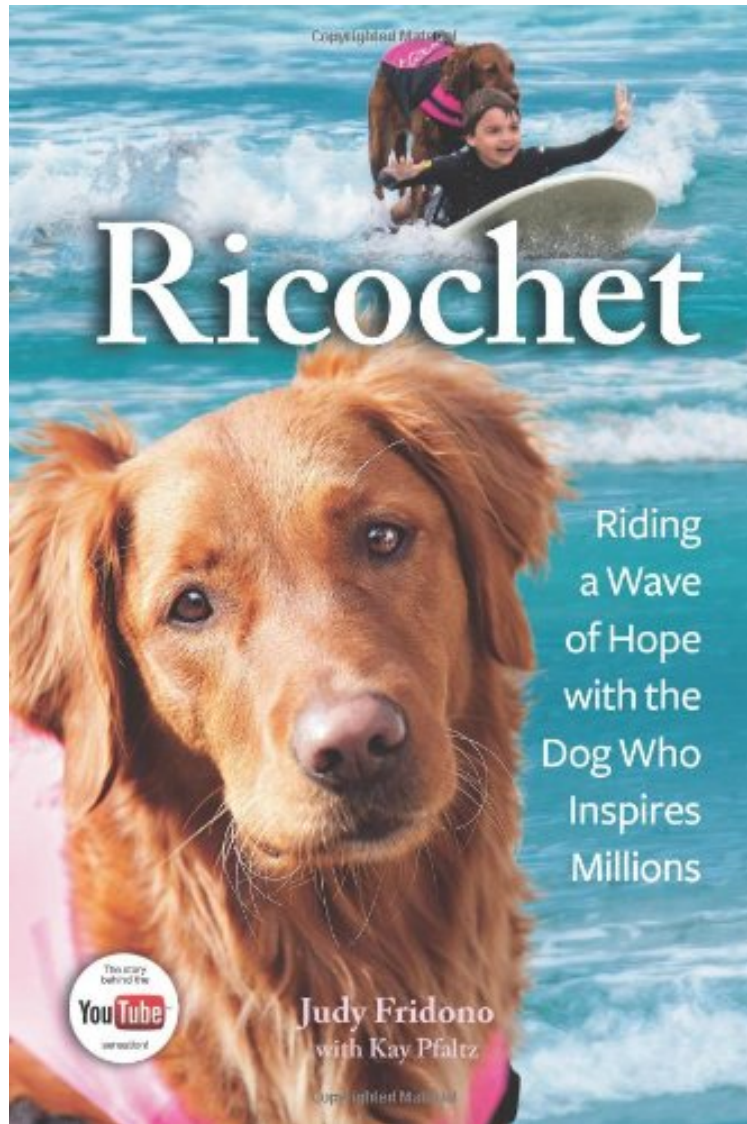


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Ricochet: Riding a Wave of Hope with the Dog Who Inspires Millions

Judy Fridono

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Judy Fridono : Ricochet: Riding a Wave of Hope with the Dog Who Inspires Millions before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ricochet: Riding a Wave of Hope with the Dog Who Inspires Millions:

25 of 26 people found the following review helpful. A MUST READ!By Frenchie MomAs a personal friend of the

author and Ricochet, I wasn't sure what to expect, but this book absolutely BLEW ME AWAY! It's beautifully written in a wonderful, heartfelt manner with so many touching moments. Although I was already familiar with many of the stories told thru vignettes in the book, I still found them very interesting and emotional. You'll want to keep a box of tissues handy! One does not need to be a dog lover to enjoy this book. Her story is one of love, loss, hope, forgiveness, courage and strength. The lessons we can all learn from Ricochet are endless! What Judy, Ricochet and Rina have contributed to the world has made an immeasurable difference in so many lives! Bravo, Congrats, and LOVE! 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A wonderful book about an amazing dog! By jun@0212I first saw Ricochet on my news feed on Facebook. I resisted liking her page on Facebook. I am mostly on Facebook to support dogs that are from puppy mills or are abused by other means. I thought it was wrong to intentionally breed dogs when there are so many in shelters that could be trained to be a service dog. Then came the San Diego fires and I saw she was requesting money for gas masks for the dogs so they would stay safe. I gave a donation for that and read about Ricochet. I had thought she was a boy. It is not very rational but since she was a girl it made me like her a little more. I liked her page and read all about her and started following daily stories. When the book came out I ordered it on the first day. I spent one day reading it. I really didn't know about service dogs and the training and commitment it takes to become one. For the dog and the trainer. I can understand now the breeding for these types of dogs. I read with sadness how Ricochet's mom had such a hard life. And the fact that Ric herself did not want to be a service dog in the traditional sense. It was amazing to read about her training at such a young age. She couldn't even see, but yet she began. I also never thought much about surfing or dogs that surfed. I actually did not know that they could. I also thought that even so, how would that help a person. I was so wrong on how that helps the disabled. I think one of the most uplifting quotes of the book is when Patrick (the first boy she surfed with who was confined to a wheelchair) said that "I look back on the beach and I can see my empty chair. I am free out there." Ricochet helped him surf and helped him raise money. So special. The book continues with more and more people that Ric helps. For me the underlining message of hope and to make a difference in the way you know how captured me the most. I think you will be inspired by the goodness in people and dogs if you read this book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful, heartwarming read By ladumondI've been following Ricochet's 'career' for 2 or 3 years via her Facebook page website. I truly enjoy her stories often find myself in tears. We have 4 dogs at the present time I know from experience that each has a gift to give. Ricochet had a higher calling Judy allowed her to follow that. She has gone on to help so many people animals thanks to Judy. Both are one of a kind. And let's not forget Rina who is seeing them both thru on this journey. I would recommend this book, especially if you have a hard heart because it'll soften it before you're done reading the book (if it doesn't, then you don't have a heart).

Ride the wave of hope with Ricochet the only SURFice dog in the world who chose her own purpose! She surfs with children with special needs, people with disabilities, wounded warriors, and veterans with PTSD as an assistive aid and intuitive muse, healing hearts and souls on every wave. This tears-to-triumph story takes readers behind the TV and video sensation and shares the true journey that went from promise to disappointment before ultimately finding life's purpose. The gorgeous golden retriever Ricochet seemed destined to be a service dog from the moment she was born. She approached her training with boundless energy and surpassed every other dog in her Puppy Prodigy training class. Unfortunately, her love for chasing birds could prove dangerous, for those she would assist. Fifteen months into her training, Ricochet was released, leaving a frustrated owner and a dog without a direction. Yet through a twist of fate, Judy realized that flunking out of school wasn't the end of the world and in fact, could be the beginning of a new one. Once Judy learned to let go and let Ricochet be who she really was, they found her true calling as a SURFice dog. Ricochet's story is one of synchronicity, our interconnectedness, and opening ourselves to life's 'paws'ibilities. Embracing her true calling, Ricochet began to help others, including those with traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress, and physical disabilities, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for charitable causes and inspiring people to believe in themselves. Ricochet does more than steady the board: she offers hope, comfort, healing, and a reason to keep fighting. What gives this story such extraordinary potential to become a publishing sensation? Ricochet is the only SURFice dog in the world, there is no other story quite like it!

"This is a beautiful story from start to finish about the journey of one very special human/canine team and the powerful impact they have had on so many human lives. Ricochet is a truly inspirational read that will not only make you laugh and cry, but also confirm what great love, trust, and dedication can achieve." Victoria Stilwell, author of *Train Your Dog Positively* (Endorsements) "If you've ever loved an animal, this book is a must-read. It will lift your heart and keep you turning the pages with its insights about love, loss, keeping your faith, making a difference, and the intangible but incredible connection we have with our animals." Dr. Marty Becker, "America's Veterinarian" (Endorsements) "Ricochet's awe-inspiring story is a celebration of the healing power of the human-animal bond. Judy's personal journey with Ricochet is a moving story of hope with a four-legged champion of compassion who continues to touch many lives. This is a must-read tribute to real American heroes on both ends of the leash!" Robin R. Ganzert, Ph.D., president and CEO, American Humane Association (Endorsements) "Ricochet is a must-read for everyone who

wants to be inspired in a challenging world in which inspiration is much-needed. I've never met a dog being like Ricochet and I hope one day to do so. Thanks to Judy Fridono for sharing this wonderful story of a most amazing savior. Ricochet is a very special dog whose story must be circulated and shared globally." Marc Bekoff, author of *Why Dogs Hump and Bees Get Depressed*"What a wonderful story! Ricochet is everything anyone could hope for in a dogfriend, coworker, and surf buddy to name a few of her many qualities. This amazing dog and her incredible human partner found their purpose in life together. They will make you want to spring into action with your own natural talents. This book is a blessing!" Allen and Linda Anderson, founders of Angel Animals Network and authors of *Animals the Kids Who Love Them* "Ricochet will bound right into your heart. Her story inspires us all to find our purpose!" W. Bruce Cameron, author, *A Dog's Purpose*"Judy Fridono recounts story after story of lives forever changed, her own included, with the help and presence of her furry canine companion, Ricochet, whose soul purpose is to encourage and comfort anyone who dares to dream of riding the perfect wave. Profound and uplifting, the story of Ricochet is not so much about a dog who surfs but about the impact she has in the lives she touches, one paw at a time." Susan Sims, publisher, *FIDO Friendly* magazine About the Author Judy Fridono is a dog trainer with an associate's degree in service dog training. She is the founder of *Puppy Prodigies*, a unique program designed to provide a long-term advantage at an early age for service dogs and pets. She is also the guardian of Ricochet, an internationally renowned, award winning surf dog who has become an inspirational phenomenon, philanthropic role model, internet sensation, fundraising marvel, community advocate, goodwill ambassador, and muse to millions! Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Turning Tragedy to Triumph 'It is often your deepest pain which empowers you to grow to your highest self.' Karen Salmonsohn The video was still going viral when the new year began. Since it had gotten so much exposure, I immediately turned the video into a platform from which Ricochet could spread her Paw It Forward message to help human and animal causes on a larger scale. I also added a small note at the end of the video asking for donations. I found that people far and wide were not only willing to help, but wanted to help. They wanted to be part of something larger than themselves. Donations started coming in, so I knew I had to find a beneficiary. But who? With serendipity working once again, one morning I checked my email to find an article a friend had sent me titled 'Ian Will Surf Again.' It was the deeply tragic but ultimately uplifting and inspiring story of Ian McFarland. On the night of July 2, 2008, Ian McFarland, along with his younger siblings, Lauren and Luke, and their parents, Stephanie and Tod, left their hometown of Carlsbad, California, en route to Boulder, Colorado, for a cousin's wedding. Ian had soccer assessments that day, so the family decided to drive through the night. The kids would sleep in the car on the way, and the family would arrive the next day. Stephanie's sister, Melissa Coleman, was also meeting them in Boulder, driving west from Tulsa, Oklahoma. The last time the sisters had seen each other was in May at their grandmother's funeral, and they were excited to spend more time together and with family. After the wedding, they planned to go camping in Colorado. Melissa and Stephanie were two years apart and very close. They were used to talking on the phone every day, several times a day. 'I'm addicted to talking to you,' Melissa joked to Stephanie because they spoke so often, each becoming worried if one was unable to reach the other. Now Melissa worried about Stephanie, Tod, and the kids making the drive at night; she had a strange feeling a few days before they set out that something was not right. Before going to sleep on July 2, Melissa called Stephanie, who was already en route, and the two sisters spoke briefly. The next morning Melissa began calling to check on her sister and her family, but her calls weren't answered. Because she knew their route full of mountainous passes and bad phone connections she didn't initially worry. But as the day progressed, she began calling and calling more frantically. Something was wrong, yet she had no idea the McFarlands had been in an accident. At 6:00 am that morning, the McFarland family had stopped for gas and snacks. About forty-five minutes later, as they were driving up a bridge, they missed the curve. The driver lost control of the family's Ford Expedition on Interstate 70 about 150 miles south of Salt Lake City. The SUV veered off the road and into the median, then hit a reflector pole and continued down the median until it hit a wire mesh fence. There, it launched into the air, flipping end-over-end, falling off a bridge and onto the highway below where it came to a rest. The cement under the Ford Expedition was crushed. Tod and Stephanie died on impact. Thankfully, the three children had been in children's seats but still sustained injuries; they were rushed to the Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City. Ian was five, Lauren was two, and little Luke was only a year old. Melissa and her parents were already at the rehearsal dinner when the message came: There had been a terrible accident. But when they tried to return the call, they couldn't get through. They then decided to contact the police and ended up spending hours at the police department as officers called various hospitals and police stations, desperately trying to get some information on the family's whereabouts. It was not until sometime after midnight that they were able to find out the tragic, unimaginable news that would forever change their lives. There had been an accident, and Stephanie and Tod had not survived. The three stood in stunned shock. Melissa's worst fear was unfolding. Her sister, her rock . . . was gone. But as the reality began to sink in, Melissa had one thought: She had to be with the kids. There was no question. Ever. She walked away from her life in Tulsa, Oklahoma, without a second thought and didn't look back. She and her parents immediately tried to get a flight, her mind relentlessly thinking of the kids hurt and alone in the hospital without their parents, and that, combined with her sister's and Tod's death, was a pain deeper than she could bear. And yet she had to for Stephanie's sake and for the sake of her sister's children. Not once did she waver in her decision. Not

once was there ever a moment of 'What shall I do?' She had no children herself; she had no attachments in Tulsa. She knew what she had to do. She just had to be there. They arrived at the hospital desperate to get to the children. As they arrived, more details were emerging like bad dreams upon waking: The first reporters to the scene of the accident didn't think Ian had made it. Luke had been awake and screaming. The children were LifeFlighted to the hospital, and when rescue workers found Tod's ID badge to Scripps Green Hospital, they were able to contact his mother, who flew to Utah to be with the kids but had no way of contacting Melissa and her parents. When they arrived, Ian was in a coma and having seizures. The doctors had put casts on his feet, and he had suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) called an axonal brain injury. There was no prognosis for him. That, for Melissa, became one of the hardest images to bearseeing young Ian like that. She began praying to God for his survival. Lauren and Luke were badly bruised, but alive. The doctors urged the family to tell them right away that their parents were not alive. There were tears, shock, numbness . . . but ultimately the children were too young to understand what they were hearing. They thought Ian had not survived either. The only thing that brought any remote comfort was holding on to these precious children. The doctors advised that it would be best to get them home and back to an environment that they knew, so Melissa, her sister, Christina, and her brother-in-law, Steve, left for Carlsbad, California, with Lauren and Luke stuffing pillows up against the windows of the car so they couldn't see out. The freeway was now a very scary place for them. Melissa's parents and Tod's mom, Vi, stayed with Ian. Once back in their own house, Lauren ran through the house crying, 'Mommy? Daddy?' as Melissa stood by impotently, holding back tears. Scattered around the house were the to-do lists Stephanie had written before the trip; drawings and scriptures in Stephanie's handwriting. This time it was too much. Melissa crumbled. But there wasn't time to crumble. The family had to care for the kids, and they knew Ian needed to come home. They began making preparations while Ian remained in a coma. After four weeks, he was flown to Rady Children's Hospital in San Diego, closer to their home, where he spent three months in acute rehabilitation. Just before being transferred, the doctors decided to place a shunt in his brain to alleviate some of the fluid buildup. There was still no real prognosis for him. He was still partially in a coma. But the next day, Melissa brought his brother and sister in to see him. . . . and that is when Ian started to wake up. For the next three months, Tod's mom slept with Ian at the hospital. Melissa brought Lauren and Luke by for daily visits and she also met with doctors and attended therapies. The doctors wanted to put Ian in a convalescent center, but Melissa said, 'No way.' She'd made the tour of the center and knew many of those kids stayed there until they were eighteen. Following four months in hospitals, Ian was finally discharged, but he was legally blind, attached to a feeding tube, and paralyzed on his left side as if he'd had a stroke. The trauma to Ian's brain left him barely able to speak, and he was confined to a wheelchair. A real problem with TBI is that therapy through insurance is rarely enough, and Ian's therapy costs were astronomical. As I read the article, I thought about the uncanny similarity to Patrick's situation, and I knew serendipity was at work again: Ian used to surf with his daddy. I knew that Ricochet would find a way to help Ian McFarland. There was also another similarity this time to my own life and I was feeling its poignancy deep within my soul. Like Ian, I had lost both of my parents. Although I had been much older than Ian at the time, one moment I had parents, and in the next moment, I was an orphan. Already I felt a bond beginning with this young boy whose life had dramatically changed in a blink. I had no contact information but saw that the article had been written by the very same news station that had created a segment on Patrick and Ricochet. Another synchronistic sign, I thought. I contacted the news station: 'Is there any way you could put me in touch with the family? Ricochet would like to try to raise funds for Ian,' I inquired. While the video was still making its rounds, I didn't know how much longer this wave would last. I felt the urgent need to jump on the opportunity immediately in case the views began to dwindle in the coming weeks. The producer put me in touch with Max Moore, a classmate of Tod's, who'd created a page for Ian on the Web site CaringBridge.org. When Max heard about the accident, he asked simply, 'How can I help?' Max opened his home up to family members of the McFarlands, and they accepted his generosity. Working in medical research, with a specialty in brain injuries, Max knew that with TBI, Ian needed help immediately. Moving quickly was crucial, for the longer they waited, the less chance of recovery. It was urgent, Max said, that Ian should be treated to a course of rigorous therapy at once. 'If you're willing to let me work on this, I'm willing to help,' Max told Melissa. 'Yes . . . anything to help.' It was Melissa who touched me on the deepest level because she left her life in Oklahoma and never looked back. She had one of the most caring hearts I'd ever seen. She would say there had never been any question. But Melissa didn't have the deep pockets needed to provide the kind of therapy Ian needed around \$4,500 per week, in addition to leg braces at \$3,500. She was just trying to survive. Funds were running low, and time was crucial. 'His therapy is in direct correlation to his outcome,' Ian's doctor told Melissa and Max. It just so happened, however, that Tod, Ian's dad, had worked as a physical therapist at Scripps Green Hospital, and there, his coworkers didn't have to think more than a moment to come to the decision to help start Ian back on the long road of reclaiming his life. The normal therapy course for a TBI patient was twelve sessions per year; with the help of Tod's friends, Ian received twenty sessions per week. I was in awe at Melissa's ability to manage three young children and such an overwhelming schedule of treatments. Strangely (or not, as I would come to see with Ricochet's guiding paw), the first person Max met at the hospital while visiting Ian was Jennifer Kayler, Patrick Ivison's mom. Jennifer, who was training to be a nurse at the children's hospital, stopped what she was doing and sat down with Max and told him all the things he would need to do in order to raise

funds, and all the people he needed to contact. She even wrote out an extensive list and emailed it to him, and, in hearing this, I could see the strange yet beautiful interconnectedness of all life. Max knew he had to make Ian's experience of therapy a positive one somehow; he had to make it fun or Ian would quit. Young Ian would be training like an athlete, and that was hard on a child who was in pain and didn't understand why he had to work so hard and continue performing grueling tasks. Max wondered if surfing might be a way to bring some of the fun back into Ian's life, but the idea was loaded with inherent problems. To begin with, Ian was still in a wheelchair and had little physical ability. There was the physical stress, but perhaps more than anything, there was the emotional pain. Surfing was what Ian had done with his dad. Tod was an avid fly fisherman, surfer, and rock climber who loved the outdoors, taking his family to the beach for picnics and dinners beside the crashing waves whenever he could. Tod had Ian on a surfboard by the time he could walk, and for Ian, those moments had been filled with love, not only the love of the ocean and surfing, but of that special time he spent together with his father, who shared his same sense of adventure. It was their bond together, their joy, their passion. They practically lived at the beach, surfing together whenever possible, and the beach and the ocean became a sacred place for them. I sent Max a copy of Ricochet's video. With the way our image-driven society craved new stimuli, Ricochet might be old news tomorrow, so I knew we had to act quickly. I couldn't have known then how much influence Ricochet would have in the future. When I told Max we were interested in fund-raising for Ian, he was very eager for Ian to meet Ricochet. He said the surfing part could be great, but he was perhaps more interested in letting Ian be with a dog, because at this point Ian needed fun things in his life. 'Can you send me some pictures?' I asked. 'I can make a fund-raising Web page for Ian on Ricochet's Web site.' Max did, and we transitioned into a new campaign that began fund-raising for Ian. But when Max told Melissa about Ricochet, she was understandably skeptical. One has to understand that Melissa and the children were in survival mode, just trying to get by day to day. Then one day she gets a call about a lady with a dog that . . . surfs. 'A dog?' Melissa said to Max. She really didn't know how she'd have the time or energy for one more thing. 'Please, I don't have time for it.' But Max pushed her. Ian had always loved dogs. And he loved to surf. What could be more perfect? With little resistance left in her, Melissa agreed. By then I realized the wave we were riding was bigger than I had ever imagined. When I first spoke with Max, I had no idea how long the video would remain popular, but since hitting its millionth view, it continued to climb, so I knew that Ricochet's impact was powerful and that she had the ability to touch lives far and wide. But it seemed she was destined to touch this one individual life in a very personal way. We met first at Ian's house. It was January and too cold to surf. Melissa wheeled him out and down to the grass under the trees, while I walked Ricochet over to greet him for the first time. As if she knew exactly who she was there to see and what she was there to do, she walked right up to the little boy with the long brown bangs and licked his face. I had a moment of concern that he would be frightened, but my worry evaporated as I watched a smile crease his tender face. Each time she licked his face, I could tell by his expression that he loved it. So I said to him, 'Blow softly on her nose.' Every time he did, she responded with a lick. And Ian laughed. I had no real expectations of their meeting; my main goal was only to get a good photo of Ian with Ricochet so that we might use that for fund-raising. His left side was still very weak, but he had regained his vision. He could toss the ball for Ricochet, which he did, and she pounced and brought it back. Sometimes she darted off to investigate life around the trees, and I wondered if she was perhaps giving him some time and space just 'to be' so that our combined energies wouldn't overwhelm him. 'He's loving it,' Melissa said. 'He loved the neighbor's dog and always wanted a dog. I know he's always loved dogs, but look at how they're connecting,' she remarked. 'That's pretty beautiful and amazing.' They connected straightaway, and later on, when Ian would be interviewed by the press and asked about his connection with Ricochet and what it was like, he would say: 'When I first met Ricochet, I was so excited. She ran to me and kissed me.' They were communicating on a deep level with no words exchanged between them. And yet they would not surf together until many months later. Ian was still afraid. The water was still too cold, and he didn't like getting water up his nose. There were perhaps the associations with his dad, but perhaps more notably, there were also the huge physical limitations. Just like Patrick, Ian needed a team of people to help him in the water, but unlike Patrick, he wasn't strong or big. He was little and fragile, and he hadn't learned to hold his breath if he went underwater for any length of time. It could traumatize him into never surfing again. On Ian's sixth birthday, January 22, he and Ricochet met again at Cardiff Beach. Holding a birthday party at Cardiff was poignant, for each birthday or special occasion would find Stephanie and Tod celebrating with their children at that very beach, with Stephanie setting out a table with linen and candles. The beach was their special place. The beach was their true home. On the day of Ian's party, Melissa set up picnic tables the way Stephanie once had and covered the tables with pizza and cake. There must have been about thirty people there: friends, family, and therapists. Ian was distracted by all the commotion, but when he saw Ricochet, he became excited, and when Ricochet saw him, she streaked across the sand, making a beeline directly to him and ignoring the people, the pigeons, and everything that wasn't Ian McFarland. 'It was amazing,' Melissa said. 'They'd only met once before, but they have a special connection.' 'Hi, Ricochet,' Ian said as she licked his face, and he threw his head back and smiled. 'I wanna introduce Ricochet to my friends.' 'You can do that,' Melissa agreed. 'Ricochet is my new friend,' Ian said, and I wondered if perhaps he said it with more confidence and pride than he had two weeks earlier. Over the months that passed, Ricochet continued fund-raising for Ian, and I continued working the networking angle through media, Web

sites, videos, and email contacts. I posted Ian's story on Facebook and Ricochet's Web site, and we raised \$7,500 for his therapy. I got to know this extended family of Ian's, many of whom were not connected to him by blood but rather by love. It was not something I ever could have predicted in the dark days that followed my mother's death or my divorces and the many disappointments growing up. But I was willing to accept it and see where this new journey would take me. I knew there was a higher power at work. And as I stood there, I also realized there was a red dog waving her tail back and forth, wanting to do more good. The third time we all met again was at the beach, so that we could present Ian with his check. He sat on a long surfboard with Ricochet by his side, and Melissa wrote Thank You! in big letters in the sand. Ricochet was exuberant around Ian, and yet she knew exactly how much stimulation he could take, perfectly content to sit or lie quietly by his side. 'Ricochet is my good buddy and my good friend,' Ian said, looking around as he stroked Ricochet's soft coat. A couple of months later, a documentary was being made about traumatic brain injuries, and the producer wanted Ian included in the filmpreferably surfing with Ricochet. In the weeks leading up to this day, Max and Melissa tried to get Ian to go in the water lying on a surfboard, but he hadn't wanted to and he cried. He was filled with a fear of the ocean and a dislike of the water hitting his faceand, most likely, deep memories of his dad. Yet Melissa knew the water's healing effect on Ian because it had been in the water that he had first moved his leg after the accident. 'He moved his leg!' she exclaimed to Ian's physical therapist. But they didn't believe her. She swore to them that he did, but when they still couldn't believe it, she took a video to show them, and one of his therapists came with her to the beach, that special place for Ian, to see for herself that he really did move his leg in the water. Because the ocean was such a healing place for him, Melissa and Max knew the next step was to get him on a surfboard. They knew how much it had meant to him to be out in the ocean with his dad. But Ian knew that if he fell in the water, he wouldn't be able to get up like he used to. Plus, in the past, his father had always been there. Now he'd have to rely on someone else. Nevertheless, on the morning he was to surf with Ricochet, for the first time since the accident, Ian woke up happy and excited! Gone was the fear and in its place was excitement and anticipation. 'I'm going to surf with Ricochet today!' A crew of people met us at the beachMelissa and Max, the documentary producer and his crew, Dave and his son Austin, and Prue Jeffries, a pro surferall ready to help with the important mission. When Ricochet saw Ian, she raced for him, licked his face as he loved, and then sat down beside him. 'When he woke up today,' Melissa told me, 'he said, 'I wanna go surfing! I'm gonna go surfing with Ricochet today.' I couldn't believe it. It was such a beautiful thing, a memory I'll always cherish and love. He loves the waterthe ocean is his connection with his fatherbut he's been so afraid.' Melissa, Max, and Prue gathered around Ian. Dave and Austin helped get Ricochet up behind him on the board. Then came the first wave, which Ian and Ricochet rode in together. Then another. I think we all were a little tense, and we all let out a collective breath and began to relax. And then they fell. Ian's head submerged completely underwater, and Max told me afterward it had been a fleeting moment of supreme panic for him. But Ian's team reacted instantly, hauling him forth from the waves and, to everyone's amazement, as his head reemerged, Ian said, 'Man, we wiped out,' and then he laughed. 'Do you want to surf again?' Max asked anxiously. 'Yeah, I wanna go again.' Again the twoIan lying down and Ricochet balanced adeptly behind himsurfing in on a wave. Ian looked as if he was focusing hard, but often a smile would break through his concentration. I looked at Ricochet's face, and it, too, was focused and intense. It was as if she was saying, 'It's okay, I will guide you and everything is going to be okay.' And I thought to myself, Yes, and all will be okay. Maybe not in the way we ever expect, but somehow, some way, everything is going to be all right. Everyone present watched in awe as Ian rode in wave after wave with Ricochet. He was out there loving the water once again. Ricochet was able to reach out to this boy in ways only a dog can . . . in ways only Ricochet can. Hearing Ian's laughter when they wiped out echoed through my heart. He talked about falling off the board more than he did about all of the perfect rides they made to shore. When they came from the water, everyone was on a high. Ian's little sister Lauren ran up to him and gave him a congratulatory hug. It was so sweet to see these two young children embrace because of a fun experience they shared together. 'It was pure joy for everyone,' Melissa said. 'Just seeing Ian back in the water . . . and the excitement that Ian could surf again.' 'I couldn't believe it when he wiped out!' Max exclaimed. 'I really felt that was a breakthrough moment. I can't tell you how concerned I waspanicked is more like itwhen his face hit the water. I'd talked him into surfing another wave, and the moment he wiped out I was terrified he'd never go back in the water again. And then to see him actually smiling after his spill . . . I can't tell you . . .' he trailed off. 'I was a little nervous, too,' I admitted with a laugh. 'Ricochet made it exciting for him!' Max said. 'Before he was very protective . . . he didn't want water in his face. But Ricochet brought out the kid in him. He doesn't want to surf with a forty-six-year-old man,' Max said motioning to himself. 'But the thrill of spending time with Ricochet taps into that child he'd lost. He doesn't always want to spend time with adults.' 'Ricochet has a way of bringing out our childlike sides,' I agreed. 'Ricochet inspires him to do it just for fun. There's no selfish reasons,' Max chuckled. 'I'll admit it, I want to surf. But Ricochet says, 'Come on, let's have fun.' ' Yes, I thought to myself. How true. She has no expectations, she puts no pressure on anyone, and she accepts what is, no questions asked. It was innocent; it was pure. Yes, that was how Ricochet operated. Ian and Ricochet sat in the sand, soaking wet and glowing with life, and Ian turned to Ricochet. 'Ricochet is my surf buddy.' Later I figured out that if Ricochet rode in the front of the board, Ian wouldn't get water in his face, so she now stands in front and he sits behind her, with his arms around her back legs. In this way, she takes

the brunt of the waves for him. After that day, Ricochet and Ian surfed together many more times, but they also spent a lot of time together on dry land. Ricochet would lick his face, and Ian, in return, would hug and pat her, making us all realize that a lot of therapy was transpiring outside the water as well. As I thought about this, I also understood that maybe these experiences were therapeutic for me, too. After experiencing so much darkness, I continued to be surrounded by so much goodness. I was blessed to be in the presence of Melissa, such an amazing and selfless woman. She radiated such goodness that I felt like I was enveloped in a cocoon of safety and love. 'It's such a huge honor,' Melissa told me. 'Every single day is such an honor.' She paused. 'They call me 'Mom.' That is so beautiful; it's such a gift. And Ian calls me Happy . . . which I love because that was Stephanie's childhood nickname for me. 'And now when I think about how Ricochet has changed Ian's life,' she continued, 'I can't imagine our lives if Max hadn't talked me into letting Ian surf with a dog! My heart is filled with huge gratitude as I reflect on all that Ricochet has done to impact Ian's life, and his quality of life for years to come. Ian is fearless with Ricochet by his side.' I sat down beside Ricochet and Rina, who had joined us at this event, and I thought about the special boy we had come to know like family. I thought about our similar circumstances and how we'd both lost our parents. But I also thought about the families we now had perhaps because of those very tragedies. And I realized that often our truest families are made up of people who may have once been strangers to us, but people who were now bound together through love and compassion. Life is one interconnected and continuous circle. Jennifer and Patrick . . . Melissa and Ian . . . they have opened their families to me, made me part of them, inviting me over for Thanksgiving and Christmas, because they know I'm alone. I am in one sense, but not in another. Ian was very reflective. More than reflective . . . he was wise. Melissa told me that Ian had said, 'I love surfing because it reminds me of my dad and the ocean is my place of peace.' I thought of his words as I watched him surfing with Ricochet, and I pondered all of the serendipitous events that had brought us to this moment. ESPN had come out and filmed one day, and now I thought about the questions the commentator had asked and Ian's wise-beyond-his-years responses: 'You used to surf, right?' the commentator asked. 'Yeah.' 'How do you surf?' 'You have to trust the waves,' Ian replied after a moment of reflection. 'How do you trust the waves?' 'Like you trust people,' Ian answered. 'And now you're surfing again, right?' 'Yeah.' 'Can you tell me about that?' 'Well, at first I was scared,' Ian paused. 'But Ricochet helped me not be scared anymore.' 'What's that like?' 'I feel surprised because I don't expect her to jump on my back while we are surfing and then I feel happy because I know that she is there. I feel safer when Ricochet is there.' 'You're not afraid anymore?' 'Sometimes I feel scared in the water because I don't like to go out really far, but Ricochet helps comfort me. My favorite thing about Ricochet is that she is a dog and one of my best friends. I have a poster of me and Ricochet in my room, and when I look at it, I feel strong and excited to see her again.' 'How do you think you look?' 'Always smiling, always happy.' 'Why?' There was a long pause in which Ian never broke eye contact with the commentator. Instead he was looking intently at him, reflecting with tears welling up in his eyes. 'It reminds me of surfing with my dad.' 'Does that make you happy?' 'Yeah,' he said, but this time he didn't hesitate. 2014 Judy Fridono. All rights reserved. Reprinted from Ricochet: Riding a Wave of Hope with the Dog Who Inspires Millions. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the written permission of the publisher. Publisher: Health Communications, Inc., 3201 SW 15th Street, Deerfield Beach, FL 33442.