

The Rentcome Family: Sarah, Jessica, Emma, Allan, Tracey and Scooter.



Feeding Au Naturel

Introducing Bones2Go!

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The last decade has brought to bear much change and innovation in the pet industry. Many new concepts and products have been introduced including doggie daycare, pet resorts, training experts with their own TV shows, fashionable styles, 5 star hotels with doggie amenities and a plethora of food and treat choices. Speeding past all of the hype, one of the most important elements to a happy and healthy pet is nutrition and it is arguably one of the areas where the pet industry has at times failed the consumer.

What to feed our pets has become the proverbial “water cooler” fodder in recent months due to the pet food recall. However, quietly in the background for a number of years, pet owners have become more discerning in regards to their pet food choices. They have armed themselves with information and their own research rather than taking the word of pundits.

Educated consumers know that poor nutrition can cause or worsen many maladies including allergies, lethargy, poor skin and coat, compromised immune systems and even behavior problems. Even though more information is available through research and feeding trials than ever before, there still remains as many “ideas” about what is most nutritious for a dog and cat as there are dogs and



cats. In stark contrast to the wide array of opinions on pet nutrition is the pet owner who would like a simplistic, exact diet for their pet that is optimum for their pet's health.

Herein lies the problem; each dog and cat are unique, just as humans are different. What is a good diet for one person, may actually cause an allergic reaction in another. Therefore, we have no roadmap to perfect nutrition and we must do for our pets as we do for ourselves...use trial and error to find the food(s) where our pet displays their healthiest self.

One local Houstonian that would like to provide an option to pet owners about food choices is Tracey Rentcome, proprietress of Bones2Go, a raw food and treat distributor located at 7025

W. Tidwell, Ste. H109. At her warehouse store, Tracey sells food, grainless treats, and supplements.

“Pet owners have come to realize that there are alternatives to providing a nutritious diet for our dogs and cats” says Tracey. “Often times, a pet owner is faced with a seriously ill pet and whether it be cancer, allergies or other problems, they want a solution that is natural, provides the elements comprising a species appropriate diet and offers a booster to the immune system. Feeding raw or possibly using supplements and making sure the diet is balanced is often their chosen solution” she adds.

And by the looks of Tracey's two Great Danes, Scooter and Stanley, her feeding program is working. Both dogs have beautiful coats, clear eyes and energetic vital-

ity. Other satisfied customers of Bones2Go include the Southeast Texas Lab Rescue, Golden Retriever Rescue of Houston, Lone Star Shih Tzu and Lhasa Apso Rescue and the Metro Police Department Canine Unit.

So how did Tracey's journey lead to a path of feeding raw food? It all began when Tracey moved to the States from her homeland in England where pet feeding twenty-five years ago consisted of feeding “pet mince” provided by the local butcher. “When I moved to the U.S., there was not the same type of butcher shops we had in the villages of England. I fed my dogs kibble and I had one dog in particular that just didn't seem to enjoy her food so I would try to spice it up, change it around and so forth but nothing seemed to work”, notes Tracey.

Fortunately for Tracey, Dr. Ian Billinghurst's book, *Give a Dog a Bone* was released about this time and it was very much like what she had been feeding in England. Tracey continues, “As soon as I went to a raw diet, my dog's love of food returned”.

So what exactly are the elements of a raw diet? According to Tracey, a typical diet would consist of meat, bones, organs and vegetables. For example, one might use pieces of chicken (necks, backs, quarters), Pork (ribs, neck bones) or Lamb (necks, shanks, breasts)

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and add some organs (heart, liver, kidneys) and mix in some pulverized or cooked vegetables (raw, unpulverized vegetables are not as digestible). "Vegetables, fruit and dairy may be optional depending on the exact diet being fed and depending on the pet's palate for the food" explains Tracey.

About 50% of Bones2Go customers originally switched to raw because of health problems such as allergies or immunity issues and the other half switched for a variety of reasons. Some because their dogs were picky eaters and some wanted to improve the performance of their canine athletes by giving them optimum nutrition (flyball, agility, obedience, frisbee, search & rescue, etc.). The raw diet can be purchased in bulk quantities that are fed along with supplements which are the most economic way to purchase the food. For those who prefer convenience and time-saving strategies, the pre-made diet (packaged in tubes, patties or nuggets) is the way to go.

Bones2Go inventories a selection of different raw food brands including Nature's Variety, Bravo!, Primal, Honest Kitchen and BARF World. Because supplements can be used to customize most diets, Tracey also stocks B-Natural and Animal Essentials along with a line of grainless treats, toys and books. And just in case you are in need of air freshening (which most pet owners are!), Tracey is also a Lamp Berger dealer.

As the trend toward feeding raw diets continues to grow, so does Tracey's business. She notes, "The pet food recall was really overwhelming to so many people, myself included. I was not prepared



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for the sheer volume of people and their pets that were affected. Many had switched from kibble to kibble only to find that food next on the recall list. I got to see and hear first hand from people how this had really hit home, and while it was nice to give them some level of comfort, I couldn't be sadder

that such a tragedy caused this surge in interest in raw feeding". She adds, "Almost every customer would ask me during the peak of the expansion if I was busier but for me it wasn't unlike asking a funeral director or hospital administrator in New York after 911 if business was good....it's never

good when it's at someone else's expense like that."

Feeding raw or home cooked diets have their requirements, however. Pet owners need to educate themselves or confer with an experienced source before they jump in. Many home cooked diets are not well balanced and may require supplements, or they may be over or incorrectly supplemented. Other cautions include treating the raw meat just as you would for human consumption, including

defrosting and keeping the meat for only a couple of days in the refrigerator and cleaning all work surfaces and utensils. Never feed cooked bones and no one element should comprise more than 50% of the diet.

Having an experienced feeder such as Tracey guide you is a great way to get started. She prides herself on customer service and takes time to work with her clients on their pet's profile, storage space, budget, time-constraints, etc. to tailor a program that works for each individual pet owner. Bones2Go is open Thur-Sat 10-2pm and Thur 4-7pm. Home deliveries are available on Wednesdays. There is no charge for a raw food consultation, but an appointment is required. Private shopping hours and pick ups are also available by appointment.

When visiting the store, you'll likely see Tracey's three children, Sarah, Jessica and Emma helping out. Her husband Allan has also been drafted at times to help with the front end of the business and he also wrote the software that runs the company. "He's been an invaluable sounding board for all of my crazy ideas" Tracey adds with a laugh.

When asked about Tracey's venture, Allan proudly admits "I think Tracey has done a wonderful job educating people on the benefits of a raw diet. You can buy bones and ground chicken from anywhere, but knowing how much, what goes with what and what supplements to use is key".

By Tracey's definition,

Bones2Go is a "Mom & Pop" store and they are proud of their ability to provide a personalized shopping experience that is unlike any other experience you may have had before.

If you would like to learn

more about feeding raw or home cooked diets, Tracey suggests the following resources: houstonrawfeeders@yahoo.com discussion board, the book, *Switching To Raw*, by Sue Johnson or the newsletters at

b-naturals.com. For the most up to date information on the pet food recall, check out the blog at petconnection.com.

To learn more about Bones2Go, visit their web site at www.bones2go.com.

