

True-life tale

Stuart Fraser takes a light-hearted look at life with dogs and the complex scheme he's created for caring for family pets.

The author, walked to exhaustion by Belle (and Pippin, the dog-in-law).

“We’ve got a system...”

I'm fascinated by the systems people evolve to make living with their dogs practical.

For example, my parents owned an endless chain of thousands of Dachshunds. In latter years, I rather forgot what my mother and father looked like because I rarely got to look at them: I had to spend all my visit time peering cautiously at my feet lest I step on a Dachshund.

One of them, Amy, went off her back legs. The vets were not optimistic. Amy, however, was. So my parents bought a toddler's pushchair and, when taking the other few hundred or so Dachshunds out for a walk, wrapped Amy up in a blanket and pushed her along

in her pushchair, lifting her down and supporting her every once in a while to assist nature.

This went on for a few months, and I know my father rather treasured the reactions from passing grannies who paused to coo at what they thought was a cute toddler...

Anyway, one day, whatever trapped nerve had crippled poor Amy miraculously freed itself, and she rose again. But still, when my parents went to the door festooned with leads for the walk, Amy went to the internal door to the garage, where her pushchair was kept.

She lived to be 17, a fair challenge to the controversial longevity record set by Faithful Fergus, the street Dachshund with the crooked

bum. Controversial because nobody could be sure of his age – he was rescued from a scavenging, ownerless life at two-ish and lived to be 19-ish. This may have been because he ate very well: his early life as a scavenging tramp meant anybody who came between him and something to eat got very, very short shrift – no pun intended. His bum was crooked, the vets thought, from getting a callous boot up it when living on the street.

In my house, I have evolved a system for managing the cat, Captain Pusstasticus, and Belle the mad Border Collie.

At five every morning, with eerie precision, comes my summons from Captain