

Virginia Manders – Mini Bio

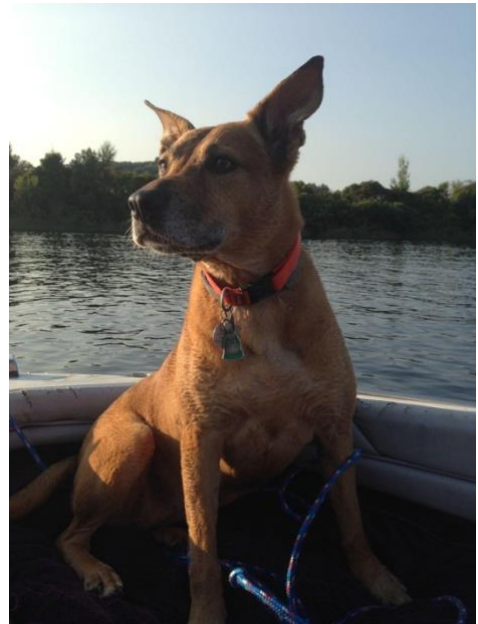
I grew up in Brattleboro, Vermont, and have spent most of my adult life in Western Massachusetts. Animals have always played a central role in my life—those who know me well would say my pets are the heart of it.

Growing up in the countryside, I developed a deep appreciation for the outdoors, as well as the wild and farm animals that surrounded me. As a child, I dreamed of becoming a veterinarian, but I soon realized I'd be dealing with animals in distress, which wasn't what I had imagined. Instead, I followed other passions including an associate's degree in liberal arts dance while always making room for pets in my life.

Abby

In 2008, I adopted Abby, an American Staffordshire Terrier mix who completely changed my world. Not only did she struggle with many fear-related issues, but she also developed aggression toward almost every dog she encountered. I was determined to keep her—and other dogs—safe and, ultimately, she managed to have a select group of dog friends, cats, and even chickens.

Abby also was a frisbee star but ACL tears sidelined her for a bit. With physical therapy and devoted care, she made a full recovery, without surgery, and at age 13, she was still catching frisbees. Her healing journey sparked my interest in canine fitness, injury prevention, and rehabilitation in general. To that end, I became certified as an EMT and earned a B.S. in Kinesiology with certifications in Corrective Exercise and Personal Training (for humans).



Hiking Paws

In 2016, I began working at Hiking Paws, an off-leash group dog walking business in Massachusetts. It started as a part-time gig but quickly became a full-time passion once I completed my degree.

Walking groups of dogs taught me so much about dog body language, inter-dog relationships, recall, and behavior in general. It also sparked my curiosity around questions such as:



- Why does that dog do that?
- How can I change certain behaviors?
- And why do they insist on rolling in stinky things and eating mysterious ground morsels?

I was often surprised to discover that a dog who was well-behaved on the trail could be a nightmare at home.

Chester

In 2021, Abby passed away. The following spring, I adopted a puppy from a local shelter. Chester has been a teacher in every sense of the word! His DNA results revealed a complex mix of over 18 breeds, making him uniquely adorable and behaviorally challenging. He faced early autoimmune health problems (see puppy picture) and numerous behavioral struggles. By six months old, he developed extreme reactivity and potential aggression toward both dogs and humans. In the past year, we've made incredible progress on those issues through positive reinforcement training.



Training Certification

In the past few years, I've read numerous books and taken countless classes and webinars to deepen my understanding of dog behavior. I'm proud to be a 2025 graduate of the Karen Pryor Clicker Training Certified Training Partner (CTP) Program.



I believe I can help you and your dog have a happy and healthy relationship. We can work on behavioral issues, cooperative care, interspecies coexistence, health and diet, nose work, trick training, recall, prey drive, strength and fitness, injury prevention and so much more.

Hobbies and Other Passions

Outside of my passion for dogs, I love dance, yoga, foraging mushrooms, gardening, trapeze, handstands, obstacle course racing, and outdoor adventures—preferably with at least one animal by my side.

