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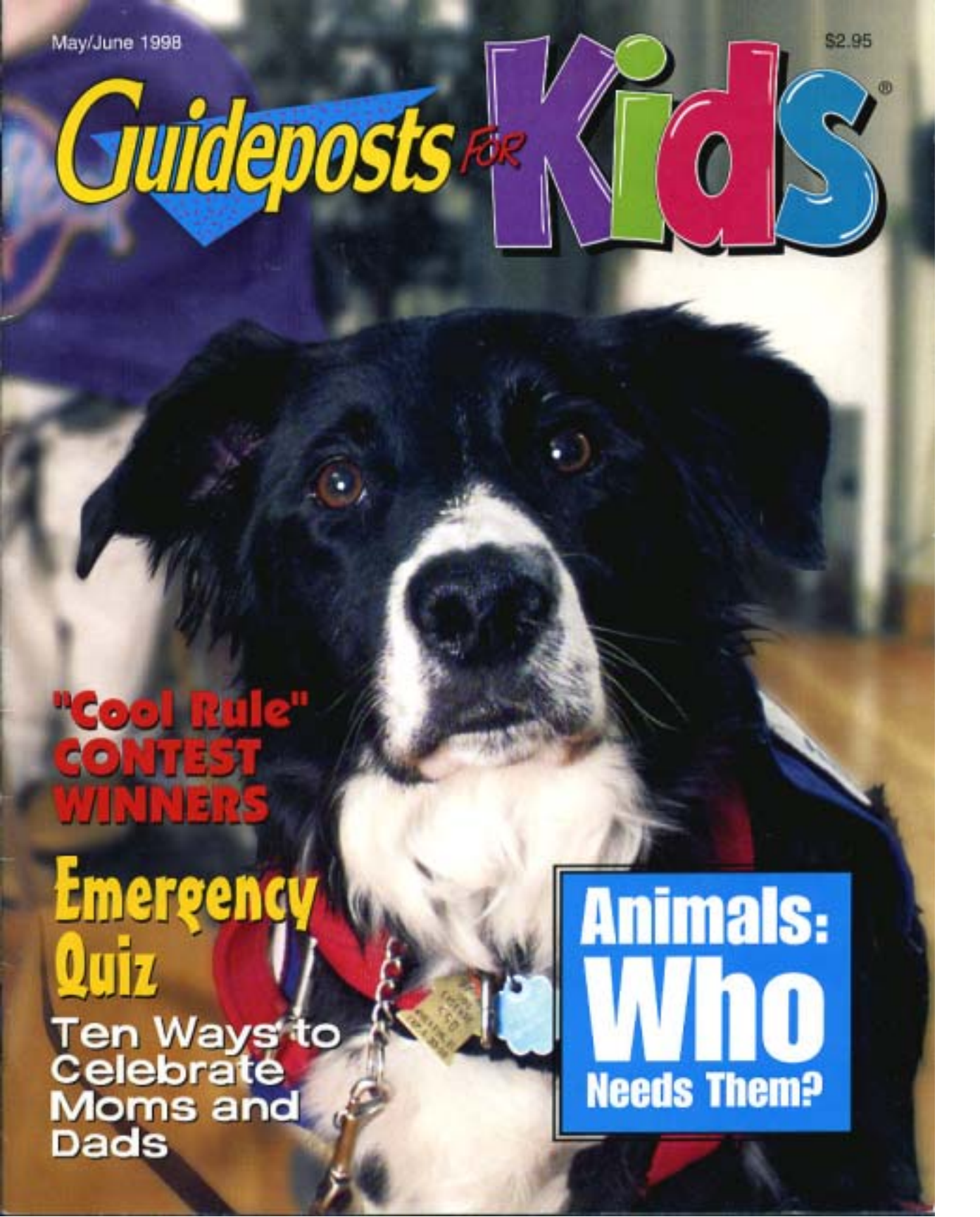
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# Dancing for the World to See

by Melanie G. Snyder

The low hum of bagpipes interrupts a quiet morning at Inveraray Castle. Jill Thomson, 13, straightens her plaid kilt, pulls on her green velvet waistcoat, and takes a deep breath. It is her turn to dance the Highland Fling, the oldest traditional dance of her country, Scotland.

For three minutes, Jill will perform the complex steps that were developed more than 800 years ago to symbolize victory after battle. A judge will watch every move, deducting points for the tiniest misstep.

Inveraray is just one of many competitions Jill will attend this year. In November, she will compete in the Eurosport International Dance Competition in

Paris. Last year, she won two first-place trophies there.

"My mom was a Highland dancer," Jill says. "I went to see a competition a few years ago, and I was inspired to take up dancing myself."

Besides dancing, Jill enjoys biking, bowling, and swimming with her friends. She also performs one night a week at a dinner theater featuring Scottish music and dance. Most nights, she entertains people from as many as 20 different countries.

"When I look out at the audience and see someone taking pictures of our dances," Jill says, "it is exciting to think those pictures could end up anywhere in the world."



BRUCE G. SNEYDER

*Jill kicks up her heels as she shows off her Scottish heritage.*