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Story of Animal Friendship Warms Human Hearts

By ALYSON SENA
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The large black crow who landed on the railing outside Jeanette Griver's Palisades home brought with him a story. When Griver first saw the crow appear two years ago, she began observing the relationship between her Shetland Sheepdog, Curio, and the bird, whom she called Mr. Crow.

"I took notes thinking someday I would want to write a children's book," says Griver, an author and scientist by nature. In January of 2004, she began writing *Curio a Shetland Sheepdog Meets the Crow*, a warm and educational story for children and adults, published by Compsych Systems, Inc. and printed by the Palisades Post.

Griver was amazed at the friendship that seemed to develop in real life between her dog and the crow, who initially made a loud cawing sound that caused Curio to run to the big glass window for a look at the bird. "After a week or two, they had found a way to communicate," says Griver, who describes a curious nod that each animal, on either side of the window, would give the other as a kind of secret language.

Though her book is based on these animal observations, Griver says it's a work of fiction that incorporates ideas of communication and problem solving, loyalty and friendship. "The relationship between Curio and Mr. Crow is about finding a friend who's intelligent and with whom you share a mutual respect," she says.

Griver's psychology background helped her write "Curio" but she also conducted a good amount of research on the Internet and at the library in order to learn about and develop her characters. "I



Jeanette Griver

Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer

looked at the similarities and differences between crows and Shelties," says Griver, who earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from UCLA in 1961, and a master's degree in human factors (a branch of psychology) from USC in 1964. "I never knew how intelligent crows were."

She developed Mr. Crow from scientific data and dictionary information, and imagined him as a strong member of his flock, living off the land and providing for his family. By contrast, the character of Curio is dependent on her companion, Susan, to provide for her.

Griver already had extensive knowledge of Shelties, who she says are "very loving, intelligent, eager to please, and motivated not only by food but by love." She had taught her own Sheltie how to spell her name, Curio, in blocks using her nose and front paws.

In creating a persona for Mr. Crow,

Griver focused on the positive characteristics of crows and gave him a friendly but cautious voice instead of a loud and hostile voice, which others may have chosen for the crow.

Griver named her human character after her good friend of 25 years, Susan Espinoza, whose 10-year-old grandson, Michael Canty, was one of the book's first readers and wrote one of the blurbs on the back cover.

"I needed all the data I could get," says Griver, whose collaborator, Phyllis L. Milway, helped with the story development and dialogue, while artist Marna Obermiller, who has bred and trained Shelties, illustrated the book.

Griver is also the author of *Oh No! Not Another Problem*, a 10-step guide to problem solving which she self-published in 2000. *Oh No!* appeared on the *Los Angeles Times* paperback, nonfiction bestseller list for 27 weeks in 2000-2001 and was printed in braille by the Library of Congress in 2001 and made into an audio book; it has since been printed in Canada, the UK and Korea. Griver's first book was *Applied Problem Analysis Plus*, published in 1988.

President and CEO of her human factors company, Compsych, Griver still does some consulting but is mostly focused on her writing. She recently adopted a 4-month-old Blue Merle puppy whom she named Merula, which means 'blackbird'; 'Merle' is archaic for 'Merula'. Asked what response she hopes people will have to the "Curio" book, she says, "I'm hoping children and adults will take time to get to know their animals and one other." She is already working on a second "Curio" book.

Griver is having a discussion and book signing at Village Books on Tuesday, June 15 at 7 p.m. Contact: 454-4063.