

**Janet & Kaela:
Towards Canine Citizenship in the City**

Nick Scott, Associate Professor of Sociology, Simon Fraser University

I. Unpaving Paradise?

To honour Janet Siltanen's prolific career and scholarship, I want to write something that carries an important piece of her work further into the future in a fruitful, if unexpected direction. I came to Carleton University in 2005 seeking to explore citizenship and civic engagement through sociology, and Janet became my greatest mentor. Under her supervision for my MA and PhD, her progressive teachings left an indelible impact on my imagination. For example, Janet's 2002 article, *Paradise Paved? Reflections on the Fate of Social Citizenship in Canada* still strikes me. In it she calls out the stories Canadians tell themselves of some halcyon welfare state that Canada supposedly enjoyed in the past, questioning how these stories blur social policy together with social citizenship rights and overstate the extent to which the latter were achieved, or even prioritized. After throwing Canada's lukewarm commitment to equity into sharp, longstanding relief, she asks how "the idea of the social rights of citizenship may be useful in present and future efforts to realize a more just and equal Canadian society?" She lands on, their value "lies in the potential to strengthen and promote these rights as a discursive and practical challenge to neo-liberal interpretations of the 'good' society as a 'market' society. ... The social rights of citizenship must be re-worked in a way that acknowledges contestation over the terrain and quality of the 'social.'"

Over two decades after *Paradise Paved?*, citizenship's non-market worth remains more important than ever, even as it withers under the weight of new Gilded Age inequities, suffocating political polarization and cascading ecological crises. Yet, the potential to re-work the terrain of the 'social' and citizenship has never been greater. What if, by way of correcting modernity's false separation of 'society' and 'nature,' citizenship grew in more-than-human direction? Several years ago, I asked Janet this over coffee at Bridgehead. That's when she told me about Kaela, a rescue dog she adopted from a kill shelter, and why it might be hard to expand rights and responsibilities for someone like Kaela, given her traumatic past and fear-aggression responses to other dogs. Among other things, Janet instilled in me a deep appreciation of the work a single, well-chosen case can accomplish (Flyvbjerg 2006). So it only seems fitting that Janet, with her troubled Istrian hound by her side, act as a critical case of how citizenship studies might grow in a novel, more-than-human direction. To that end, on a special pilgrimage to

Ottawa in summer 2022, I descended upon Old Ottawa South, Go-Pro cameras in tow. In what follows, I offer photographic excerpts of results from several go-along interviews with Janet & Kaela (full results will arrive later in an academic article). Unless otherwise stated, all quotes are Janet's.

II. Squirrel Skulls

It never occurred to Janet and her family that Kaela would have such intense reactions to other dogs. But after they returned home from picking her up in 2014 as a rescued dog from a kill shelter, every time Kaela spotted an unfamiliar dog, “even at a distance, she was terrified. She would tense up, everything would get really rigid, she would bark and lunge, using us as leverage.” Their first effort to introduce Kaela to another unfamiliar dog, Rufus, was eye-opening. Rufus sat still across the street while they brought Kaela to the front door where she could see him. “The hope was that, eventually, we take her out and bring her across the street. We never got past that spot in the hallway.” Just the sight of Rufus triggered Kaela. Janet worried: “I have to be honest, I don’t know if I am capable of helping her.”

Figure 1: First play date (Siltanen 2016)



At first, Kaela needed restraint around other dogs, even a muzzle. They also used two-pound saddle bags (one tenth her body weight) to slow her down, and exercise “on the treadmill for 20 minutes before even heading out.” When Kaela lunged at other dogs, they had to hold her in place. But after help from Brigitt, a local dog trainer, Janet introduced a technique to equip her prehensions with a little more muscle: the slip collar, which, without choking Kaela, provides some control of her head. “If you pull up you get tight, you get control. We had to learn to

control her head first. Our inclination was to control her body first.” While offering enough control for a

‘structured walk,’ the slip collar also invited a new social challenge with Kaela’s rehabilitation. “I got a lot of negative comments about that strategy.”

Figure 2: Janet and Kaela embark on a ‘structured walk’ (Scott 2022)



To start the structured walk, Kaela gives Janet a “thank you lick and tail wag” which means “we’re ready to go.” Then Janet reminds Kaela with collar tension “that we’re both on the walk.” As we ramble toward the Rideau Canal on a warm sunny day, Janet explains, “there are two things, in terms of mutual respect, that she can’t do. She can’t pull me, and she should know when she’s at the edge of that, collar tighten. And she has to come back when I call her.”

Figure 3: Janet reminds Kaela they are both on the walk (Scott 2022)



Besides her fear, another important early finding about Kaela “that we had to understand was part of her make-up as a dog. We had to learn to live with that, make arrangements in the house and in our relationship with her.” For example, Kaela’s prey drive: “we had to be very careful when we let her out the back of the house. Four dead squirrels later.” To help Kaela cope with other dogs in the city, they also reintroduced her to something intimately connected to her make-up as a hound. “She’s a scent hound. If you had two Olympic sized swimming pools and one had a teaspoon of sugar in it, she would know.” They noticed in many situations, like patrolling an intersection where lots of other dogs walk by, “she was using her eyes and not her nose. We did a lot of work re-orienting her to her nose.”

Figure 4: Kaela uses her nose (Scott 2022)



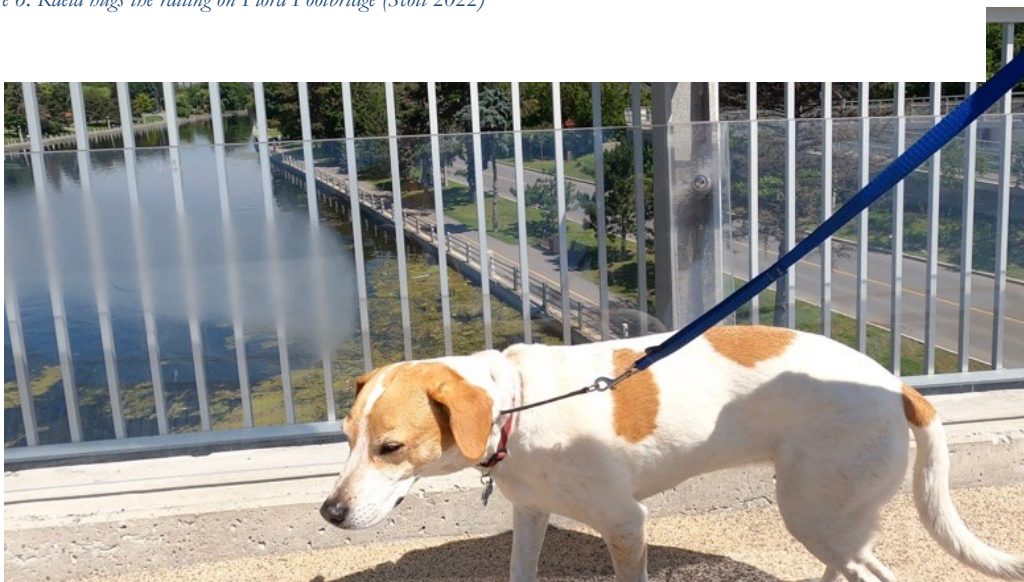
When I went back and reviewed my GoPro footage focusing on Kaela, I noticed how expertly Janet contours the fluid boundaries of Kaela’s mobility. A little tug here, a slick treat drop there, some cajoling—“picking up a little speed, that’s a good indication of whether she’s with me or not”—and suddenly we glide through encounters with other dogs, oblivious motorists, and speedy cyclists. Kaela often resists. But she uses her nose and she respects the two rules of ‘walk club.’

Figure 5: Janet expertly guides Kaela's mobility (Scott 2022)



Overlooking the Canal on a bustling pedestrian bridge, Janet and Kaela hug the railing and survey the city, which feels larger now as a canvas for their cooperative schemes. It was a long walk (over half a decade) from muzzles and four feet of freedom to their new ten-foot lead. While critics of animal citizenship like to “question whether we can ever penetrate the mystery of animal minds” as if only magical animal ‘whisperers’ can elicit their subjective good (Kymlicka and Donaldson 2014, 211), Kaela shows in painful detail that there is nothing mystical about it at all. It took years of relentless noticing, unlearning and spatiotemporal coordination.

Figure 6: Kaela bugs the railing on Flora Footbridge (Scott 2022)



Today, Kaela is blooming—as a dog and as a hound, but also as a unique individual. For example, she loves the sun: “She likes to be warm all the time, wrapped up in her duvet when she goes to sleep.” Then there is the outdoor place at home where she likes to cool off, her secret hovel beneath the back landing where “she made this little concave space because she’s laid there so often. She crawls under the steps. There’s a little access that only she can get into. She likes to go in there, it’s nice and cool. But I don’t know what’s in there. I’ve just, sort of, let her do what she wants.”

Me: “Hopefully not a pile of squirrels.” Janet
[laughing]: “Could be. Squirrel skulls.”

III. Towards Canine Citizenship

The individualized good in Kaela that Janet can elicit has since become more multifaceted, illustrating the power of trust in elaborating citizenship for domesticated animals wherein “parties first develop trusting relations with particular others, and through the evolution of these trusting relations come to participate in the shaping and sustaining of larger cooperative schemes” (Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011, 107). To gain a deeper understanding of Kaela’s civic education and Janet’s thoughts about canine citizenship, I went along with them on their ‘unstructured walk.’

Figure 7: Janet and Kaela embark on an ‘unstructured walk’ (Scott 2022)



On the brink of urban belonging, Kaela requires rigid structures and restraints that make gentle parents squeamish, but also unstructured and adventurous play in low-stakes environments to reduce her cortisol levels and give her the timespace to practice her own decision-making and olfactory immersion. Such play also opens up

the terrain between her and Janet to hail and grasp at each other's different lifeworlds and bond through what Donna Haraway calls "relations of significant otherness" (2003). For this they travel to the Ottawa's Experimental Farm, a place where tidy divisions between nature and society evaporate into thick, fragrant air.

Figure 8: Janet and Kaela explore a curious hollow



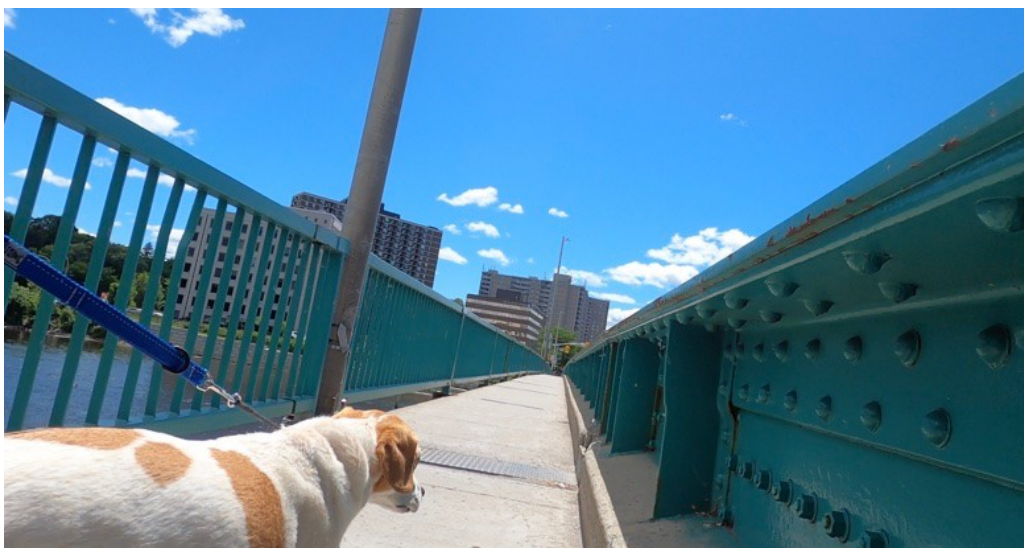
To start the unstructured walk, Kaela and Janet give each other the usual, structured walk cues, but before long Kaela is off traipsing through lush, overgrowing hedges amongst towering old trees planted by long-dead colonial botanists. Spooling forth a generous, 30-foot lead, Janet “pretend[s] to walk Kaela off-leash,” envious of the opaque little hollows she can wriggle into. With few folks around, except the gophers who keep short their passing gazes, the hound fully relaxes, nose to the ground. She immerses herself in her vast world of smell, rolling luxuriously on her back in the weeds. Ottawa's Experimental Farm was introduced to Janet and Kaela by Brigitt as a non-triggering place to practice their awkward hailing and leashing outside the dog-dense central city where things often boiled over. It forms a part of the larger subcultural urban geography known to dog park outcasts seeking to avoid other dogs in public green space (not unlike the Don and Humber Valleys in Toronto).

Figure 9: Janet and Kaela become tangled in a field of plants



As Janet and Kaela spool one another in and out of what look like gigantic cat cradles ensnaring a sun-speckled field of plants, I ask Janet if she thinks Kaela is up to the task of citizenship: “Yes. It’s a little step to include Kaela. It’s not that big of a stretch, I don’t think.” While, as Haraway (2003, 41) reminds us, “[c]ompanion species are not companionate mates ready for early twentieth-century Greenwich Village anarchist discussions,” expecting dogs to do citizenship in the ‘good’ way that Aristotle or Rawls imagined is a failure to recognize the subjective lifeworlds of dogs, much less ask how dogs can actually strengthen our democracy. But how do ‘bad’ dogs become ‘good’ citizens?

Figure 10: Kaela faces down Billings Bridge



Beside humans whom dogs can trust for eliciting their subjective good, ‘the good dog’ comes about in the same way other good citizens do—through seedbeds of civic virtue, especially democratic public education. A critical part of Kaela’s democratic education has involved Brigitt’s expert interventions, including Kaela’s gradual participation in ‘the pack,’ a curated group of seven or eight neighbourhood dogs who socialize and flow around the city together. Brigitt joins us on our final go-along, a different kind of walk meant to test Kaela’s capacity for civility towards others in public space. First, we cross a bridge over the Rideau River on Bank Street monopolized by motor vehicles which funnels pedestrians into narrow, anxiety-inducing peripheral passages. With no small, jumpy dogs around, Kaela sails across the bridge in a publicly reasonable manner. But we soon reach the (off-leash) dog park—Kaela’s most difficult citizenship test yet—and the tension is palpable.

Figure 11: Janet and Kaela dip their toes into the dog park



There are a lot of other dogs around, many off-leash with inattentive, phone-controlled humans whose lack of civic virtue reinforces the invisible wall of fear separating Kaela from the dog park. Yet, Janet and Kaela manage to walk by and even dip their feet inside the park, something Janet thought would never happen. Kaela's lead tightens. Treats flow for every acquiescence. Kaela jumps up, whines and circles around Janet's protective fold as other dogs pass by and sniff to greet them. Kaela slips into anxiety, her tail, ears and back all stiffening. But she climbs out of it, while Janet hangs tight by her hound's side.

Works Cited

Donaldson, S., & W. Kymlicka. (2011). *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haraway, D. J. (2003). *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago, Ill.: Prickly Paradigm University Presses Marketing.

Siltanen, J. (2002) Paradise Paved? Reflections on the Fate of Social Citizenship in Canada. *Citizenship Studies*, 6(4), 395-414.