

Lee Day shines through her disability

By Anne L. Malyska
Staff Writer

Celebrity Pet Hairstylist Lee Day has been in the pet grooming business for more than 15 years. She has married two penguins at Sea World and two horses on the "Sally Jesse Raphael" show. She is registered in the celebrity directory and the celebrity address book "Anyone who is Anyone," by Michael Levin.

Despite her fame and fortune, Day, a Bloomfield resident, still does most of her work locally.

Sharon Huebner, a Glen Ridge resident with whom Day has been working for years, enjoys Day's work, even though her poodle, Annie, doesn't like getting her hair cut.

"You can tell she has a genuine love of animals," Huebner said.

But there is more to Lee Day than that. She is not your ordinary groomer. Day, who works in Bloomfield, Glen Ridge and the New York metropolitan area, cares for pets in their owner's homes. She sings to pets and plays music for them on an electronic

synthesizer. She even dances with them, will get in the tub with them and sprays them with perfume to make them smell sweet.

"I love animals," said Day. "I love animals and people."

Day has performed weddings for all kinds of animals, including horses, lobsters and dogs. She has also performed dog bark-mitzvahs and cat meow-mitzvahs. She has endless energy, and she loves animals.

But Day, who was born in Millburn and has lived in Bloomfield for 25 years, is working with a challenge that most people don't ordinarily face. She was diagnosed with Noonan's Syndrome, a disease that causes stunted growth, obesity, short fingers and learning disabilities, at the age of 28.

"The doctors said I would never go far," she said, "but look at me now."

Day has appeared on television broadcasts all over the world. Her unique combination of grooming, styling and entertaining has made her a celebrity in Bloomfield, Glen Ridge and across the country.

She has appeared on the "Sally Jesse Raphael" show, "A Current Affair," "The Joan Rivers Show" and "Good Day New York." She has performed a wedding ceremony for Jim and Tammy Faye Bakers' dog, a bark-mitzvah for Joan River's dog, and sang to Princess Diana and Princes William and Harry.

Although she was diagnosed later in life, she suffered through her childhood with the disease, and at the hands of an abusive father, she said. This is one of the reasons she took the stage name of Lee Day.

"I changed my name to get away from the painful memories of my childhood," she said, "and my father, who was physically and mentally abusive."

She also changed her name to pay homage to the woman who she says taught her how to sing — Doris Day. Day used to watch "The Doris Day Show," and modeled her voice after the famous singer and actress.

She has never met Doris Day, but spoke to her once when Doris called her after Day had saved a cat from an air conditioning shaft. She received the call more than 20 years ago.

"That's my one big dream — to meet Doris Day," she said.

Day also credits her success to another important woman, her mother Harriet.

Day's mother, who died in October 1998, played a large part in her success. She encouraged Day to sing and act, took her to Broadway shows, paid for ukulele lessons, and helped teach her how to drive.

She also sent Day to grooming school after her high school graduation. Day's mother wanted her to learn a trade that would allow her to be self-sufficient.

And she is. "I've done pretty good for myself," she said. "I've been in the same apartment for 19 years. I own my own car."

Her car, a blue Geo Metro, is as unique as she is, with laminated advertisements on the back windows, pictures of dogs with messy hair, and enlarged black-and-white photos of her and Dr. Doogie — her singing, tuxedo-clad Dachshund. Her license plate reads "RUF RUF."

Day carries a message of love for everyone, she said, especially children who are growing up with a disability like she did. "Don't give up, you can do anything you try," she said. "Dreams come true. I broke all the barriers."



Lee Day and her pet pal Dr. Doogie, brighten the lives of animals, as well as people. Day has dedicated her life to our four-legged companions.