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## Dog helps a Marine see himself

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June 26, 2008



When Marine Lt. Col. Jay Kopelman brought a stray mutt back to the United States from Iraq, he didn't realize their journey together had just begun.

He soon learned they both were suffering from combat stress.

The 5-week-old puppy, "Lava," was rescued from an empty 50-gallon oil drum during a standoff with enemy snipers. Just as the dog gave comfort to the U.S. troops who fed and sheltered him in Fallujah, he gave Kopelman insight into mood swings that haunted him after returning home to La Jolla and retiring from the Marine Corps.

Kopelman chronicled Lava's journey to the United States in 2005 in his book, "From Baghdad, With Love," which sold more than 300,000 copies.

But there is more to the story. He writes about their healing together in his just-published sequel, "From Baghdad to America: Life Lessons from a Dog Named Lava."

After the dog survived the ravages of war, Kopelman almost lost Lava when his skittishness propelled him away from a noise and into the path of an approaching Land Rover on a road in Rancho Santa Fe. Lava survived, but was diagnosed with some classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. He was easily startled, hyper-reactive, hyperactive, moody, depressed and aggressive with little provocation.

As he explored treatment for Lava, Kopelman discovered that he also had



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symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

"I was a typical Marine. I didn't need help. We Marines helped other people." But as Kopelman did research for his book, he realized that he, too, had to get therapy – especially for anger management.

It's all led to his newest project – starting a foundation to benefit veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

### Mitt and knit?

If you go to Petco Park on Sunday, expect to see a lot of fans who love to knit, crochet, cross-stitch, needlepoint, embroider – and watch baseball at the same time. They are gathering for a special "Stitch 'N' Pitch" at the ballpark.

National Needle Arts is promoting such events with 26 major league teams and 16 minor league teams. Game tickets (\$21) are available at several needle arts stores, such as Common Threads in Encinitas, Needle Nook of La Jolla and Yarning for You in San Marcos, as well as the Web site [Padres.com/stitch](http://Padres.com/stitch).

"Those of us who love knitting can do it without looking, Caryl Nelson said. "You have to put your knitting down to clap, but yelling and cheering aren't a problem."

She admits it's best to avoid complicated patterns at a ballgame.

Nelson co-owns Common Threads with her daughter, Nancy, who is knitting her own seat pad with the Padres logo.

### The Price is wrong

Rodger Price's daughter, Chandler, received a letter in the mail recently from the "Cambridge Who's Who." It announced that the La Mesa girl is "being considered for inclusion in the 2008/2009 Honors Edition of the "Cambridge Who's Who Among Executive and Professional Women."

"Having just turned 10 years old, I guess they heard she was one heck of a dog sitter," Price said.

### Stage presence

Longtime Old Globe Theatre actor Jonathan McMurtry has earned another accolade: The county of San Diego and city of Vista both proclaimed June 30 – his 71st birthday – Jonathan McMurtry Day. . . . Meanwhile, actor Patrick Page, Broadway's "Grinch" and "Scar" in "The Lion King," has been named the Old Globe's 2008 Shiley Artist-in-Residence. . . . Actress Joyce Bulifant, a staple on TV's long-running "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," will emcee the Red Dress Ball for Childhelp on Saturday at the Sheraton Resort in Carlsbad.

■ Diane Bell's column appears Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Fax items to (619) 260-5009; call (619) 293-1518; or e-mail to [diane.bell@uniontrib.com](mailto:diane.bell@uniontrib.com).

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