



DOG Champ

By Melanie D.G. Kaplan, WebMD Contributing Writer

Imagine a world in which none of us hid our flaws, and all it took to see others' souls was a deep look into their eyes. When actor Maggie Q (Maggie Quigley), star of the CW spy drama *Nikita*, gets going on her favorite topic—dogs—she wonders why we can't all be more like her four-legged best friends.

"If I have a pimple, I don't want to leave the house," says the former model, 32. "But my son Cesar [her 9-year-old shepherd mix, one of three dogs she rescued while living in Hong Kong] has this deformity that was so bad they were going to put him down before I adopted him. And the minute he meets you, the first thing he does is stick out his handicapped leg so you can shake it, saying, 'Look, here's my flaw!' And you love him even more because of it. Why don't we all understand that it's OK we're not perfect?"

Born in Hawaii to an American father and Vietnamese mother, Q now lives in Los Angeles. When she's not learning life lessons from her dogs, she splits her time between *Nikita* and a broad range of film roles—credits include *Mission Impossible III*

(2006, her first leading action role in an American film), *Live Free or Die Hard* (2007, with Bruce Willis), and *Balls of Fury* (2007, starring opposite George Lopez).

Most recently, she played a priestess in the post-apocalyptic sci-fi thriller *Priest*, trying to track down a murderous band of vampires. Before it hit the theaters in May, Q did some promotional interviews at the Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills. Cesar was at her feet, greeting reporters while his siblings, Lady, a shepherd mix, and Pedro, a chihuahua, both 13, were at home.

"These are dogs I used to not be able to take into public," Q says. "I always go for the large-breed aggressive dogs that people won't adopt, but you can't just adopt them—you also have to rehabilitate them." At one point, Q had eight rescue

Nikita star
Maggie Q fights
for the rights of
all animals

dogs and says the pups were constantly fighting, getting hurt, and heading to the vet. "People say, 'You're so tough in your movies.' Well, you have no idea. I have broken up like five dog brawls. Girlfriend is tough!"

In a short session with world-renowned dog behavior specialist Cesar Millan, she learned everything she was doing wrong with her dogs, she says. After a good cry, she went on to find Los Angeles trainer Tyson Kilmer. Kilmer worked with the dogs but also trained Q to be a dog trainer, which she says has completely changed her life—and the dogs'. She calls Kilmer her hero.

But while Q has mastered dog issues on the domestic front, there remains an infinite amount of work to be done on a

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local, national, and global scale. She has been vocal in supporting animal rescue and the proposed Los Angeles legislation that would outlaw puppy mills, which gained momentum last month.

Earlier this year, she reluctantly started using Twitter and has found it an effective vehicle for sharing her views and learning from her followers about new animal issues that need to be addressed. She posts puppy pictures from the local shelter, expresses revulsion toward circuses' use of animals, and urges adoption (one recent tweet: "Go to a shelter and show the ones 'nobody' wants that they are GOLD!").

Q is also the spokesperson for Best Friends Animal Society's (bestfriends.org) "Saving America's Dogs" campaign, which educates people about the good in pit bulls, and once a year she volunteers for a week at the organization's sanctuary in Kanab, Utah. "They think I'm giving them something with my time," she says, "but it does so much for me as a human being I go up there to recharge. It's soul food."

Internationally, she's involved with bear rescue in Vietnam and an elephant orphanage in Nairobi, Kenya, through Animals Asia (www.animalsasia.org). She also co-produced *Earthlings*, a documentary narrated by Joaquin Phoenix that explores society's treatment of animals, which Q admits is tough to watch for its graphic truth about animal abuse.

In the course of her animal rights work, Q sometimes thinks back to an article she read in *VegNews*, a vegetarian lifestyle magazine, about activist burnout. "At the time I didn't really feel burnt out, but I read it anyway," she says. "It's like world hunger or the environment—they're all big issues." She says thinking she can "win" and conquer these issues leads to feeling overwhelmed and defeated, so instead, she finds positive ways to contribute.

"It's important to me that, while I'm alive, I don't create the kind of [animal] suffering that would be created if I didn't care," she says. "When I die, my physical body will be gone. But I do believe my energy will stay here, and the decisions I've made will matter." ■