

## In Praise of "Fialka" Ackerman's New Four-Legged Addition

"She bath'd with roses red, and violets blew,  
And all the sweetest flowres, that in the forrest grew."

*Sir Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene*



*Fialka fits comfortably in Ingrid Lobas' shoulder bag.*

What weighs five pounds, is frisky, warm and cuddly, enjoys wispy pigeon-grey-colored-curls, responds to the name of a small purple flower, sleeps like a baby on a soft checkered blanket in an airy Volvo 240 wagon, chews keenly on a squeaky rubber duck, and makes you fall in love on the spot? Yes, you've guessed correctly, it's Fialka (Russian for Violet) shop helper Ingrid Lobas' new mini-snauser.

Keen observation on Lobas' part and a chance encounter with the owner of Fialka's sister set steps in motion for this season of summer bonding between puppy and her new caretaker. During a quick break at Peet's Coffee some months

back, Fialka's well-behaved sister caught Lobas' attention. After a brief conversation with the dog's owner, Ingrid mentioned her desire to have a similar canine companion in the future.

They exchanged phone numbers, time passed, and Lobas forgot about the encounter until she received a call from the owner letting her know that three-month-old puppies were available and looking for homes. Ingrid hesitated at first because she was still grieving the loss of her beloved Welsh terrier Utka (Russian for duck) who died of old age nine months ago. "I still miss her terribly," admitted Lobas.

But puppy yearning won out. And shortly after receiving the call Lobas got in her Volvo 240 wagon, started the ignition, and headed for

the dog owner's house in Richmond. On arrival she saw the puppy she would later name Fialka, playing in the garden, and was smitten by her purple-black nose, her spirited rolls in the grass, her effervescent pursuit of flying bugs, and her triumphant air while pulling a fat worm out of the ground. "She's fabulous, and although she's the runt of the litter and half the size of her four birth mates, she's no shrinking violet, and she fits in perfectly at Ackerman's," says Lobas.

Fialka also fits in a soft tote bag lined with soft, leopard-patterned blanket material, and in a wicker basket attached to Lobas' bike. "She's born for the bike," says the shop helper who pops the dog in the basket around lunch time and heads to Aquatic Park. Settled at the park Lobas usually enjoys a sandwich and takes great pleasure watching Fialka romping in the grass, chasing winged insects, and savoring a morsel of her lunch.

Back at the shop, the Volvo 240 wagon, parked in the shady tool shed, becomes Fialka's afternoon playground and resting area. "She likes to curl up in my granddaughter's car seat," says Ingrid who has fixed up two other make-shift dog beds in the shed. Fialka's favorite one is Utka's old, comfortable, and newly-spruced-up red-flyer wagon, and coming in second is a soft, oversized cushion decorated with more of the leopard-skin-patterned blanket material.

For Lobas, caring for Fialka is a labor of love. And rather than eclipsing Utka's memory, the puppy reminds her of the good times with her former pet and brings solace and joy with a fresh circle of doggie love.

Also Fialka's energy is catching, and Lobas feels infused with renewed enthusiasm for her duties at Ackerman's: opening up the shop, brewing coffee, vacuuming cars, operating the shuttle service, cleaning the fish tank, storing car parts, and generally ensuring everything at Ackerman's runs as smoothly as the repaired cars that leave the shop daily.

## Musician Treads Psychological Mountains And Finds her Harpist Soul

Birds sing sweetly and a hummingbird alights on a nearby Tibouchina tree as Diana Stork's harp playing awakens bright, silvery sounds from a traditional Venezuelan "llanero" harp of the plains in her Berkeley garden. The birds become silent as she stops playing and begins tuning the instrument, she plans on having fully refurbished by this fall's October 3rd, 20th Annual Festival of Harps Celebration at Oakland's historic Chapel of the Chimes.

"I wish I had some of Bruce's tools to work with," said Diana as she pulls a small, adjustable wrench from her pocket and tries to budge the stubborn turning pins located on the harp's curved neck. As she wages a battle with the nuts and bolts that stretch and tune the multicolored strings (made of fishing line and lawnmower-starter cords!) talk pivots to her association with Ackerman's, to finding herself as a harpist, and to the history of the harp she is working on.

"The harpists in Venezuela often can't afford regular strings so they improvise with other materials," says Diana. She explains how a Venezuelan harpist—Carlos Orozco brought the harp all the way from Barquisimeto—an area south of Caracas, to play it in last year's 19th Annual Festival of Harps. "This whole area around Barquisimeto is rich in harp music; and the instrument is mostly played by cowboys after a long day of work!"

Donations from Bruce Ackerman and the Venezuelan Embassy helped defray Orozco's travel costs to the Bay Area in 2008. Before he returned to Barquisimeto, the Venezuelan Embassy bought the instrument from him and donated it to Diana's non-profit, the Multi-Cultural Music Fellowship (MCMF) an organization that promotes the harp, and collaborations between harpists worldwide.

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Music has always been a key part of Diana's life. She is happily married to Teed Rockwell, a professional touch style fret board player with a passion for Hindustani music.

Volvos entered their lives soon after Teed earned a PhD in philosophy at age 50 and landed a teaching position at Sonoma State University's philosophy department. Knowing he would have a tough commute to and from Sonoma, Diana decided they needed a new car. "I thought to myself—Teed is going to be driving an hour each way three times a week, and I want a safe car for him." At the time, they had just moved from San Francisco to Berkeley and couldn't help noticing the abundance of Volvos in the East Bay. Taking that fact into consideration, she sought out the perfect car to provide transportation for Teed and to carry their musical instruments to gigs. In their research, Diana and Teed found that Volvos were strong, reliable and built like tanks. They found a Volvo sedan through the newspaper and got an incredible deal.

As it happened, their new address landed them around the corner from Ackerman's and they decided to take the car to the shop for maintenance on a friend's recommendation. They've been great fans of Ackerman's ever since. Nine years later, the two musicians still live near the shop in the same cozy apartment where Tibetan prayer flags brighten the living room.

Their home comes complete with a cheerful harp room which accommodates Diana's collection of nine harps, and allows for private practice space for herself and her students. Decorations in that room pay homage to the harp: a small harp woven in wheat, a canvas painting of a yellow and purple harp resembling a whale's fluke, a quilted fabric harp made by the mother of one of her students, and a Balinese carving of a harp with oversized metal strings.

Pleased with the new car, but busy with her own music career, Diana soon realized she needed her own car; and walked around the corner to Bruce's front office to find out if he had a Volvo for sale. By chance, ASE-certified master technician Eric Bjorklund was fixing one to give to his daughter but he sold it to Diana instead. Today the cars are as well tuned as her many harps despite having over 200,000 miles on their respective odometers. "Thanks to Ackerman's the cars are both working fabulously," says Diana.

They also like the customer service they receive at the shop and on the road. "One time Teed and I were driving down to Los Angeles for a concert, and something happened with the transmission. En route we called Bruce and he just walked us through the whole thing by phone. He assured us that it was fine to drive with the car in the condition we described. He allayed my fears that the engine would malfunction. And then, he fixed everything for us when we returned, and it's still working fine."

While regular Volvo driver often pack huge dogs, kids, and soccer equipment into their cars, Diana packs in harps and other musical equipment. "I remember the day I was traveling to play a concert with my Celtic harp trio Triskela. My band member, Shawna Spiteri, had a new SUV and thought we could easily get our three harps in her car. We tried and tried, but couldn't manage it. Then I decided to try taking out one of the seats of my Volvo wagon. And miraculously, we ended up fitting ourselves, three large Celtic harps, three medieval harps, some drums and flutes and stools, and all our fancy dresses into it! We thought we would have to pay gas for two cars," recalls Diana. "My faithful Volvo came through yet again!"

Finding herself as a harpist was more multifaceted than finding the cars. She tried many different instruments, and pursued a variety of artistic endeavors before finding the harp. In the end it was intense soul searching that led to the discovery that she was a harpist. "It took awhile, but when I found the harp, I knew I'd found my path and calling in life." For those on similar quests, Diana advocates steadfastness in the face of obstacles. "I keep telling people to follow that thread, to work for it. You are precious and you may have a special path—if that's what you want."

To prove her point, she shared some of her magical story. She was born into a musical family in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Her father

George Frederick Stork, a piano composer and pianist, studied music at Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania. He later switched to guitar and banjo—playing in numerous swing and Dixieland jazz bands. Her mother, Mary-Ernestine Weber, played piano and maintained her classical music orientation for most of her life.

"My parents both taught me to play piano when I was four. I loved all music and often sang with my three sisters and brother. My dad also taught me a few chords, and I was off on the guitar. I was inseparable from my guitar thru my teens and it really helped me get through that challenging period of my life." She tried other things besides music. "I got into writing poetry and short stories; I even wrote a novel." She also tried painting and fine art printmaking. "I really enjoyed all these things and had some success with them. But the lights and bells weren't going off and my heart wasn't totally satisfied." Some people stop when they find something they have some success with. But Diana kept searching.

Then came the first key connection to her subconscious—a powerful dream she had when she was a teenager. In this dream, she encountered a painter who invited her back to the home of her grandfather, Charles Wharton Stork, (CWS was a well-known American Poet.) The artist then requested help completing a painting of a long-beaked, long-legged Benu bird, the mythological phoenix of Egypt associated with creation and renewal. In an effort to help the artist finish the project, she picked up a red-orange pastel crayon. "I started making these lines all the way around the bird's winged body. As soon as I finished, the bird started to glow and flew off."

After the bird's powerful flight the dream continued and she noticed a fissure in the wall behind one of her great grandfather's paintings. Instinctively, she reached for it, opened it like a door, and entered a secret, light-filled chamber lined with beautiful polished oak and mahogany. Dancing joyously through the area, she eventually reached the far side of the chamber and noticed yet another antechamber. It was a lovely chapel. Still in reverie, she realized that she had arrived at the place where her grandfather went for inspiration for his poetry. Then in a beam of light she saw a Celtic harp. In the most natural way, she sat down and was able to play it perfectly. When she awoke, she knew this had been a special dream and she never forgot it.

Time passed. She attended Colby College in Maine and earned a degree in creative writing while continuing her guitar and flute playing on the side. After graduation she moved to the Bay Area and continued her search for her unique purpose in life. The breakthrough came through a meditative process in which, after a few sessions, she heard an inner voice which said simply, "I want to play the harp." "It was clearly my voice, yet it wasn't a voice I had heard before," says Diana. "I knew immediately that I'd found my calling. The dream with the fire-bird, my ancestors, and playing the harp came back to me too and helped to confirm this realization," she recalls.

Then the magic really happened. At a music-store, owned by Berkeley guitar-maker Ervin Somoygi, Diana asked if he also made harps. He said, "No, but I have a harp at home that I want to sell. Would you like to see it?" Diana replied in the affirmative and when she returned to the shop the next day he had brought a lovely, handmade, red-oak harp for her to try. "I remember that I sat down at it and was able to play it immediately. I felt that I was a reincarnated harp player—it came so naturally and felt so right," says Diana, who bought the harp and four months later gave her first recital for over 80 people. And the rest is history. She's never turned back.

"Even as a young child I felt I had a path in life. And finding the harp was the key for me. But, now that I've got this vehicle, I feel motivated to share what I do in many different ways that hopefully make the world a better place." Twenty years ago, Diana and Teed formed a non-profit devoted to bringing the world together through music—especially the harp. This year—2009, the Multi-Cultural Music Fellowship is 20 years old. Their non-profit sponsors multi-cultural harp study, among eight to eighteen-year-olds, through the Bay Area Youth Harp Ensemble (BAYHE) which Diana directs. And mindful of Latin America's strong harp traditions, MCMF also provides free harp



*Diana Stork poses with one of her nine harps.*

*Photo by Valerie Kippen.*

# Eighteen Years of Volvo Driving Come to a Screeching Halt But PR Work for Ackerman's Keeps Rolling



Photo by MarySue Foster.

*Publicizing an event at Berkeley's City Council Meeting called for my wearing a black hat.*

When a collision of circumstances caused me and my '91 Volvo 240 Sedan to part ways last month, I immediately declared a period of private mourning.

Mitigating the transition to driving my husband's Toyota Sienna involved entrusting the Volvo to Bruce for restoration and subsequent sale, and also retaining Ackerman's as one of my own clients.

As a public relations consultant for small community-oriented businesses, I help business owners actualize their goals of contributing to the general good while concurrently growing their businesses.

My work for Ackerman's ranges from promoting Bruce's practice of donating 5% of repair costs to schools or nonprofits, to profiling customers in the shop's quarterly newsletter. Other tasks include: participating in Chamber of Commerce trade shows, making follow-up appointments for minor services, and for the first time this year, arranging for Bruce to drive the shop car in the Solano Stroll Parade on September 13, and also host a booth.

There's a lot of satisfaction involved in organizing these projects and I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to work with people who care deeply about quality workmanship, clients and community.

In fact, the more I reflected on the positive aspects of my association with Ackerman's, the more I realized that instead of grieving the loss of my Volvo, I was actually lamenting the final curtain call on a sweet chapter of life: my kids' early childhood featuring them in the backseat of the Volvo and me at the wheel transporting them all over the Bay Area.

The memories carrousel slowly: bringing our newborn daughter home from San Francisco's Pacific Presbyterian hospital in 1992, transporting our son home from Alta Bates hospital in 1996, hearing sudden strains of violin music from the back seat while driving and turning to see my then six-year-old daughter playing her violin, transporting the now-deceased, next-door-neighbors', pony-sized-dog "Pal," to my daughter's school for show and tell, and schlepping gallons of home-made crêpe batter and a trunk full of clinking pots and pans to Bay Area Sur La Table stores while working as a sales trainer for a Belgian cookware company.

In letting go of some of the aforementioned nostalgia, it seems strangely fitting, though surprising, even to me, that I have been hired to organize a Fond Farewell Funeral Fair Fundraiser for Grace North Church, on Saturday, November 7th from 11-4p.m., at 2138 Cedar Street in Berkeley.

Part of my research for this project involves perusing an unsettling stash of research books titled: "A Graceful Farewell: Putting Your Affairs in Order", "Caring for the Dead: Your Final Act of Love", "Being Dead Is No Excuse: The Official Southern Ladies Guide To Hosting the Perfect Funeral", and "Food to Die For: a Book on Funeral Food Tips and Tales" by the Old City Cemetery in Lynchburg Virginia.

My family is not amused, but I do at least have solid research material to turn to if an errant wave of nostalgia for the departed Volvo crashes over me. And should I not find satisfactory comfort in that literary pile, I can always don the vintage black hat I wore to the June 23rd Berkeley City Council Meeting when Grace North Church Parish Administrator MarySue Foster and I invited the City to co-sponsor the Funeral Fair and the preceding, nine-week, Fond Farewell Speaker Series which opens at the church at 7p.m. Wednesday September 9th with Karen Leonard, researcher of Jessica Mitford's book "The American Way of Death Revisited," and green-burial advocate Jerrigrace Lyons of Final Passages, Home and Family Funerals of Sebastopol.

Although dressed somberly in black for June 23rd City Council Meeting, I was sure no one but me and my now 17-year-old daughter knew that in addition to being attired for "business," I was also clad in mourning for my car.

And although I remained composed when the City Council voted to sponsor both fair and speaker series, I still couldn't help feeling that somehow the mayor and city council members knew about the Volvo and that in addition to acknowledging the merits of bringing the taboo topic of death and dying into the open, they were also tossing a sympathy vote my way. To find more information on the speaker series and the Fond Farewell Funeral Fair, visit [www.gracenorthchurch.org](http://www.gracenorthchurch.org). For help with your business communications, contact Liz O'Connell-Gates @ [lizocg@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lizocg@sbcglobal.net), or call 510-410-9164.

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instruction for Latino children through the Mission Harp Ensemble in San Francisco; the Bahia Vista Harp Ensemble in San Rafael; and the San Bruno Harp Ensemble in South San Francisco.

Upon graduating from the ensembles, Diana's students often follow her example of taking harp music out into the world to heal and delight others. For example, BAYHE graduate, Portia Diwa, (and the third member of the Trickle Celtic harp trio,) heads up the Healing Harp Music Program at the Institute of Health and Healing at Marin General Hospital.

For Diana, the musical high point of 2009 comes on Saturday, October 3rd. On that day, after two years of work, she and MCMF will be presenting the 20th Annual Festival of Harps in a hometown "Celebration of World Harp Music." Altogether over 33 harp groups from around the world will convene at the historic Chapel of the Chimes in Oakland with their magnificent classical, ethnic, historical, and contemporary array of harps. It will be a unique kind of "walk-through concert."

Given the diversity and caliber of participating harpists, we can certainly expect melodic bliss when sounds from Venezuelan harps of the plains blend with tones from Celtic, Burmese, Chinese, West African, and Paraguayan harps to entertain the living and honor the memory of the dead whose remains are interred at Chapel of the Chimes (yes, the Chapel of the Chimes is a mausoleum!)

"The fun will be that one will be able to amble through this magnificent structure, built in large part by Julia Morgan. There are over 100 rooms in it and four levels. You can glide freely from one room to another and choose who you want to hear. There's going to be something for everyone," says Diana whose vision has always been to bring the world together through the harp.

As the sound of harp music rings out from this amazing collection of world-class musicians from all over the world, Diana's vision will surely take flight in the same way the Bannu bird flew from that dreamy painting so long ago.

You can support Diana's efforts in a number of ways: First, ask Bruce to direct 5% of your next repair bill to the MCMF. Second, sponsor a harpsicle (a small harp) for a needy musician. Third, definitely mark your calendars now and plan on attending the 20th Annual Festival of Harps on Saturday, October 3, 2009 at Chapel of the Chimes from 5 p.m.-9 p.m. And bring your friends and family. "We've kept the prices extremely low so that everyone can come. I don't know if I'll ever do something this extensive again. So I really hope people will come and take advantage of these magnificent harpists and their ensembles, and this truly magical space."

Book your tickets today at [www.brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com). Learn more about Diana Stork at [www.multiculturalmusicfellowship.org](http://www.multiculturalmusicfellowship.org), and [www.harpdancer.com](http://www.harpdancer.com).



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**2220 San Pablo Avenue  
Berkeley, CA 94702**

**510.549.9330**

**[www.AckermanServicingVolvo.com](http://www.AckermanServicingVolvo.com)**



**Bruce Ackerman, owner**

Liz O'Connell-Gates, writing and photography

Email: [lizocg@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lizocg@sbcglobal.net)

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**Drawing is on 1st of each month.**

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