

The Telegraph Pets

Pet Proust: Downton Abbey's Lesley Nicol on her rescue poodle, Freddie

Downton Abbey's Mrs Patmore: 'I was crippled with shyness, just like my rescue poodle'



LESLEY NICOL, WHO PLAYS MRS PATMORE IN DOWNTON ABBEY, WITH HER RESCUE POODLE FREDDIE

Olivia Parker 25 September 2015 • 7:00am

How did you meet?

About five years ago I became obsessed with a dog rescue website in Wales called manytearsrescue.org. My husband [Da'aboth Te'He'ling, a spiritual therapist] used to say I needed parental control because I was reading the stories of these little dogs all day long. One day I saw a small bashed up face that looked just like our current dog, a pedigree Tibetan terrier called Bertie, and before we knew it we were driving absolutely miles in terrible weather, to visit this shivering mess that looked just like a crumpled, black roll-neck sweater.

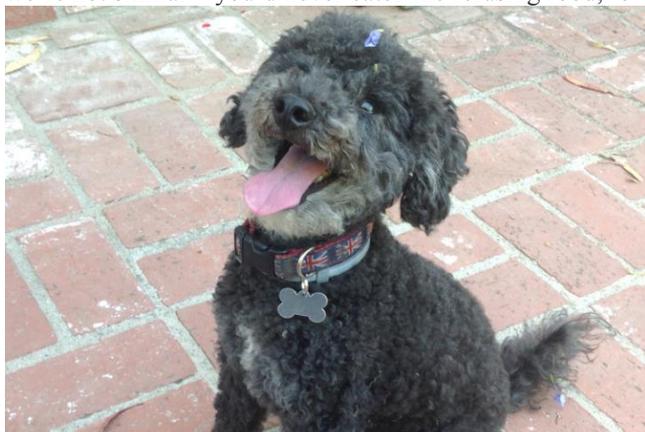
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Freddie's childhood memories?

Poor Freddie was rescued from the house of a lady who'd kept over 200 animals out in the cold, so he hadn't been house-trained, nor had he ever played with toys. The rescue home said they'd never seen such cold animals, which explains why Freddie now loves to lie out in the full sunshine whenever we're at our house in Beverly Hills. He's like a terrible Brit trying to get a tan.

His chief characteristic?

I never knew a dog could be naturally shy, but Freddie is. He sticks to me or my husband like glue. I can relate to that because I was crippled with shyness as a kid. The trouble is that because he's cute people always want to pet him. He hides behind my legs, just as I remember doing with my father. Parties were torture when I was little. Relatives always wanted to come and make a fuss of me because I was tiny and I found it horrendous. I've seen Freddie freeze, trying to make himself look invisible just to avoid the attention. In other ways, though, we're not similar – you'd never catch me refusing food, for instance.



Freddie came from a rescue home in Wales

His party trick?

Initially Freddie slept in a little bed in our bedroom, but he developed a routine as soon as the lights went out. We'd hear him scrapping around as he tried to work out how to get on our bed as covertly as possible. As time went on he couldn't be bothered and now he leaps into the middle and spreads out on his back. We had to get a bigger duvet because Freddie was hogging it.

Freddie and Bertie are not child replacements, but they do give us a strong sense of family because they rely on us for everything.

What surprises you about him?

I'm constantly amazed at both dogs' capabilities. How do they know to race to the window when I'm close to home but they can't see me? The question of leaving dogs in cars was raised recently and I heard someone say that it was ludicrous to imagine dogs have feelings. It took my breath away. I'm certain my two sulk, show off and feel hurt – dogs are so much more than little fluffy things at the end of the bed.

How would he fare in the wild?

He's a big softie, but if he and Bertie are arguing over a bone, Freddie will win hands down. I think his traumatic youth has made him resilient and even the seven times he's flown over the Atlantic haven't bothered him at all.



Lesley in her role as Mrs Patmore in ITV's Downton Abbey CREDIT: PHOTOSHOT. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

His idea of perfect happiness?

Since he discovered the ball, he wants me to throw it 24 hours a day. It's his absolute joy, that and cuddles. He's not even interested in walks – he's the only dog I know that will pull to go home, because home is where he knows he's safe. We share that feeling, too.

His greatest achievement?

Regaining his confidence. He came to us as a damaged little soul, and a bit dysfunctional. Like Fred, I've come a long way too. I became an actress because I was shy, and acting let me be someone that I wasn't able to be in real life. It's a fantastic feeling of power playing a person full of confidence. If someone had told shy me that I'd one day stand up in front of a crowd of influential people in Washington for an [Animals Asia](#) fundraiser, speaking in my own right – I'd have said no, that'll never happen.

What does Freddie mean to you?

I know some people would actively prefer to spend their day with animals, rather than humans. Well, I think there's room for both in my life. Dogs show that amazing unconditional love that not many humans offer. They also mean I meet a lot more people: the first time I realised that [Downton Abbey](#) was going to be something of a phenomenon was when a lady in our local park in London came running over and flung her arms around me. Dog people tend to be more open than others, particularly in the UK.



Lesley would occasionally take her dogs on set at Downton Abbey, she reveals CREDIT: GILES KEYTE

Any regrets about him?

None. My sweet husband originally wanted a cat because he'd had one as a child, but now he adores the dogs. Freddie and Bertie are not child replacements, but they do give us a strong sense of family because they rely on us for everything. My only problem is resisting getting another one, because I would in a heartbeat.