

PEOPLE IN ACTION

Three Girls à Go-Go

*Most women will walk, talk and shop free-of-charge —
but these three earn good money at it*

BY JOAN RATTNER

Melinda Rogers walks in the park for fun and profit

There's a long, lanky and beautiful girl who can be found in New York's Central Park every morning and afternoon, dragged along at a fast clip by a pack of six large dogs. Her name is Melinda Rogers and she covers 30 miles a day because she's a professional dog walker.

Melinda is one of 18 girls who charge forth twice a day, in rain, snow or whatever, to give big-city dogs their exercise. She works for Jim Bucks' Dogs, an outfit which trains and conditions dogs as well as exercises them. She started as a kennel cleaner and apprentice handler, and worked up to the point where, besides the walking, she is now in charge of all the girls and their schedules as well as the dog grouping. "I like to be outdoors," she says.

That follows. Melinda was a top-flight fashion model in New York

until she switched to dog-walking. But before that she was a professional skier (both racing and teaching), a scuba diver and a sports-car racer. Did she win many races? "I got out alive, which is one way to win."

Dog-walking is more involved than it may sound. Each pack of five or six dogs, which may range from a mutt to a \$5,000 show dog, is carefully matched in physical condition and temperament, but even so the handler must know what she's about. Once she's chosen, she trains for about three months before she's trusted with her own pack of big active dogs. She picks up her dogs, starting at 7:30 a.m., from their various abodes around town, gives them a fast-moving two-hour run through the park, then delivers them all home. Same thing at noon, though this trip would be considered more of a stroll. Salaries range from \$65 to \$200, plus a percentage of the business for top people.

Any problems? If a dog doesn't get along nicely with his pack, he is transferred to another where he may

be more compatible. And sometimes he is expelled altogether. The only real threat is a dog that's loose in the park, or a pet poodle who comes over to be friendly. The pack won't put up with them for a moment. "You have to be like a lion tamer," says Melinda. "You can't control that many dogs with strength. It's all psychological."

Lise Besthoff gets paid to shop for others — including kings

Most people are so uncertain. And a lot don't have much time to spend. That's where I come in," says busy Lise Besthoff.

Are you a visiting Frenchman who wants to buy your wife a diamond pin? Are you the King of Greece with fur coats and a refrigerator on your mind and no time to shop? Are you a rich New Yorker who must have the perfect mink or sofa and isn't sure how to find it? Miss Besthoff is your girl. She's made a business out of shopping.

A former department-store fashion director and buyer, she started her own service, "Touch of Elegance," a few years ago. Now, her income is in five figures. Working by the hour or on commission, she'll buy anything for anybody, and usually cheaper than they could buy it. She takes her clients along or she makes the decisions herself — "I don't get stuck with much." Some clients write from other countries. In this case, Miss Besthoff usually sends a picture first to be sure she's on the track.

"I'll shop for sculpture, or TV sets, or linens, or chairs — whatever a customer wants. It's a lot of fun because I make so many people happy." Lise used to take on whole groups of shoppers. Travel agencies would send 30 Mexican tourists or 23 Frenchmen at a clip, and she would hire a bus. But now that business is booming, no more

mob scenes. She works with a maximum of four clients a day, has a group of interpreters on tap. "Right now," she says, "I need someone who speaks Arabic." Having done a lot of shopping for the Shah of Iran's family, "Things like furs, jewelry, alligator bags," she's now got a constant stream of rich Arabs who want help spending their cash.

Most recent interesting purchase was a gift from a Mexican millionaire to another one who had everything: a \$750 Wedgwood telephone. ■

Alison Steele: Her job is to gab 4 hours a day with no script

Alison Steele is never at a loss for words — which is a very good thing. As a girl disc jockey on an FM radio station, she works in four-hour stints, 4 to 8 p.m. every day, talking her way from song to song. Only breaks are five minutes an hour during newscasts. "That's when I rush to the ladies' room, gulp a cup of coffee or run to the newsroom to see what's new to talk about."

Alison reports that the four hours don't seem long at all. "Once you can carry on for an hour, you can do it for four," she says. Most disc jockeys never read their material — it sounds too stilted. They talk off the tops of their heads, sprinkling in commercials and public announcements. Alison specializes in the New York scene.

"I was born here," she says proudly. "That makes me quite unusual." From a show-business family (her father was in vaudeville, her mother a singer), Alison wanted to get in the spotlight too. She started off on TV, doing commercials and kiddie shows, had her own exercise program for a while. She's been a weather girl, covered news, done comedy bits, interviews — everything you can imagine a woman doing on television. From all this, she met thousands of people in show business, and intersperses interviews between spinning the discs. Does she get rich?

Well, scale minimum is \$175 a week and Alison obviously makes more than that. She earns every cent.

As WNEW-FM's Broadway critic, Alison covers all the shows and nightclub openings. She reads all the newspapers and magazines, and "I don't have time on my hands. Every minute is busy." She does have time for her nine-year-old daughter (she was married to Ted Steele) when she comes home from boarding school. And she has time to talk.

"I'm a great gabber," she says. Luckily. ■



Richard Litwin

