

# In search of dog tales

NIGEL BELL

THIS enthralling and beautifully written book tells the story of a special woman's close relationship with a special dog. She had other animals under her loving care — dogs, cats and, as opportunity arose, chickens, duiker, goats, tortoises. In fact, any animal in her environment that could possibly benefit from her care received it.

The book focuses on Javelin, a female Doberman Jill Wylie selected from the litter at three days old before the breeder sent them away to have their tails docked. With her uncanny insight into animal capability, and the help of “a series of little ‘intelligence tests’, where we moved the pups bit by bit away from their mother to see how quickly they would find their way back to her,” Jill decided that the largest female, “who consistently and unerringly caught scent of her mother and swam back to her in moments,” was the dog she was looking for. And, most importantly, Javelin was to remain undocked, “whole and unamputated as she was born to be, unshocked, unbloodied.” The puppy took a little time to understand how to manage it, but that long and whippy tail was to become a vital element in the signals that Jill was to interpret as Javelin set about her life's work — that of tracking and locating the dogs caught in the wire snares that were (and no doubt still are) ubiquitous in the surrounding wild country.

No one could have been better equipped than

Jill Wylie for the intricate task of training Javelin. She had had the experience of training her now much older dog, Call, a male Basenji. Javelin was intended to succeed Call as tracker-in-chief as he became less active. As before, the process was based not on tedious repetition, strictness and punishment, but on love. Love, patience and resourcefulness in devising the most effective ways to achieve the desired results.

Above all, remarkable empathy with animals enabled Jill to understand Javelin's feelings and needs at each stage of the training process and the best ways to keep her happy, healthy and safe in spite of the dangers she faced in her work. Apart from snares, there were leopards, bush pigs and snakes to watch out for.

Nothing is more moving in this book than Jill's account of the night she took the still young Javelin into her bed to keep her warm and willed her to recover from an attack of biliary. “I believe that from that night of her near death, from the warmth of my body when hers was so cold, from the beat of my heart when hers was floundering, from the strength of my willing and the power of my love, there grew a special relationship between us, above and beyond the species barrier, such as I may never know again.”

• *Search: Dogs to the Rescue in Wild Zimbabwe* (ISBN: 978-0-62041-937-6) is published by Echoing Green Press and sells for around R160.