

**PET HEALTH**

# Dancing Queen

By *Melanie D.G. Kaplan*

Ukrainian-born champion dancer Karina Smirnoff kicked off her impressive *Dancing With the Stars* run on ABC in 2006 with Season 3, when she sashayed into a second-place finish with partner and TV personality Mario Lopez Jr. She then danced all the way to the mirror ball trophy in Season 13, in 2011, with Army vet J.R. Martinez, and just recently concluded season 18.

Smirnoff, who wrapped up Broadway's *Forever Tango* last year, has also appeared in movies such as *Across Grace Alley* and *Shall We Dance?* and is a founder of Alternative

Intervention Models, a nonprofit that gives kids and teens a healthy outlet in movement. Throughout her dance career and during her time on *DWTS*, she's had a lot of leading men—musician Gavin DeGraw, actor Ralph Macchio, country music singer Billy Ray Cyrus, boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr.—but no man leads her around more than her beloved American Staffordshire terrier Randy.

*“When you find your dog, you know it. It’s like true love.”*

Read the full Q&A with Smirnoff in our free iPad app!

**What’s Randy like?**

He’s almost 7 years old and 95 pounds, and he’s the biggest teddy bear. He’ll look mean, but he thinks he’s a Chihuahua and likes to sit on your lap. When he walks by a mirror, he’ll startle himself because he doesn’t realize he’s so big. He sleeps with me, taking up 90 percent of the bed, and only eats with a spoon.

**How did that habit start?**

He had a stomach infection when he was a puppy, and to save him, the shelter fed him with a spoon. By the time I adopted him, he was set in his ways.

**Did you have dogs growing up in Ukraine?**

I wanted a dog. My parents were always working, and I was in every activity imaginable. They’d get me cats. When we came to America, we saw a little kitten under a car in the Bronx, where we lived in the ’90s. My mom said we could take her home, and we named her Hillary after the first lady. Dogs are more responsibility—it’s like having a 5-year-old kid.

**How did Randy get his name?**

I had another Staffie mix named Tyson after Mike Tyson, when we lived in New Jersey. I love these big, muscular dogs. He was the center of the family. But he got out of the house, ran toward the highway, and got hit by a car. He was only one and a half, and after that, I’d catch my parents crying when they were looking at pictures of Tyson. I thought, we’ve got to get another dog. Then I found Randy, who is named after Randy Couture, another fighter. But I’m an only child, so he’s really Randy Smirnoff—the sibling I never had.

**Any siblings for Randy in the future?**

I want to get another dog. My mom is not 100 percent for it, but it will definitely be a big breed. When you find your dog, you know it. It’s like true love.

Reviewed by **Will Draper, DVM**  
WebMD Pet Health Expert