



P.S. I LOVE YOU

Actor pens tribute to four-legged soul mate

He's played the psychologically tormented spy in *Alias*, the hard-working chief of surgery in *Hawthorne*, and the "It Guy" in big-screen rom-coms like *Never Been Kissed* and *Monster-in-Law*, but Michael Vartan's favorite role to date is dad to his 8-year-old chocolate Lab, Millie. His affinity for animals stems from his childhood on a farm in France, surrounded by dogs, cats, ducks, roosters, and sheep. "My first true love was a German shorthair named Watson," he says.

Naturally, when Vartan learned of a book project in which people write letters to their beloved dogs, the self-described "animal freak" didn't hesitate to get involved. "I thought it was a really interesting and fun idea to get to see people from all walks of life with their dogs and what those dogs bring to their lives."

Available in October, *A Letter to My Dog* features heartfelt tributes by media icons like Oprah Winfrey and entertainers like Colbie Caillat, as well as contributions from everyday people with amazing stories of the human-dog bond. Beautiful photographs by author Robin Layton accompany the text.

Vartan admits that he spent a few days composing his letter. "I didn't want to make it too mushy because the guys on the hockey team might read it. But at the same time I did not want to belittle what this dog has meant to me and my life."

In this edited interview with associate editor Arna Cohen, Vartan describes his connection with animals and how Millie makes him a more complete person.

Was it hard to come up with the words to express your feelings for Millie? The one notion that crystallized when I was writing the letter—I think we're so nuts about our dogs not so much because of this unconditional love that everyone talks about, but because they give us the opportunity to love them completely. As I said in the letter, if I spoke to any girl I've ever dated with 10 percent of the craziness and voices that I speak to Millie with, that girl would be out the door in a heartbeat!

Millie lets me be a completely uncensored, completely expressive loving creature toward her and always asks for more. And in this society, where you turn on the TV and it's bad news everywhere you look, to have a really unconditional source of purity that a dog can be is really important. I think people need that.

Do you think your wife might be a little jealous? Not in the least! That was our unspoken prenuptial. I said, "Listen girl, you're No. 1 with the bipeds, but don't get in the way of Millie or my hockey!"

Lauren has a dog as well, a rescue. These dogs have been living together for three years. It is the most unbelievable friendship. We peek over to the living room, and one of them has her head on the other one's butt and they're sleeping.

Do you think they know how lucky they are? Probably not. They think every dog in the universe rides in the front seat and sleeps in the bed.

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Love for animals...

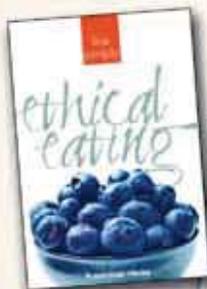
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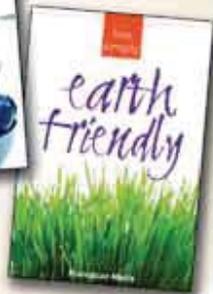
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Q&A MICHAEL VARTAN

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Does sharing your life with pets inspire you to advocate for other animals? There are so many unspeakably cruel things happening to animals around the world—shark finning, hunting [elephants] for ivory, dogs left to die in dumpsters. It's really disgusting. Animals are on this planet for a reason and have the right to live.

The dog issue is the one that's closest to me because I love dogs so much. It's really mind-blowing how many dogs are killed and discarded. Spaying and neutering could cut those numbers in half probably. People don't really take it seriously. "Please spay and

neuter your dog or your cat" doesn't have the impact of "Stop the massacre of the Bengal tiger because there are only [a few thousand] left in the world," but it's just as important.

TO VIEW more excerpts and photographs, go to humansociety.org/allanimals.

You have volunteered at shelters, helped organize a poker tournament to raise money to combat dogfighting, and regularly tweet on animal issues. Are there any animal welfare projects you're working on now? I'm always looking. My publicist knows to never delete or send to junk mail anything with the subject matter being an animal cause.

Dear Millie,

a.k.a. DAMOOSERS, Moose McGillicutty, and MRS. Velvet-ears,

This might seem a little odd because you can't read, so I'll explain it to you over a beer and a few* treats very soon. I intended to write a letter thanking you for your unconditional love and unwavering loyalty, qualities most dog lovers would agree are the most beautiful you possess.

But instead, and I've given this a lot of thought, I'm writing to thank you for letting ME love YOU! For letting me love you unconditionally, completely, with all my heart, with no shame or fear, and with total childlike abandon, the "I'm glad the guys on the hockey team can't hear me right now" kind of abandon.

I mean c'mon, some of the voices I use and things I say to you when we cuddle would send any other woman—a less confident or understanding woman—running for the hills, but not you. With your head on my lap, your incredible smile, you gaze at me with those deep brown eyes and exhale the most contented groan. In those moments, those splendid little moments, all is well in the world; it really is.

You are the most gentle and tender creature I know: your sweet little essence ever soothing to my soul. With you, I can be weak, I can be insecure, completely flawed and utterly useless, yet you love me all the same, never criticizing or passing judgment (which is really cool, 'cause more times than not I'm all those things!).

So, in closing, thank you for being my best friend, my faithful companion, and above all else, my dog! Oh, and also for having the softest ears in the universe, literally, in the entire universe, all of it, the softest!

All my love, Your wildest admirer
and faithful companion/Dad



* "few" in our household means a Labrador's dozen

From A Letter to My Dog by Robin Layton. © 2012.
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