




Q&A
Sara
Paretsky



Fiercely independent V.I. Warshawski is the creation of Sara Paretsky, who — with the recent release of *Body Work* — has written 14 mysteries featuring the tenacious (some might say stubborn) Chicago private eye.

With the help of her downstairs neighbor, Mr. Contreras, V.I. shares her life with two dogs: Peppy, a Golden Retriever, and Mitch, a half-Golden; each came to her via a case and each has a distinct personality, but both help her unwind from her complicated life.

After a road trip promoting her book, Paretsky took time to tell us more about the dogs in her own life.

Bark: Why did you decide to add dogs to V.I.'s story? And why Golden (or in Mitch's case, a half-Golden)?

Sara Paretsky: I grew up not liking dogs, and then married into a family of insane dog-lovers. My husband and his three sons were in between dogs when we married and I thought we would stay that way, but the

lobbying was intense. When English friends were looking for someone to baby-sit their Golden, Capo, while they went to the UK for a year, I agreed—I thought, *One year, I can do this; by then, my stepsons will be leaving home and we'll all be dog-free.*

When we took on Capo, we didn't know that she had already been in five different homes. She was the sweetest dog in the world, so why home number one gave her up, let alone homes two through five, I'll never know—unless it was because she was on a mission from the Great Dog in the Sky to convert me.

Tim, our second son, is a great athlete, and Capo was seriously fat. He started running and swimming with her, and within two months, she was a sleek, bright-eyed animal. Tim was her best friend; she slept with him, waited for him to come home from work and basically left me alone, which was great with me. When our friends returned from England, they saw how much healthier she was with us, and how happy, and they let Tim and my husband keep her. I didn't mind—I just ignored her. In those days I was a marketing manager and was gone most of the day, anyway. And then, two years later, Tim moved out. Capo was desolate. She curled up outside his bedroom door and wouldn't move, except for brief trips outdoors to relieve herself. She stopped eating. I thought she would die. I still didn't like dogs—I didn't like touching them—but I couldn't let her die, so every evening when I got home from work, I would curl up on the floor next to her with my arms around her. She didn't know I didn't enjoy this, she just felt comforted. And after three or four days, she started eating again. And then attached herself to me. When I was ill, she slept next to me, not leaving my side even to eat. When I went swimming, she herded me to shore where she could keep a closer eye on me. When she died at 15, I was inconsolable.



B: It was great that V.I. essentially rescued Peppy; what made you decide to introduce her that way?

SP: Good friends of mine had had a Golden named Peppy, and I used to make fun of them for their adoration of their dog. After Capo converted me, I was so ashamed that I had to give V.I. a rescued Golden named Peppy. And since we had sort of rescued Capo, I decided to introduce V.I.'s Peppy in the same way.

B: Do you feel that adding the dogs changed V. I., or the way she views the world?

SP: For V.I., having dogs in her life means she has to think much more about rooted personal relations than she did before. She has responsibilities that she has to think about every day, but she also has a source of comfort. One of the challenges for me as a writer is not to get bogged down in details, and I realize as I'm writing that I spend a lot of space on the details of how V.I. looks after her dogs.

B: How many of V.I.'s interactions with her dogs come from your experience?

SP: Our first Golden, Capo, was perfectly trained. She responded to both voice and hand commands, and we never needed to have her on a leash, but she did live to swim—the first time she

saw Lake Superior, she jumped from a 20-foot cliff into the water. We didn't know until then that our perfect dog needed to be on leash when she was near water!

V.I.'s Peppy is like Capo. Mitch is more like our current (third) Golden, Callie. She, too, is very sweet, but she is incredibly high energy, and even though we have been working for seven of her seven-and-a-half years, and she stays and sits and lies down like a champ, she will not heel. And she gets wild fits where she roars around—we just have to stay out of her way until they pass.

B: Tell us more about Callie, your “senior C-dog.”

SP: That's a funny one. I set up a solo corporation about 15 years ago, when we had our second Golden, Cardhu. I wanted the name to reflect me, my husband and the dog. My husband's name is Courtenay; he served in the Royal Navy during WWII. Roosevelt's code name for Churchill was “seadog,” because Churchill had been First Lord of the Admiralty at one point. So my husband was a seadog, or a C Dog, and my corporation is called Sara & Two C-Dogs, Inc. When Cardhu died from bone cancer, we were so distraught that we thought we would never have another dog. But after four years, we couldn't stand it, and we got Callie. Because of our adored Capo, we stick with Golden retrievers. And because my company is Sara & Two C-Dogs, their names start with C. Courtenay vetoed Chernobyl, so I chose Calliope, Callie for short, because she's a merry-go-round.

B: Just for fun, how would you compare V.I. with Peppy and Mitch—any personality traits in common?

SP: V.I. is definitely more like Mitch—high energy, hard to control. Maybe that's why she enjoys Peppy's company more. **B**

Read more about V.I. (and Sara Paretsky) at sara.paretsky.com.