

50+Living our best lives now and in the future!

A Life of Adventure, Learning, and Advocacy

As someone who grew up in Alaska and is a life-long learner, Kate Durket, JD, hasn't shied away from challenges or opportunities to grow. She rescued a wolf pup and raised it, ran the [Iditarod](#), starting in Anchorage with 20 sled dogs and finishing in Nome, studied sign language, became a court interpreter for deaf people, became a disabilities attorney, was part of a team helping frame what became known as The Affordable Care Act (ACA), is an activist for social justice, and is now a highly respected dog trainer in Oregon and online.



A Call of the Wild

Durket grew up in Juneau, Alaska. Her family raised German Shepherds as seeing-eye dogs. "Juneau is a wonderful place with mountains, glaciers, wildlife, and the most incredible friends who have lasted my lifetime."

One day, when hiking with a veterinarian friend, she encountered a dead wolf and six out of seven dead wolf pups. She took the surviving wolf home,

named her Gracie and raised her. "I never learned so much about the canine world as I did from her. She was super smart, willing, and a great ambassador. I took her to the State Legislature to show them what they were trying to eliminate. She also picked up sign language quickly."



On Her Bucket List: A Test of Stamina

After much preparation, in 1996, Durket ran the Iditarod from Anchorage to Nome, following the North route over 1107 miles in 13 ½ days. Other than standing on the back end to balance the sled, she completed about 800 miles on foot. When she reached Nome, 17 of her 20 sled dogs were strong enough to complete the race; it was a true test of endurance.

Bridging Communication Gaps through Sign Language



Studying accounting at UC Berkeley, "I worked my way through college at a convenience store where two people who were deaf would come to shop. I felt ignorant that I could not understand them. I petitioned the Provost at Berkeley" to accept signing to meet a

language requirement. “I ended up studying signing for four years and got my interpreter's license.”

Durket taught sign language at the University of Alaska SE Annex. “We performed at a local mall around Christmas, signing to four songs, including one by Peter, Paul, and Mary, and one by Simon & Garfunkel.” She also taught her students some profanity and sexual signs because they were similar to others and could be easily confused. For example, the sign for ‘F*#! U’ is similar to ‘meet.’

Disability Law and the ACA

“I was working as a court interpreter for the State of Alaska and decided I could be a better representative for people with disabilities if I had a background in law. I worked to advocate for people who could not advocate for themselves or manage the system. Watching deaf people getting railroaded or judges assuming deaf people were stupid infuriated me. I realized the ‘justice system’ was the ‘just us’ system. It is still that way today, though it has improved since the 1990s.”

As a disabilities attorney in Alaska, Durket also spent time in Washington, D.C., lobbying for those who could not lobby for themselves. During one of her trips, she met Rahm Emanuel, who was serving as Chief of Staff in the Obama Administration. As a result of this meeting, she was invited to be part of a 100-person task force helping to provide some framework for what became known as the Affordable Care Act.

Marching for Social Justice

While at UC Berkeley, Durket participated in several Roe v. Wade marches. On one occasion, she marched next to Martin Sheen (of television’s *West Wing* fame). She also marched for additional Civil Rights actions. Then, in January 2017, she participated with 100,000 other women in a Women’s March in Portland, Oregon.

A Call to Oregon

After practicing law for 13 years in Alaska, Durket moved to Sutherlin, Oregon, to care for her father. She later “found the perfect house” and has enjoyed “15+ wonderful years here along with her two dogs, Indy (an Irish wolf Hound) and Delightful (‘Dee’).

Becoming the Fairy Dog Mother

In 2016, Durket started working at Sutherlin Vet Hospital for a veterinarian friend. At the same time, she chose to work with ‘untrainable’ dogs and help dogs and families with the final journey during euthanasia.

As her practice as a dog trainer expanded, she soon became known as the ‘Fairy Dog Mother.’ “I speak fluent dog language; they recognize that I do.” She has trained family dogs (and their pet parents) throughout the area and makes nail-clipping house calls. She has also done online (Zoom) training for pet parents. She notes that it is generally ‘pet parents’ who usually need the most training. If interested in training, contact Kate: Juneauwolf@aol.com



For Relaxation

“My way of relaxing is a good glass of wine or a mug of beer with my two dogs, Indy and Dee, snuggling with me.” Durket confesses that she also enjoys reading Supreme Court Decisions and Briefs, including [Dodd v. Jackson](#), Bush v. Gore, and Olmstead v. LC.

A Piece of Training Advice for Pet Parents

“When teaching an animal, never let it end on a failed attempt.”

American Sign Language: Did You Know?

You have probably seen sign language communicators at meetings or on television. Providing information for and communicating with those who are hearing impaired is vital for the well-being of our society. Nearly [two million](#) people in the U.S. use American Sign Language (ASL) in the United States, making it “the fourth most widely used language” in the country.



Did you know?

- ASL is considered a foreign language.
- Different countries have different sign languages.
- Certificates, two and four-year degrees, and master’s degrees are available in ASL.
- Users of Sign language “often [use facial expressions](#) to change the meaning of signs.”
- Full and part-time positions (paid and volunteer) could be available for individuals proficient in sign language.
- Sign language proficiency requires training and a lot of ongoing development.

Suppose you want to explore the possibility of learning sign language but are not yet ready to enroll in a college credit sign language course or program. In that case, several free or low-cost introductory options are available, including:

- Free apps such as [InterSign ASL](#) for Apple products
- Free YouTube videos like “[First 99 Signs](#)” (ten minutes)
- Inexpensive introductory courses such as “[Master Sign Language](#)” are offered on Udemy for \$49 or more.

At the very least, learning sign language is an opportunity for all of us to keep learning and growing—especially for those no longer actively

engaged in the workforce. [Learning ASL](#) could enhance our cognitive skills, expand our cultural awareness, and help us become better listeners. Consider checking out an available sign language resource and see where your journey might take you.

Animal Interactions and Health Benefits

A 2018 National Institutes of Health [article](#) stated, “Interacting with animals has been shown to decrease levels of cortisol (a stress-related hormone) and lower blood pressure in humans. Other studies have found that animals can reduce loneliness, increase feelings of social support, and boost our mood.”

Therapy Dogs: Serving in the Community

Unlike [service dogs](#) that perform specific support functions for their owners who live with disabilities or particular conditions, [therapy dogs](#) are used in various settings to provide “comfort and affection.”



Therapy dogs, like your family pets, cannot freely enter businesses that do not allow dogs. Instead, dogs trained to comfort people in hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and other institutions provide a community service that could benefit all concerned.

Mutually Beneficial

According to the [American Kennel Club](#) (AKC), a therapy dog serving in medical settings could “help lower blood pressure and heart rate, reduce patient anxiety, and increase levels of endorphins and oxytocin.” The AKC notes that studies suggest therapy dogs also benefit. “Rates of endorphins and oxytocin are higher in therapy dogs than average family pets.” Further, “getting out of yourself and giving back to the community can improve your mental and physical health.”

Essential Characteristics and Qualifications for Therapy Dogs

[Canine Journal](#) explains that a potential therapy dog candidate would be “naturally calm as well as affectionate and friendly to strangers.” These dogs must be trained to be well-mannered and obedient. Generally, therapy dogs need to pass a relatively rigorous test and be certified through a recognized organization.

One organization that tests and certifies therapy dogs is the [Alliance of Therapy Dogs](#). After a background check, an application, appropriate training, and the dog is at least a year old, testing can be arranged with a volunteer. If the dog and handler do not pass the test, they can be retested later. For a minimal fee, a dog that passes the test can be certified. The Alliance also offers liability insurance.



I have a four-month-old English Labrador Retriever puppy (Ranger III). Other than periodically acting like a rambunctious pup, he is generally calm, very affectionate, and friendly with everyone he meets. I watched an Alliance of Therapy Dogs training [video](#) (about 12 minutes long) and learned

what my dog would be expected to demonstrate when he is ready for testing. As a technically ‘retired’ person who wants to make a difference in the lives of others, I am excited about the possibility of working as a team with my dog to serve in our community. Paula Marie Usrey

Post-Career Work: Not an Either/Or Choice

Once you leave the workplace and begin your new life, the thought of being tied down to a job—even part-time—may not sound too exciting. But what if you had the flexibility to travel and could create your own schedule? Part-time remote work may be an option for some who want to earn a little extra money or keep engaged meaningfully without some of the hassles that typically accompany many traditional jobs.

Here’s a quick AI-generated list of potential part-time remote jobs that might be ideal for some:

- **Translator or Interpreter:** Provide translation services online.
- **Virtual Assistant:** Assist businesses with administrative tasks and other organizational responsibilities.
- **Remote Customer Service Support**
- **Consulting or Freelancing:** Use your expertise in marketing, finance, writing, web development, or other areas.
- **Online Tutoring or Teaching:** Use your background or expertise as an online educator.
- **Remote Elder Care Companion:** Offer remote companionship, support, and guidance for older adults.
- **Remote Health and Wellness Coach:** Provide online health, wellness, fitness, and/or nutrition coaching.
- **Online Researcher:** Conduct online research for businesses, academics, or individuals seeking specific information.
- **Content Creation:** Write blog posts, articles, or create digital content for websites, blogs, or social media.
- **Remote Bookkeeping or Accounting:** Handle financial tasks, invoicing, and business expense management.

In addition to using your own contacts (including previous employers), [LinkedIn](#), [Indeed](#), and [Upwork](#) could offer some potential leads.



Boomer Best U does not provide medical, dietary, legal, or financial advice. As appropriate, consult your doctor, a legal professional, or a financial expert when considering health-related, legal, or financial changes.

Subscribe/Unsubscribe: Paula@boomerbestU.com