially.



*You can access online bonus content at the following web address:*

*[www.beautifulbeasties.com/books](http://www.beautifulbeasties.com/books)*

*Here, you can find useful information about photography-related resources as well as a great synopsis on the characteristics and behavioral traits of many common (and not-so-common) dog breeds.*

With all that said, young pet photographer, let's get started! Happy reading!

## Chapter One

# *The History of Pet Photography*

- ★ The Backstory on Pet Photography
- ★ The True Value of Pet Photos
- ★ The Pet Photography Industry
- ★ Classes, Schools, and Workshops
- ★ Forums



## The Backstory on Pet Photography

Photos of pets have been taken since the inception of the camera. The oldest known photograph of a dog is a *daguerreotype* of a white poodle titled *Poodle with Bow, on Table*, taken by an unknown photographer in the 1850s. A daguerreotype is a direct positive that's made in the camera on a silvered copper plate. The process involves a long exposure time that makes our modern day shutter speeds of 1/1000 second and faster pale in comparison when it comes to time commitment. To take the shot surely must have required one very patient photographer or one heavily sedated dog—or both. This piece sold at Sotheby's for \$8,125 in 2009.



*The first photo of a dog, created by an unknown photographer in the 1850s.*

Since then, both technology and the relationship between humans and their animals have evolved dramatically. As domestic animals have continued to become more and more entrenched in our everyday lives, our cameras have spent more and more time focusing in their direction.

In the 1950s, Elliott Erwitt, a French-born American photographer, came onto the scene and captured photos of people with their pets on the streets of New York City, focusing much of his work on dogs. Perhaps the most iconic photo Erwitt created was a black-and-white image titled *New York City, 1974*. The photo is of a miniscule Chihuahua

standing next to its high-heeled owner, flanked on the other side by the legs of a mountainous Great Dane. All the viewer can see are the legs from the knees down of the woman and the Great Dane, and the little sweater-clad Chihuahua on the right. It's a humorous look at the relationship between man and beast, and an ironic and unusual capture on the part of Erwit.

Along with Erwit, many other twentieth-century photographers aimed their lenses at domestic animals. William Wegman became known for his humorous portraits of Weimaraners in unlikely scenarios. Ilse Bing included dogs in her portraits, including the photo of a Terrier next to a shadow of the photographer in *Self Portrait with Stacatto, New York*. Robin Schwartz has photographed dogs as pets and strays; canines inform a large part of her work. Eadweard Muybridge's work, a photo series of race dogs in motion titled *Animal locomotion: an electro-photographic investigation of consecutive phases of animal movements, 1872-1885*, was groundbreaking for its time and became a study in its own right. And famed photographer Irving Penn was known to include dogs in his portraits of humans.

It wasn't until the 1990s that pet photography became a career unto itself. It was during this time that a small cadre of photographers decided to specialize in pets as a niche, photographing more for private clients and everyday pet owners rather than for gallery shows and artistic projects, as their predecessors did.

This "new" old-school breed of pet photographers became well known in the 1990s. Their ranks include Jim Dratfield, who became famous for his romantic, traditional sepia photos in New York City; Deborah Samuel, recognized for her moody, abstract black-and-white shots of dogs in her books *Dog and Pup*; Kim Levin for her emotive and candid



work of both dogs and cats in books such as *Why We Love Dogs: A Bark and Smile Book and Cattitude*; Amanda Jones for her now iconic, highly influential, clean, modern studio shots on white backdrops; and Rachel McKenna (*nee* Hale) for her endearing commercial photography of kittens and puppies. Other notables from the 1990s include Joe and Healy Grisham, and Bruce Weber. Before I started my business in 2003, I looked up to and highly admired the aforementioned photographers; they were taking the time and care to capture my favorite creatures and publish books of their photos. Those books lined my bookshelves and provided me with inspiration when I made the move from hobbyist to professional.

Yet more modern-day pet photographers who started their businesses in the late 1990s and early 2000s while the industry was still young include Bev Sparks, a Seattle photographer whose black-and-white work was featured on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*; Sharon Montrose who became successful for her clean-lined commercial work of cats, dogs, and all manner of wild and exotic animals; Emily Rieman, whose photographs conjure up old Hollywood glamour; Kendra Luck, a San Francisco-based photographer who coined the term “Dogumentarian” and is known for her black-and-white documentary-style photos; and me, Jamie Pflughoeft (also known by my business name, “Cowbelly”). My specialty is colorful, candid, documentary-style photos of dogs and cats on location.

All of the early pioneers of pet photography have helped shape the look, style, feel, and trends in the modern pet photography industry as it exists today. They have helped to produce a movement of visual art that is filled with variety, creativity, uniqueness in both concept and execution, and styles that are as diverse as the photographers that create it. Now, it’s not uncommon to find business names attached to the photographer’s names

that often contain a pet element as well as work that is as niche as it comes.

Today, influential modern pet photographers who specialize in domestic animals include (among many others) Illona Haus of Scruffy Dog Photography, Sarah Beth Photography, Tim Flach, J. Nichole Smith of dane + dane studios, Carli Davidson, Serenah Hodson, Grace Chon of Shine Pet Photos, Stephen Dodd of Fidojournalism, Margaret Bryant of Bryant Dog Photography, Jesse Freidin, and Paul Walker of Paws Pet Photography. These photographers all dedicate their businesses to capturing photos of their client's cats, dogs, horses, goats, and birds. They capture moments that will last a lifetime. From candid to studio, from abstract to photojournalistic, every style is represented. These photographers influence their colleagues and work hard to elevate the art form that is pet photography.

Along with the innovators who came before them, there are many wide-ranging factors that influence modern-day pet photographers. Many find inspiration in wedding and engagement photographers such as Jasmine Star and Jose Villa, pulling shot ideas from poses of couples under trees and in urban settings that might include alleyways and train yards. Others find inspiration in fashion and catalogs, perusing the pages of *Vogue* and Pottery Barn looking for ideas for color and design. Still others look to landscape photography to inform locations and settings. The greatest influence in my own work has been commercial photographer Stephanie Rausser, whose fresh, joyful, happy images can be seen in ad campaigns all over the world as well as several covers of *The Bark* magazine. Of course, the greatest influences on all pet photographers are their furry, feathered, and scaled subjects and the humans who care for them.

Inspired to create higher-quality, more unique, and more engaging photos of pets, modern pet photographers are also inspired to take on personal projects, the likes of which the photography industry has never seen before. A short list of pet photographers and their projects follows.

***Brooke Mayo: the Underwater Dogs project; Diving Doggies***

Mayo's project, Underwater Dogs, is captured in colorful, engaging, bright, sharp photos of dogs underwater in pools, diving down for balls and other toys in her book, Diving Doggies. The book was a trendsetter at the time, creating a wave (pardon the pun) of other photographers who followed the concept of shooting dogs while underwater.

[www.brookemayodoggiefriends.com/](http://www.brookemayodoggiefriends.com/)

***Carli Davidson: the Shake series***

Davidson garnered a huge following on Facebook after her high-shutter-speed studio photos of pets shaking off were featured on the Animal Planet television network.

[http://carlidavidson.photoshelter.com/gallery/G0000s\\_trsf9CDFI](http://carlidavidson.photoshelter.com/gallery/G0000s_trsf9CDFI)

***Cowbelly Pet Photography: Graffiti Dogs project***

A personal project, just for fun; I head out to the most urban of urban settings—under freeways and behind train yards—to capture dogs in front of colorful graffiti-covered walls.

[www.cowbellyblog.com/category/graffiti-dogs-project/](http://www.cowbellyblog.com/category/graffiti-dogs-project/)

***Jesse Freidin: the Doggie Gaga project***

Singer Lady Gaga's outlandish costumes and headpieces inspired photographer Freidin to dress his furry charges in similarly zany attire to create humorous studio shots filled with irony and fun.

<http://jessefreidin.com/album/the-doggie-gaga-project/>

***The 52 Project***

Inspired by a movement among portrait photographers to take on a new photography assignment every week of the year, and then post the photos in a "blog ring" with their colleagues, the 52 Project was created by photographer Dana Cabbage. It was soon joined by more than 40 members of the Beautiful Beasties Network, an online assemblage created for pet photographers. Weekly assignments range from noses, to motion, to textures, and tributes.

[www.cowbellyblog.com/52-project/](http://www.cowbellyblog.com/52-project/)

***Serenah Hodson: Rocco and Ralph series***

Hodson's work with her late Mastiff, Rocco, and Daschund, Ralph, are cutting edge in their sometimes odd, frequently comical, always simple, vintage-looking photos of Ralph stuffed into a hot dog bun or Rocco with an Afro wig on his head.

<http://serenahphotography.com.au/>

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Along with personal projects done for fun, pet photographers are working tirelessly on projects designed to give back to the animal community at large. Projects include those designed to help shelter or rescue animals or bring awareness to a cause. Examples of these philanthropic projects follow.

***Claire Bow of Rouxby Photography:  
Portraits of Greatness***

Bow's stunning photos of rescued Great Danes reflect the poignancy of this breed of gentle giants, sometimes wounded, always graceful, and always beautiful. Proceeds from the book go to Rocky Mountain Great Dane Rescue.

[www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/709827](http://www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/709827)

***HeART's Speak***

HeART's Speak is an organization of professional pet photographers dedicated to helping find homes for shelter animals throughout the United States by means of high-quality photography, education, and gear. The goal is to increase the numbers of adoptions of animals through the use of captivating visual art.

<http://heartsspeak.org/>

***Smile for a Cure***

Smile for a Cure is a fundraiser for the National Canine Cancer Foundation. Participating pet photographers donate a

percentage of their session fees to the organization to help raise money toward the goal of ending canine cancer.

[www.smileforacure.org/](http://www.smileforacure.org/)

***Melissa McDaniel: Deaf Dogs, Rescued in America and Pit Bulls & Pit Bull Type Dogs***

McDaniel's books, filled with portraits of deaf dogs and pit bulls, help raise awareness and money for the "underdogs" of the canine world: deaf dogs and Pit Bull Terriers.

[www.thephotobooks.com/](http://www.thephotobooks.com/)

***Traer Scott: Shelter Dogs and Street Dogs***

Scott's books highlight the plight of abandoned and abused dogs with heartwarming sepia and black-and-white images of man's best friend. Proceeds benefit the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA).

[www.traerscott.com/books](http://www.traerscott.com/books)

Pet photography has come a long way since that first photo of a dog was taken in 1850, and the future of this growing industry is exciting and filled with possibility. As long as we have pets in our lives and in our homes, we will be capturing them with our cameras for all eternity.

## **The True Value of Pet Photos**

As I mentioned in the previous section, the role that pets play in our lives has undergone drastic transformation over