

TG the Terrific



The biography of an incredible dog

Lee J. Pullen

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To TG

On her 10th birthday
August 15, 2003

May you live in good health for many more years with us.
You are truly TG the terrific!

And to the memories of my Mother and Father.

Readers Comments

"We are humbled by your sensitivity."

A. J. Marhofke, President of 911BC Search and Recovery (see page 53)

"TG sure sounds extraordinary. I'm sure glad that you wrote this amazing book about your wonderful dog. [...] I hope you have many more stupendous memories."

Katie L., A Panera Soup Customer

"As long as children build snowmen in front yards and grown men write tenderly about beloved dogs, there is hope for the world."

Pat Goetz, *"(The last paragraph [in the first chapter] brought tears to my eyes.)"*

(ed. note – Ms. Goetz is an established Wisconsin writer)

Introduction and Acknowledgements

TG is one of our dogs. She is not an ordinary dog as you might well guess from this book's title. She is, in the words of our friend Rick Ruston (talking about his dog, Cookie), "the finest four-legged human that I have ever met."

I suppose a lot of people feel that way about their dogs – at least I hope so. We have always had a very special dog in our home and we have loved many dogs in our time.

But TG is so very out of the ordinary when it comes to wonderful dogs. She and I have developed a trust and a level of communication that is truly incredible. She does not just know what I am thinking nor just let me know what she wants. It goes way beyond that in many different directions. This book began as merely a list of over 70 basic experiences that we have had with her. I soon realized that I would have to expand them to give them justice. Somewhere along the way, I decided to write them into a book.

One of my guiding principles is to write the book while TG is still alive. Personally, I cannot fully enjoy a book about a terrific animal that has gone to pet Heaven. TG is very much alive and after reading this book, I hope you too, will also call her *TG the Terrific*.

My heartfelt thanks to all of the wonderful members of the Greater Racine Kennel Club (GRKC) in Racine, Wisconsin www.grkc.org. They have done so much to help me understand and communicate with this wonderful dog. A special thank you to Ellen Hauerwas, our first obedience instructor; Alice Applin, our second obedience instructor; Deb Chvilicek, our first agility instructor; and Barb Allen. Without their encouragement, this special bond between TG and me would not have reached the heights that it has. Thank You!

A special thanks to my wife, Gail. She has a special love for all animals. She is the one that persuaded me to get TG from our neighbor. And while I was unsure at first, she insisted that TG would NEVER have to go to the Humane Society as a lost dog. I love you!

Thanks to my friends and relatives who have read and re-read each of the versions of this book. Their comments and suggestions have been immeasurably helpful. Diane Snyder, without your and Beth's help with my grammar, this book would have been very difficult to read.

This first home publishing effort would not have been possible without the extensive help from our daughter, Cathy (Katie.) Thank you so much; I am deeply indebted.

An acknowledgement and thank you to the many patrons of Panera Bread Co.-Mt. Pleasant that read an earlier manuscript that I placed at the store's fireplace. Many well wishes were received and some wrote comments that I have been happy to include.

Lee J. Pullen
Racine, Wisconsin
December 2004

Chapter 1



The New Puppy

“Dad! Thank goodness you’re home! I thought you’d never get here! Come here QUICK! I gotta show you something! Right Now!” TG met us at the door with exceptional excitement erupting all over her body. She made sure that I was following her as she ran into the kitchen. “Over here – over here!” as she leapt again and again high into the air next to the kitchen counter. “Can I have some of this? Huh, huh, can I?”

And there sitting right at the edge of the counter was an untouched, unwrapped, two pound steak that we had inadvertently left to thaw for dinner. We just couldn’t believe that she hadn’t even touched it. Gail, my wife, cried, “Oh, you poor thing! I left that right out in the open and I never intended to tempt you with it.”

We, of course, heaped praises on our very young puppy and rewarded her excellent behavior. I could barely possibly see that she might not touch it if we had emphatically told her not to when we left the house an hour or two before, as she had already demonstrated her terrific behavior to us. But for her to know that she shouldn’t touch it at her young age? Impossible!

I have told this story to a lot of people at the GRKC (Greater Racine Kennel Club – Racine, Wisconsin) and each person said the meat would have been eaten by their dog. Many of these people have dogs that are obedience champions.

We began to realize that we had something very special here. We really did not know what kind of dog she was. TG was a stray 14-week old black, white and brown puppy that parked herself on the front porch of our neighbor’s house on the Friday before Thanksgiving Day in 1993. She told them that she was out looking for a home and she had chosen them.

Five days later, I was in our back yard with our two eleven-year old dogs, Teddy and Scotch. It was one of the first chilly days of the season and I was watching their breaths forming little puffs of smoke in the still air. Our neighbor, Dorothy Jacobsen approached me with concern that the “poor dog” at the house on the other side of hers was going to get cold. It was tied up outside all day long with no warm dog house to shelter her. It never got into their house and was always outside. Dorothy said that the lady over there had gotten rid of her previous dog because she was a single, working mother and did not have time to care for a dog. Dorothy wondered if we could take the puppy until its owner was located.

I explained the situation to Gail and she agreed that we could take the puppy for a while. I soon found myself at the neighbor’s house, ringing the doorbell, and thinking about that poor puppy that never got into the warm house. As I rang the bell, I could hear a dog running through the house barking and heading for the door. I was greeted by Joleen Aschenbrenner and a cute black, white and tan puppy. My first thought was, “I have been had!” This was the puppy that never gets inside the house.

I explained my mission and was told, yes, we could take the dog, but could we wait until the next day? She had promised her daughter that the puppy could sleep in her bed that night – it had slept in Joleen’s bed the nights before. Again I thought, “I have been had! This was the puppy that never gets inside the house.”

The next day was Thanksgiving Day and Joleen brought the puppy, her new collar and a toy over to our front door in the morning. We had a nice size dog crate ready for her. There were tears shed, but they thanked us profusely for our help.

But not the puppy! She had chosen where she wanted to live and this was NOT the place! She went ballistic – crying and trying to climb through the lower solid window in our front door. Whenever we took her to another part of our home, she made a bee-line to the front door. So we decided that would be the best spot for her crate – next to the front door.

I called my Dad to tell him the news and told him how smart she was. I had gone down the basement stairs to get something and told her to stay upstairs. She did! So I hid around the corner for a while. She came cautiously down the stairs to look for me. I jumped out telling her, “NO!” while she scampered back up the stairs. I hid again and she STAYED at the top of the stairs. She also already knew the SIT command. After I hung up the telephone, Dad told Mom, “they are going to keep her.” And we did.

It was Thanksgiving Day and we were having the family dinner at our house. The puppy had a good time playing with everyone – especially Rob, our son-in-law. She was running around non-stop. Rob said, “you are a

Thanksgiving present. You are just a little TG, aren't you!" And that is how TG got her name. TG for Thanksgiving Day 1993.

A week went past and Joleen reported that nobody had claimed their lost puppy. She had a few calls to her FOUND PUPPY classified ad. Even though she had described the puppy in the ad, people called looking for their lost white poodle and other dogs that obviously did not match TG's description. She said that the only call that she got that came close was a man that called and said, "it sounds like my dog, but if it is, I don't want her!" Then he hung up. We kept wondering why he even called.

TG lost her baby teeth at our house so the vet was able to determine her birthday was about August 15th. That means that she had been wandering around as a stray when she was only 14 weeks old. She must have been a stray for quite sometime. Joleen said she was very thin and very hungry when she was discovered. She apparently ate anything she could find – including small stones, sticks, paper and weeds. They had been her diet for so long that it took over a year to break her of that habit. Once she was very sick for a while until she passed a Y-shaped twig that had entered her bowel forked-end first.

Her former owner was a tall man who always wore a cap and beat her on her head with his hand after coaxing her near him with his hand. She told us this as we discovered some of her fears. Now, ten years later, she still ducks when I reach out to pet her on top of her head. And I had to wear a cap regularly for several weeks before she realized that men with caps were not always bad. Isn't it sad that some people leave permanent mental scars on their pets?

I had always said that when our two dogs, Teddy and Scotch were gone, that I would like a Golden Retriever. TG did NOT look like a Golden and it took me quite a while to get to see the beauty in her. She won me over with her demeanor and incredible intelligence. We have said that if we had gone to a shelter to get a dog, we would have walked right past TG without giving her a second glance. This thought haunts us because we would never have had the pleasure of knowing this incredible dog.

TG's first day with us was very hectic with the big dinner and family gathering. Later when we had some breathing time, I set out to introduce her to our cat and parrot whom she had not yet met and to show her where the community (always full) dog food and water dishes were located. She put her head in the food dish and gave me a loud snarl telling me that if I took one step closer, I would lose some important part of my body – permanently!

Gail said, "Oh no! We can't have that behavior with two other dogs here."

I asked her to close the two doors to the kitchen and leave me in there

with TG for a while. I glanced at my watch to see how long this would take. I sat on the floor next to her and spoke reassuringly to her and – you will not believe this – she just seemed to melt. Five minutes later I was taking food out of her mouth and giving it back to her. Just FIVE minutes and she knew she could trust me for life! I still find that hard to believe. I called Gail back to the kitchen and said, “it is all over!” Poor Gail, she thought that I had decided to get rid of TG. But, “No, watch this!” and I took food from TG again. Gail couldn’t believe it either.

TG and I began our bonding for life right then and there.

Chapter 2



Teddy and Scotch

Teddy and Scotch played an important part in TG's development. They came into our lives as two puppies small enough to both fit into a shoebox together. We picked them up from Orphan Kanines, one of our local rescue shelters. We really had no intention of getting *two* dogs. In fact we were just there to look at a puppy that had been featured in their newspaper ad. Gail said, "Let's go look at a golden retriever puppy that was in the paper." We had an hour before we could pick up our daughter, Cathy, from her gymnastics lesson. When we got there, we found that the puppy in the paper wasn't really a golden retriever – it just looked like one. Actually the puppy in the paper had just died from parvo and there were only two puppies left from the litter. Grace, the owner, gave one of them to me and the other to Gail. We held them for a while and fast became attached to these two adorable puppies. The time was approaching when we would have to leave to pick up Cathy. Gail said, "I'm not putting this puppy down."

I said, "well, I'm not putting this puppy down either." Then that "I have been had" look crept over my face and I realized that we would have to take both of them. Grace put them both into a single shoebox so that we could carry them in the car.

These two males were completely different from each other. Teddy, short for teddy bear, my favorite, developed into a stocky, Golden Retriever/Lab/Shepherd mix with very soft, fuzzy, long-flowing hair. Years later people always thought he was still a puppy because of his soft fur.

Scotch, short for butterscotch, was the favorite of Cathy. He was more yellow Lab in appearance with short hair. His fur was very dense, but he had way too much skin for his frame. When he lay down on his side, his skin would slide off his frame in huge rolls making him appear three inches taller. Scotch also had to pretend-bury his food in the kitchen linoleum floor. He rubbed his nose so hard and so much that his black nose turned a permanent pink!

OK, you dog owners out there. I know that his nose color change had more to do with maturing. But it always got a chuckle whenever I told it my way.

They both had parvo when we picked them up. Scotch recovered quickly under Dr. Perry's care (Belle City Veterinarian Clinic.) Teddy was touch-and-go for a while. He finally recovered, but up until his death thirteen years later, his stools still showed the effects of the parvo. Unfortunately, the puppy that had been in the newspaper died from it.

Both puppies had some obedience classes at the GRKC (www.grkc.org.) They learned well and we had many good times with them. One of the most memorable occurred at a campground where we had a 16 foot canoe. It was a hot summer day so we ran our hose into our upright canoe parked next to our trailer. Both puppies enjoyed wading in the water. As they cooled off and got more playful, the water rose in the canoe. They were jumping in and out of the canoe, barking, splashing, and chasing each other around our lot. The puppies were making so much noise and the seven of us were all laughing so hard, that we soon had a large group of laughing spectators with us. The pups were chasing each other the length of the canoe, jumping over the seats, and diving under the thwarts. Sometimes they even dove under the water to get under the seats. They looked like a couple of porpoises on a holiday.

Teddy and Scotch remained good friends until somewhere around their 8th or 9th birthday. They started snapping at each other. Infrequently at first - but it was never too serious. They usually went everywhere in the car with us. But one day we left them home and returned 45 minutes later to find Cathy in our driveway screaming and crying. She had stopped by our house and looked through the window to see "her" dog, Scotch, covered with blood. Never suspecting a dog fight, we wondered how Scotch could have hurt himself so badly. We unlocked the door and were met by two very calm dogs that were happy to see Cathy and us. Then we saw that Teddy was also bleeding – it didn't show up on his darker fur through our tinted windows.

A quick exam showed facial cuts on both of them which accounted for all the blood. They were rushed to the after-hours emergency vet hospital for stitches. That didn't take long, but it took three hours to clean up the blood in

the house. They must have had a big fight, because the blood was splattered high on all the walls.

From then on we had to keep them separated whenever we left them home alone. In fact, towards the end we had to separate them in the house even while we were home. Animal psychology books and conferences with Dr. Perry led us to the conclusion that both dogs wanted the dominant position in the herd in our house – even though they were both neutered.

They didn't fight while riding in the car with us, but in the house it was a different matter. Each time they fought, I would come running and would grab them by the scruff of their necks and hold them up off the ground at arms length until they calmed down. I still don't know where I got the strength to do that with two 60-70 lb. dogs. I guess it was pure adrenaline.

We noticed that each time Teddy and Scotch had a fight, TG would stand at a distance and just watch. Afterwards, she would check them over and lick their wounds. She was especially attentive to Teddy. When we decided to physically separate the “boys” in the house, TG was placed on Teddy's side. They had the run of the major part of our ranch style house. All Scotch really wanted to do was to hang out in our bedroom wing, so this arrangement seemed to suit them all.

Teddy was a ripper. No, not with Scotch, but with our rug and furniture. We came home one day to find the skirt from the front of our sofa in the wrong room. It was soggy and shredded. Scotch gave us that “Nope – it wasn't me” look. Teddy tried the same tactic, but a small piece of sofa was still in his mouth. After a trip to the upholstery shop, the sofa returned looking fine from the front. But we never let anyone see it from the back.

Another time I caught Teddy digging a hole to look for rabbits or hidden treasure. But he wasn't adding to his collection of holes in the yard, he was going down the middle of one of the cushions in that poor damaged sofa. Good thing the cushions were reversible.

Teddy was also very good at digging up the carpet in our dining room. Once he had dug up a corner, he would grab it in his mouth and start tugging. The installer had done a good job, so the carpet wouldn't just pull up and off the tack strips. Oh no. It had to resist Teddy's tugs until it ripped! I became an expert at sewing carpeting back together again.

One day we decided that all we could see in several corners was the waxed twine that I had used for the repairs. There wasn't anything left to sew together. So the carpet was removed. We took it out of the dining room and our two adjoining halls. We replaced it all with tile squares. It was my first floor project and it turned out great. We now had what appeared to be wooden parquet flooring. We liked it so much that the project was extended to include the entire kitchen and back room, too. So now we had floor tile

throughout the kitchen, dining room, bedroom wing hallway, back room hallway, and back room. We left the indoor-outdoor carpeting from there to the door of the garage.

It was great, easy to maintain, resisted any of Teddy's further diggings, and we loved it. But when TG arrived on the scene, it was a bit slippery for her quick movements.

Chapter 3



Quick Start

Learns to Walk Backwards

Puppies don't walk, they run. And they don't start out slowly then build up speed like a freight train. They are more like dragster drivers. When they decide to go, they mash the pedal to the floorboards and spin their wheels. TG could mash her pedal with the best of them. She always looked like a galloping horse on TV – lots of flying feet, but you don't have to turn your head or move your eyes to follow her. She stayed right there in the center of your TV screen. Finally she would get some traction and go tearing off somewhere. We called her “Quick Start” because she couldn't start off slowly.

The new slippery flooring, though, was her nemesis. It was comical at first watching her flying at full speed into a corner then turning her body and galloping in the new direction while still sliding in the original direction until she banged into the wall. She eventually learned to bank off the walls to make the turn. Her slides into the dogs' water bowl were especially funny. Here comes this black ball of fur sliding out of control, heading for the water bowl with all four feet scrambling for a new direction and her tail making erratic circular motions in a vain attempt at avoiding another watery collision. Then CRASH – she hit the water bowl – SMACK – the bowl hit the wall, SPLASH the water left the bowl and landed all over the wall and floor. It was

like watching the main clown act at a circus.

Her crashes were not limited to the water bowl. The new floor was especially slippery where ever it was wet from melted snow that had been tracked into the house or from water bowl crashes that had been tracked to other areas. She had taken several seriously hard crashes on nearly all of the corners in the house. We were concerned that she might crack a rib if she kept it up.

TG figured out all by herself that she needed to do something to avoid these body slams. Rather than slow down (hey! that isn't in a puppy's vocabulary), she would just take these corners BACKWARDS! She would run up to a corner full speed, slide to a stop, then turn around and walk backwards around the corner, turn around, do another quick start, come to the next corner, slide to a stop, turn around and walk backwards, and continue like this throughout the tiled portion of the house. Sometimes she would even slip and fall down on a straight stretch of hallway.

She remembered each of these falls and crashes and walked backwards through each of them – whether they were now wet or not. What was comical to watch before, now became hilarious. She traveled the straight stretches of the halls so quickly that she seemed to be constantly turning in circles across the house. Friends that watched her asked, “What is she doing?”

TG is very “body sensitive”. This is a trait that many dogs have. It was first explained to me by my departed friend and co-worker, Ron Behling, who had a “seeing-eye” dog. Ron said that he was out for a training walk while he was at the guide dog school right after a heavy snow storm. He was learning how to walk with his new dog when he felt her suddenly turn around in her harness. Rather than walk beside him, his dog was walking backwards and pulling him through a narrow path in the snow!

For TG, being body sensitive was not limited to avoiding places where she had previously fallen or hurt herself. She also avoids any narrow opening or place where she might bump into something that might fall. These situations included times when we had a bunch of paper grocery bags on the floor or we had several piles of sorted soiled clothes on the floor next to the washing machine. At each of these body-touching obstacles, TG turns around and navigates through them backwards.

It is really a strange sight. She has a look of studied concentration on her face. She lifts one back leg high in the air then reaches it backwards and tap-tap-taps it in the air behind her until it finds a spot on the floor. Then she shifts her weight to that foot and begins the process all over again with the other rear foot. The front feet don't seem to present the same problem as she can see where she can put them.

This was in complete contrast to TG's traveling backwards from rug to

rug in the kitchen. There she practically scoots across the floor – it’s just that she does it backwards!

The ultimate backward maneuver came one day when she decided that she was going to go downstairs to the basement to help me with something. I caught her at the bottom of our carpeted concrete stairs. “TG, what are you doing down here? You have to get back upstairs.” And that’s exactly what she did – backwards! One foot at a time, r-e-a-c-h-i-n-g backwards and upwards for the next step above her. I had all I could to keep from laughing. She finally got into a rhythm by the time she had gotten to the 13th and top step. She was so proud of her accomplishment that she wiggled all over. Of course she was rewarded for her “Good back-up, TG!”

Chapter 4



This is a Very Different Sort of Dog

Teddy and Scotch loved to ride in the car with us. They always took up the entire back seat. When TG arrived on the scene, we were not sure where she would sit, but figured that they would all work it out. So when we went for a ride, I opened the back door on the driver's side as usual and Teddy jumped in first, followed by Scotch. I told the boys to move over and let TG in. She looked at them and decided to lie down on the floor. We tried to intervene by moving Teddy and Scotch over to make room for TG on the seat. They were uncomfortable with this arrangement and kept moving around to get comfortable. TG finally settled on the floor again. She was on the hard floor with the drive-shaft hump down the middle. Finally we got smart and filled the floor area with several rolled up sleeping bags until it was raised up to the seat level. This gave all three of them more room so they could all spread out comfortably.

The third time we took them for a ride she changed into a different sort of dog. She ran out the back door in a barking frenzy – chasing Teddy and Scotch. With TG at his heels, Teddy trotted around the front of the car to the left rear door. TG left Teddy there and went back around the front of the car until she met Scotch, who was heading down the right side towards the rear of the car. “Oh no you don't!” barked TG. She barked in Scotch's face and Scotch turned around and retraced his steps with TG barking behind him. By this time, Teddy went around the back of the car to see what the commotion was all about. When Scotch got to the car door, TG left him and went after

Teddy again. Soon Teddy came back with TG barking at him. I opened the car door for the dogs and TG dove at Scotch knocking him out of the way. Teddy jumped in the car first. Scotch headed for the door and all of the barking suddenly stopped. TG waited for Teddy and Scotch to settle down then she jumped in to lie on the floor. We looked at each other and both said, “What was that all about?”

We soon learned that when TG had observed a consistent pattern that occurred twice, she enforced it. From that time on, TG was the combination bus tour coordinator and traffic cop. Teddy and Scotch had to be lined up in order and standing at attention by the time I got to the car to let them in – or else!

This was a personality trait in TG that we observed many times over the next nine plus years. “If we did it twice, it was law” and TG would enforce it. Period.

Before TG arrived, Teddy had been my constant companion. We played together a lot and sometimes we even bordered on playing kind of rough. TG did not understand that, however. One day, Teddy and I were playing and Teddy told me that I was getting too rough, by snarling at me. This was a normal part of our play and I had complete confidence in his love for me. TG barked at Teddy and wedged her body between us. She wasn’t going to let anyone hurt me. I felt as if TG had put her life on the line for me. For the next two days neither Teddy nor I could get anywhere near each other. TG would just get in between us. This was not a “falling-out” between TG and Teddy like the two boys had. She still liked Teddy very much. It was just that she did not want Teddy to harm me.

One evening Gail and I were relaxing in the den watching TV. TG came running into the den bouncing and making fast moves in the direction of the back door. She told us, “if you don’t take me outside right now, there is going to be the biggest flood since Noah!”

I asked, “Do you want to go outside, TG?” and got up from the sofa. TG tore off in the direction of the back door and ran into the kitchen. By the time I got to the corner of the hallway, TG was pushing Teddy out the other kitchen door in front of me. She was prodding and pushing Teddy with her nose. Teddy was getting older and much slower, but finally trotted along with the two of us to the back door and out through the garage. I opened the back door of the garage and let Teddy out into their 6x6 ft. kennel. But TG did not go out. She just stayed in the garage with me. She knew that Teddy had to go outside so she came to get me then “helped” Teddy to get up and get going. Incredible!

But wait, there is more. It was beginning to get cold and we were having the first cold rain of the season. Teddy was out in the cold rain while

TG and I waited in the garage for him. Teddy finished emptying his bladder then wandered slowly to the opposite side of his kennel. I noticed from the corner of my eye that TG looked up at me then at Teddy. I tried not to move just to see what she would decide to do. She looked back and forth at me then at Teddy again. Then she bolted out into the rain to Teddy and hit him with her shoulder spinning him around. When Teddy was facing the house, he trotted back into the house with TG behind him. Incredible, again!

A couple of weeks later we spent the weekend at our favorite campground. We have our trailer parked permanently on a large lot that gently slopes down to a lagoon. The dogs woke me up about two in the morning to go outside. I stayed in the trailer and just turned on the outside light so that I could watch to see when they were done. They didn't need to be on a leash as it was too late in the year for many people to be at the campground.

The dogs finished their duties and Scotch headed back to the trailer. Teddy kept wandering around and couldn't hear me calling him due to his growing deafness. I started to get really concerned when Teddy started downhill towards the water. I did not want a soaking wet dog in the trailer and I did not have any more than a tee shirt on. TG came to the rescue. TG ran to Teddy and hit him with her shoulder again. She spun him around towards the trailer when he was just a couple of feet from the water's edge. When he saw me in the doorway waving to him, he trotted back into the trailer.

This confirmed that TG was really thinking these situations through and acting on her own without any direction from me. We have never seen this kind of intelligence in any of the many dogs we have known. She is a very different sort of dog.

Chapter 5



Gentle!

TG loves to play, even now at ten years old. TG loves to chew. Those are safe statements, because all dogs love to play and chew. But TG is a very different sort of dog. Teddy and Scotch chewed everything in sight. We did not know that we were supposed to put them in crates when we were not at home. But we did lock them in the kitchen. They chewed the table legs and chair legs and wooden drawer handles. When they grew out of their puppy chewing stage, I had to go through the entire kitchen replacing all the drawer handles – all ten of them. And we had to replace the table and all of the chairs. They were all in danger of collapsing. Actually, Teddy never quite stopped chewing. I have already told you the story of his furniture redesigning capabilities.

We were ready to defend our house again against this new puppy that certainly was going to eat our house from the inside-out. But she never chewed anything that we did not give to her to chew. Scotch chewed some of our clothing, but TG would not think of doing that. Each chair leg, rug and shoe was completely safe with TG around. She knew which toys were meant for her. Whenever we bought a toy for her at the grocery store, we would just say, “There is something for you in this bag.” She noses through the bag, past all the food and pulls out her wrapped toy.

Her favorite toy is a double-handled, hard rubber pull tug. Most of them are shaped like a figure-eight with a bell inside the center cross-over part. The loops are made of ½-inch diameter hard rubber and the pull tug is

about 18-inches in length overall. They are available in red, green, yellow, or blue. They take the brunt of TG's need to chew. There are portions of pull tugs of various colors all over the house.

One evening Mom and Dad were here and I was sitting on the floor with TG while talking to them about how smart she was. I said, "I have never tried this before, but let's see what she will do. TG, go get the green tug." She trotted off to her toy box in the den and did not come back for quite a while. I joked that dogs are colorblind so it was going to be interesting to see what she would do. Just then TG came back with pieces of four tugs in her mouth. Each was a different color. We were all astounded! She did not know which was the green one so she picked out four different colors to bring back. Mom and Dad agreed that she sure was smart to solve her problem like that.

She loves to play tug with me. I frequently have one of the pull tugs (or a part of one) dropped in my lap or on my feet as an invitation to play. She plays equally well with a rope tug – which is a length of thick, colorful, cotton rope with a knot at each end and in the middle. She has a way of bracing herself and jerking so hard that Gail can not hold onto the tug. We know that it is very important to never let a dog "win" at tug. They always need to know who is the boss. So Gail leaves all the tug pulling games to me.

Teddy liked to play tug, so I had some recent experience in tugging. Scotch would not even try it. Teddy's style was to tug in short jerks and to shake the pull tug from side to side. TG's style is similar to Teddy's except she throws in a few more wrinkles. She also jerks downward and to the side. This is an especially powerful move on her part and it is very hard to hang on at times. Knowing that she was building a lot of muscular strength in her neck, I did my hard tugging in downward and sideward moves too, as I did not want to put undue strain on any of her muscle groups that would cause her any pain or injury. We built muscles for both of us in our play.

She could do backward jerks that were very powerful. When I got on the floor either on my seat or in prone position, she could pull me across our carpeted living room floor. I was about 200 lbs. at that time. This 50 lb. puppy was powerful. The more we played, the more we laughed.

Another game we played a lot was "I'm going to get your (body part name.)" In this way she learned nose, ear, tail, foot, feet, tongue, tickle-tummy, and tooth. I said, "I'm going to get your ear" and she starts growling and comes at me with her mouth open and does everything she can to keep me away from her ears. She swings her front paws and bats down my arm. The whole time it sounds like a really bad dog fight. If I do get her ear, I just rub it gently as if I am petting her and say, "I did! I got your ear!" She just stands there letting me rub her ear.

Then I switch to “foot” and she goes into a dance keeping her feet moving and off the ground as much as possible. Her teeth are barred and every other part of her body is also in motion.

Sometimes I switch my target body part without being able to get the former target. When I do this, her defensive actions always switch to meet the newly announced challenge even before I actually make a dive for my new target. So we know that she knows each of these body parts.

When I want to stop, I just say, “Gentle” and the play is immediately stopped. She is so good at responding to this softly spoken word, “gentle”, that I can use it anytime that she starts to get too rough or if I just want to stop. I brag that she has already been in a full frontal snarling attack dive towards me with her teeth barred and all four feet off the ground, when I just said, “Gentle.” She closes her mouth and just comes to an immediate stop before she even hits the ground!

She is NEVER out of control. It is always just a game with us. When I tell people about this, I always say, “Of course ‘Ouch’ works, too.” The only times that she has ever hurt me are when I do not get out of the way quickly enough and she catches me with a sharp tooth. Never in a biting motion – only in a sweeping motion.

These two words, “gentle” and “ouch” bring different responses from TG. While there is an immediate shut off for both, the “ouch” brings an “I’m sorry” from her. She hangs her head and licks my wound until I tell her it is alright. Then she thanks me for my understanding by licking my face. But she will not resume this play with me if I have said, “Ouch.”

We played like this so much that it was only natural for us to sometimes play before a class started at our dog club. One time in particular I remembered demonstrating my “Gentle” command to our instructor. TG loved the dog club and was particularly fired-up that night. She launched into the loudest attack on me that I had heard in a long time. After a short demo, I said, “Gentle” and she stopped immediately. I turned proudly to our instructor with, “see!” written all over my face.

Alice Applin, the instructor, just looked disapprovingly at me and said, “Someday she may not stop – I wouldn’t push it if I were you.” The other class members also appeared agitated and shocked. Their dogs needed some calming down before we could get the class started. After that I only did these demonstrations in my own home. I will say it again, TG is NEVER out of control with this type of play.

Warning: Do not attempt these activities at home. Your dog could hurt you seriously. TG and I have complete confidence and trust in each other. To do these things with a dog, who is just a friend, could be dangerous.

There have been times, both in play and not in play, that I have hurt TG in some way. For example if I step on her foot accidentally, I always stop what I am doing and bend down and stroke the injured part and say, “Oh, TG, I am so sorry.” She is very still at first, then in a second or two, she accepts my apology and gives me a kiss on my nose or cheek. Everything is immediately back to normal in her mind. She realizes that it was an accident and that she was not being punished for something she had done.

Chapter 6



More Games

Our play typically consists of a few other rough-housing activities. The body-part games sometimes turned into a chase. TG will tear out of the room then come flying back in, banking off the sofa and back out of the room. I try to dive on top of her. I really don't want to dive on a running dog and hurt her so I always just miss her. I touch her, but do not land on her. Gail laughs and TG just loves it.

At other times, I hide around a corner or behind the sofa when she is walking by. Then I leap out with my own "argh" growl and both hands up in the air in a tiger's pounce at her. Sometimes she sets up the situation for me. When I go out the front door to get the mail from our mailbox across the street, she waits for me in the kitchen. When I get back into the house, I crouch down behind the living room sofa. She comes out on a pretend scouting mission to find me. She sneaks up to the edge of the sofa then pounces out in front of me. I go into my attack leap and she turns and runs as fast as she can. Then she comes back and pretends to attack me. The game usually ends there and she is just normal and happy to see me.

Another game that she loves is to attack just my feet. This is usually as soon as we finish our supper on TV tables in the den. She does not want me to spill my milk nor upset any of our food, so she waits until we are finished. Then she attacks one of my feet like a ferocious lion attacking her supper in her cage. She grabs my foot in her mouth and growls like crazy. Sometimes I counter attack with my other foot. She turns and attacks that one. When I

have a chance, I spread my legs and encourage her to get between them. Then I try to clamp her body between my legs and trap her. She wriggles out and attacks my foot again. Oh, I didn't tell you that I am wearing shoes. But there is never a tooth mark on my leather shoes. She just mouths them and only holds on tight to the sole of the shoe. Her teeth are in contact with only the sole on the two sides of my shoe.

I tried the same game in just stocking feet. She sounds just as fierce as if I am wearing shoes, but my socks are never damaged in the slightest way. TG sounds like a lion ripping into its food and growling ferociously to keep the others away. I can even play barefoot, but it feels more like a foot massage. No tooth marks, no red spots, and no blood. She seems to have just as much fun whether or not I am wearing shoes. She always uses the appropriate amount of jaw pressure for the situation. Never too much.

A game that TG created for us was "keep away from my toys". TG brings a toy for us to throw for her. This is the way she wants the game to start. We toss the toy for her, then she runs to pick it up and dares us to try to get it. I avoid using a command to tell her to give it to me, but instead try various ways to get it from her. She might lie on the floor chewing the toy. I get on the floor and edge closer and closer to her before she growls and changes her position. Often I slowly move one hand as close as possible to the toy without having her change position. Then I attempt to distract her with my other hand. When she is distracted by the other hand moving towards her, I make a fast grab with the first hand and grab her toy.

After she has fallen for that trick a couple of times, she moves her gaze rapidly from one hand to the other and back again. That does not work for me any more so now Gail joins in and begins making distractions. That trick did not work for very long either. TG was on to us.

I think that activity became a training exercise for TG that taught her to broaden the scope of her concentration in various situations. Especially in her agility training.

We noticed another of TG's traits while playing these games. No matter how hard she is playing, if I toss a ball into the air near any furniture, plant, or lamp she just stands there. She makes no move to catch the ball. She waits until it comes to rest before retrieving it. TG has never knocked over anything in our house. If the ball rolls under an end table, she comes to get me to retrieve the ball so that she won't upset anything on the table by trying to go under it. We wish our five children had been this careful. (I won't bring up the basket ball toss in the kitchen by #2 son that brought down a collectors plate with a crash.)

TG creates her own games. This was the most evident when we had three of our young grandchildren stay at our house overnight within a few

months of each other.

Nolan was about five and was already an avid ballplayer with an accurate throw. He tried to play catch with TG the way that he played with his dog. But TG just stood there ignoring his attempts. The ball would whiz past TG, but she wouldn't even move. We told Nolan to only throw underhand in the house. As soon as his power pitches slowed down, TG readily played with him. She was not going to be a part of any play that might damage something in the house.

When Landry (from Iowa) was about eleven, TG said, “OK, now this boy is bigger and I’ll see if he will try to catch me.” She would not play ball with him, but she did play with him in a milder modification of the way that I play with her. TG let Landry chase her around the house, but she would not let him catch her. She would not do any playful attacks with him either.

Joey was three or four when he first stayed overnight. Joey was born in Okinawa and was living in California at the time – he has since returned to Okinawa – his Dad is in the USMC. TG attempted several different games with Joey that just didn’t work. It was interesting to see her try different games until she settled on a rolling ball fetch game modification. Then whenever she saw one of these grandsons again, she picked up where they left off and played the same game that TG had originally chosen for that grandson.

Chapter 7



What Kind of a Dog is She?

TG looked a lot like the dog that my best buddy, Bill Wenzell, had when we were in high school. He had said that “Boots”, was a Collie, but she did not look like a “Lassie” Collie. Boots was mostly black and tri-colored like TG and Boots’ nose was not as long and pointed as Lassie’s, but it was considerably longer than TG’s. Boots had a shaggy coat.

Our vet thought TG was a Lab mix. We took her to the local humane society to get their opinion. They said that TG was definitely a German Shepherd - Lab mix. We still were not satisfied. Then we thought we had the answer. The Purina Chow® dog treats box had a picture that looked a lot like her. Gail wrote to Purina asking what breed that dog was. Their reply was very cordial and said it was a “Russian Wolfhound.” Our vet never heard of that breed so our curiosity quickened. We borrowed a copy of the AKC registered dog manual. We still could not find anything about Russian Wolfhounds.

When I signed TG up for her first obedience class at the GRKC (Greater Racine Kennel Club,) the application blank asked for her breed. I told the instructor what Purina had told us. I was informed that Purina did not know what they were talking about. I showed the picture from the box and they all agreed that it was a picture of a Smooth-coat Collie. I was informed that “smooth-coat” just meant that the breed has shorter hair and was not a Rough-coat Collie like Lassie. They felt that except for TG’s short hair that TG looked a lot like a Border Collie. So she was registered for class as a

“Border Collie mix.”

We tried to learn more about Border Collies and I stumbled upon the AKC breed standard instructions for Border Collies on the internet at www.adog.net/breeds/2aborc01.html. What we read there was an eye-opener on several counts.

The instructions emphatically informed the judges that a “smooth-coat Border Collie” was an acceptable variation in the breed. It went on to exactly describe TG’s coat and stature. This gave us an enormous sense of discovery and relief to know what her breed was. Since we have no papers for her and she tends to push the upper limits of size and weight, I describe her as a “Smooth-coat Border Collie mix.”

The USBCC (United States Border Collie Club, Inc.) at www.bordercollie.org/bcchar.html describes a Border Collie as working with its head low and its tail tucked between the hind legs. When they are working, they don’t take their eyes off their sheep. They raise their head when they are not working or at play.

This explained away a concern that we had about her. When TG was walking at a “heel” on a leash, she had her head lowered to her shoulder level and her tail between her legs. We had been interpreting this action as displeasure on TG’s part when it was not that at all. She was just doing what comes naturally to a Border Collie. This helped us to better understand her.

Border Collies are ranked at the top of the list of intelligent dogs. TG, in my opinion, is right up there near the top of all of the Border Collies. Before TG, I had never met a dog that had so many human qualities of comprehension, compassion, wit, memory, teasing, understanding, companionship, caring, love, etc., etc. She is just terrific.

Chapter 8



Marley

One day our daughter, Cathy, asked us if we could take her cat, Marley. She was moving into an apartment that would not allow pets. Marley was a 4-yr old completely black, short-haired female cat. She arrived in a pet traveling crate and was set down in our spare bedroom that we call our blue bedroom - or just blue room. Our Maine Coon cat had died at 19 years old a few months before, so we were without a cat when Marley arrived. TG was nearly 3 years old and was used to our Maine Coon. Marley had lived with a large 125 lb Golden Retriever so she was used to having a big dog around.

The introductions went very well with both TG and Scotch. (Teddy died the year before.) While Scotch was just stand-offish, TG and Marley hit it off very well right away. So well, in fact, that whenever there was a thunderstorm, Marley would run for cover - - under TG.

They often napped next to each other. This was usually initiated by Marley, but TG did not object. When they woke up, Marley would stand up first and rub on TG. It was really comical to watch. Marley did her flank rubs across the side of TG's face. Then she turned around and rubbed her other side on TG's face, ducked under TG's nose, and rubbed her back on TG's chin. Coming out the other side, she paused, twitched her tail, and went back for more. TG just kept turning her head to avoid getting tail twitches in her face. They kept this up until they caught us laughing at their antics.

TG created a game with Marley that they both loved to play. TG bounced at Marley asking her to run. If Marley was willing, she would run

for the sofa in the den. From up on the sofa she challenged TG to a game of King of the Hill. The usual sound effects of barking and hissing mixed with growls came from both of them. They kept this up for long periods at a time. Sometimes Marley started it by teasing TG then making a run for it. We even saw TG letting Marley chase her.

Sometimes they would both be resting on the sofa when one of them would start something. We could watch without getting in their way by looking through the “pass-through” cut-out window over the kitchen sink into the den. Marley was batting at TG with her clawless front paws. TG was also batting at Marley with her front paws.

Like all cats, Marley loved to play with anything that moved. One day Gail was sitting on the den sofa mending some torn clothes. Marley was being a pest by chasing the thread that Gail was using. Twice, Gail pushed Marley away saying, “Don’t Marley!”

The third time TG took over. She put her paw over Marley, wrapped it around Marley, and scooped Marley towards her. TG barked at her with, “Marley! She told you to get back. Now stay back!” And she did.

TG went a bit over-board, as she often does. TG interpreted Gail’s command as referring to anything that Marley wanted to chase. Poor Marley was not allowed to chase anything. When I was decorating our Christmas tree, I tried to get Marley to chase the long sparkly foil garland that I was dragging across the floor in front of her. It took several passes in front of her and another across her back before Marley took a whack at it. She was just warming up and really getting into it when TG walked up to her and barked once. Marley immediately stopped, laid down and tucked her front paws under her. From then on she only just watched me. Poor Marley.

Marley had lived with an aquarium full of gerbils at Cathy’s house. Frequently Cathy took a few gerbils out for Marley to play with. Marley was taught to play gently with them. Surprisingly enough, Marley never bit them and merely tapped them softly with her clawless front paws. When Cathy moved and Marley came to our house, the gerbils came, too. The gerbils somehow got out a couple of times. We arrived at home one day to find Marley and TG watching three escapees. Marley had two of them under her watchful eyes near the fireplace in the living room. TG told us the third one was behind the piano in the den. It was a struggle to pull out the piano far enough for me to get back there. Every time I thought I had it out far enough, TG got in there first and I decided that I would have to pull it out farther. Sure enough, there was the gerbil – down in the return air vent behind the piano – right where TG said it was. We would never have found them without the aid of our dog and cat wild animal rescue team. There was only one other gerbil escape incident, but it was not very eventful. We made sure

their aquarium cover was on securely. The gerbils were taken to our local pet store shortly after that.

The only time that Marley went into the attack and kill mode was when she was chasing flies and bugs on our screens. TG learned from Marley that there was a preferred technique in catching bugs from the screened door. TG watched while Marley jumped and swatted at the bugs with her cupped paw. After a few lessons, TG began honing her jump and cupped-paw-swatting skills. It was really cute and entertaining to watch two cats trying to bat down bugs from the screen – except one of them was a dog. When Marley caught a bug, she ate it. You guessed it – TG ate them too. Well, she only ate one or two before she told Marley, “Euwwe! These things are gross! Yuk!” After that, TG just stepped on them or punched them onto the floor with her nose to make sure that they were dead.

Chapter 9



Back Seat Driver

Many stories have been told about pets traveling across country to return home or to find their families. Most of them are so hard to believe that you are almost sure that they are fictional. TG has made believers out of us. She always knows where she is. It is as if she has a grid map in her head and an active GPS (global positioning system) that is always turned on and in full operation.

She knows where each of our kids lives (well, not the boys in Davenport nor Okinawa) and she tells me where to turn to drive to each one of their houses. She also knows every store that we frequent by name and where it is located.

Our oldest daughter lives in Glendale, a northern suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, about 35 miles from our house. The second time we drove there with TG, she told us when we were about ½ mile from Karen's house. For the next three turns, TG was panting with excitement and looking out of the correct side window for each of the remaining turns. As we approached our daughter's house, TG went ballistic. This was only the second time that she had ever been there and her previous visit had been several months before.

When we left our house that morning, we did tell TG that we were going to Karen's house, but we only told her once. We did not repeat the reminder several times during our drive. That would have kept her keenly focussed on our destination. No, we just said, "TG, get in the car. We are going to go to Karen's house" and that was that. She was smart enough to

remember our destination and to somehow recall our route. Could a human have done as well? Well some could, but there are many of us humans that could not. I can not remember how to get to my brother's house in DePere, Wisconsin. And I have the advantage of having driven there a couple of times and can read maps. Hmm, next time I'll have to be sure that TG goes with us – then she can direct me after that.

You may think I am kidding you, but she really does back seat drive. After several more examples, I hope you will have a better insight into her driving skills. (I'll have to check to see if the AKC will issue her a "back seat driver's license.")

We had driven our youngest daughter, Cathy, to a Milwaukee clinic multiple times during her difficult pregnancy five years ago. TG usually went with us. While we were there, we always parked our station wagon in their multi-level parking ramp. Although it was mid summer, she was cool in the shade of the ramp and near an outside wall to allow a better quality of ventilation. Because our focus was on our daughter, we never gave TG the name of the clinic. We never said, "TG, we are taking Cathy to The Froedert Clinic today," or anything like that. In her mind it was not unusual for us to drive up I-94, I-294 and Hwy 45 to the clinic without telling her where we were going. So when we drove that route two years later to go a mile or two further up the road to a different location, she thought we were heading for Froedert Clinic again. She was calm until I went past the off-ramp to Froedert.

"Dad! Dad! You missed your turn!" TG's paw was on my right shoulder. "Dad, wake up!" You missed your turn!" My right ear was being licked by an over anxious dog. "Mom! Mom! Tell him that he missed the turn!" She was climbing all over Gail's back and both shoulders. All 76 pounds of wild dog were on one shoulder, in her ear, pawing frantically at the back seat window, on her other shoulder, in her face, and back to the window. All of this took place in a matter of 10-15 seconds along with rapid panting and verbal urgings from TG.

She was convinced that I was lost again and that she knew where I should be going. She did not calm down until we both told her, "It is alright TG. We are not going that way today. Just settle down and relax."

TG did not lie down. She just sat looking out of the window thinking, "We'll see."

I mentioned earlier that TG had a built-in GPS. It was always turned on and functional. She always knew where to go even if we were driving on a road that she had never been on before. For example, when we drove to our daughter, Anne's house, we always approached it from the south. One time we decided to test TG's GPS so we approached her house from the north

instead. We told TG once, that we were going to Anne's house while we were driving south on a road that was three or four blocks north and east of Anne's street. Just north of her house, we turned to the west and drove slowly. TG was sitting up and looking out the windows. As we approached Anne's street, TG got more and more excited. But then I drove past her street, setting off TG again. She knew where Anne's street was even though she had never approached it from that direction before.

Another memorable example was on a trip to our campground. We told TG that we had some errands to do then we would be going "to the trailer." She understood that we were not going directly there so she didn't fuss when I drove a mile north of our usual route then headed west. That was fine with her because the trailer was ten miles west then eight miles south and we were now going in the right direction. The road that we were on did not matter to her – only the direction. But then, I did the unthinkable. I turned north again!

"Dad! Dad! Wait! You turned the wrong way. Don't you know your left from your right? Geesh, do I have to do everything in this family? We will never get to the trailer going this way! Mom! Tell him! He will listen to you. He got it all screwed up again!"

"Settle down TG, I'm turning onto the interstate and I can't see to drive with you in my face. First we have to go this way to do an errand in Milwaukee. Then we will go to the trailer." That was all she needed. Just a simple, but believable explanation. I will tell you more about this "First – Then" stuff in the next chapter.

Oh, and she was very happy when we finished our errand and headed once again in the right direction.

I believe that I may have messed up TG's GPS one time recently. We were out doing errands and did not have any particular place like "grandma's house" or the "trailer" to go to – she was just with us as a passenger on our errands. TG hadn't complained at all about my driving. Gail and I suddenly realized that we could shorten our overall route by changing the order of accomplishing our list. But that required a U-turn. That is when TG let out a long, low, very disgusted moan. She must have been mapping our course and now she would have to erase the last part of our map for the day. "Daaaad? Do you want me to help you?"

"No, TG, just relax, we will be done soon."

A side note here: Dick, do you remember all the times you told me that people were silly to talk to their dogs as if they were human? Have I convinced you yet? If not, the next chapter was written just for you. I hope you will become a believer in the intelligence of dogs.

(I don't want to give out Dick's last name, because I am sure he doesn't want a flood of letters from dog lovers.)

Chapter 10



First – Then

Teddy had an understanding of “If-Then”. I used to tell him that if he did something, then something would happen. He understood the consequence of an act. For example, I might tell him “if you come in the house, then we can go to grandma’s house, but if you stay outside, then we can’t.” This doesn’t present a very difficult decision for a dog that loves to go to grandma’s house. As his ability in If-Then situations increased, I gave him tougher choices and he always came through with an understanding. At the time, I thought he was a very smart dog.

But even a complex If-Then is child’s play for TG. She just accepts situations like these as a normal part of our conversation. This is probably because she has already thought through the consequences of multiple sequential actions that she will be taking.

We do not have a consistent bedtime especially now that we are retired. So TG is never sure when we will be going to bed. Sometimes when I am headed to the garage for odds and ends, I will ask her if she wants to go outside (to her kennel to do her job.) She doesn’t go out unless she needs to. This is probably because she wants to be where I am and going “out” means that I will set my watch for eight minutes when I put her in her “yard”. Eight minutes away from me is something that she would rather avoid. So when she doesn’t need to go out, she just turns her head to the left and drop her ears as far as she can. I will ask her again, “TG, do you want to outside? Come-on, don’t you want to go potty?”

Nothing. TG has lost her hearing again. I know she can see me because she is giving me a few sideways glances out of the corner of her eye. But otherwise, she doesn't move. Only her tail moves and it is slowly sinking. What a look of disappointment! "OK, you can stay there, I'll be right back." That makes her happy again. Happy that I did not send her outside alone.

But if I am trying to get her outside one last time before bed, I have to let her know so that she can decide whether or not she wants to go out. "You had better go out, because we are going to bed now." Or, "Come-on, TG, we are going to go night-night." Instantly, she decides that she had better go out. Her decision has nothing to do with the time of day, my body actions, or the tone of my voice. Once in a while when we have decided to take an afternoon nap, I have told her, "Come-on, TG, we are going to go night-night" and if she chooses not to go out, she will just head for our bedroom. So I know that she has this all figured out. The part that amazes us is that we could not get our kids to use the bathroom before we went for a ride or before bedtime. But TG doesn't want to bother me during the night, so she decides to go out before bedtime. Hmmm, does this make her smarter than our kids?

TG's reasoning and memory are far beyond anything that I ever expected from a dog. She amazes us nearly every day. It seems like we are always saying, "Now how did she figure that out?" One morning, Gail told TG that we could go to the trailer later in the day, but we had several things that we had to do first. She then proceeded to list our chores for the day and said then we could go to the trailer. Although just the word "trailer" would usually turn TG into a misguided missile, she just walked off and plopped herself down on a favorite rug. Gail thought her response was a bit odd, but figured that TG just knew that it would be a while before we were able to go.

We were busy that day mowing the lawn, pulling weeds out of the flower bed, shopping for groceries, putting them away and then cleaning the bathrooms. Well, while we were trying to clean the bathroom floors, TG drove us nuts. She was panting excitedly, running from one to the other of us, bouncing with excitement. I didn't have a clue as to what she was trying to tell us, because I did not know that Gail had given TG a list. Then Gail suddenly remembered what she had done. "Oh my gosh! TG remembered the list that I gave her this morning. And now she knows that we are going to the trailer next. How did she ever do that!?"

We know that neither of us had said anything about going to the trailer while we were doing our chores. We were not even thinking about the trailer, so there was no ESP going on. We are both certain that TG can memorize a list and check them off in her mind as we perform each one.

TG repeated this fantastic feat countless times over the past nine or ten

years. We have tried to complicate the list, but her memory is better than mine.

I even took a memory course. One time I went into the store for apples, bananas and carrots (“A”, “B”, and “C” foods – no problem, right?) and came out with apricots, broccoli and cauliflower. The course did help, however, because now I can remember eight things fairly regularly without writing them down on a list.

But TG has not learned to write yet – and doesn’t need to. She flawlessly handles seven items on her list and once remembered nine items!

Dick, are you convinced now?

Chapter 11



Personality

I have gotten so wound up writing about TG's abilities that I haven't told you much about her personality yet. Who ever first declared that a dog was man's best friend must have had a dog like TG. That is the shortest description that I can make about her personality – she is the best four footed friend that a person could ever have.

Dogs have faces and body language that can be very expressive. Various dog books mention that the way that a dog holds his tail, cocks his head, or shows his teeth will tell you all you need to know about the dog's attitude. The difference between the ordinary friendly dog and TG is extreme. It is similar to the difference between a five year old child reading a book and a 50 year old Shakespearean actor reading his part. Both are reading and expressing themselves in the best manner that they can. But wow what a difference!

TG has the full range of human emotions. Any human emotion that you can think of, TG can uniquely express. She even likes to tease me. One of her games is to put one of her toys within my reach and see if I can get it from her. She will drop a ball, for example, near me then just turn her head and walk off a few steps and direct her gaze away from the ball. If I make a very slow move towards the ball, she will let me get close enough to where I think I can get it with my incredible burst of speed. Nope! She's got it already. Wagging her tail and laughing at me while I get all cracked up and am laughing at both of us. It doesn't matter if I go at her toy at a normal rate,

a fast maneuver, a “you can barely see me move” speed or any combination. She gets it first 90% of the time and we both laugh.

If I do get it first then I will tease her by reversing the roles. She will try various tactics on me to distract me before she makes a blinding dive to rescue her toy. Then we both laugh again.

Gail’s mother says that TG is a “lovebug.” When TG sees Grandma’s car, she barks with excitement and runs down the driveway to meet her. TG usually waits near the trunk of her car to get her handout of three small dog snacks. TG counts them out and does not proceed to step two of kisses and shake hands until she has all three treats. They are usually all placed in a pile of TG’s choosing before taking time to eat any of them. From that point on, she lets us know that Grandma came to visit her first and us second.

TG shows affection a bit differently for each person. Both grandmas get palm of the hand licks with prancing front feet and nearly circular tail wags. TG is not generally a “lick happy” dog. Some dogs have to lick you all the time. They lick you every time they see you and it becomes annoying – especially if they have just been to the water bowl and they are especially sloppy with their kisses. The grandmothers generally get the most licks from TG. At the other extreme Gail and I get one or two licks on an exposed elbow when TG wants us to get up in the morning. It is both an “I want you to get up now” and a “good morning” kiss.

TG expresses herself with licks for a number of different situations. One of the sweetest and most human-like is her thank-you kiss. Whenever you do anything for TG that is just a bit out of the ordinary, she will express her thanks with a single kiss. It was most apparent when I put down a hallway carpet to keep TG from sliding on the slippery floor. Gail and I were afraid that she would sprain or break a leg in one of her high speed crashes on our floor tiles. So we bought some rubber backed hallway carpeting. As soon as I got down on my hands and knees to roll it out, TG knew that we were doing this just for her. She came over and gave me a quick single kiss on my cheek as a “Thank you for doing this for me!” She stayed on the carpeting the whole time that I was rolling it out. By the time I had rolled it out the length of the hallway, TG had already run its length three or four times. She was tearing back and forth down the hall where a few moments before she had been walking cautiously and was turning to go backwards at the corners. She was panting with a big smile on her face and came over to give me a second single kiss on the cheek. That was very definitely an acknowledgement of what we had done just for her and she was letting me know how much she appreciated it.

Another lick that she uses for a single purpose is her welcome home kiss. This one has changed over the years. It started out as what I would call

a punch in the nose. She was so exuberant in her greeting when I returned home that she would jump up and give me a kiss in the nose. But in her typical “quick start” fashion, she jumped up so hard and hit me in the nose so hard that I was afraid that I would get a bloody nose. I am not sure when nor why TG made a change in this greeting (maybe it hurt her nose, too), but it is now three or four quick licks way down inside of my left ear. Maybe she recognized that now that I am retired, I have neglected my ear hygiene – especially the left one.

Another lick in her repertory is her “I want ...” lick. She has been doing this for years, but I can’t seem to learn to recognize this one without asking her “What do you want, TG?” She probably has some subtle different patterns in these licks that each mean something different to her, but she has not taught them to me yet. In fact I usually think that she is just coming up to me and showing affection with her little hand licks. I frequently respond by petting her or rubbing her ears gently. Depending upon the urgency, she may pull back just out of my reach, then intensify the hand licks until I wake up to her message of “I want something.”

“OK, TG. What do you want?” She will go off trotting to lead me to whatever she is concerned about. It could be a request to go outside or to tell me that her food or water bowl is almost empty. It could just as likely be a request for me to retrieve a toy from under the sofa or to let me know that our grandson, Jordan, has woken up from his nap. We had Jordan here for the first year of his “day care.” TG was very attentive to his needs and nudged or licked us to let us know whenever she felt Jordan needed something.

One time she used this to tell me that she had a sand bur stuck in the bottom of her foot. That was a difficult one for me to figure out, but she persisted until I finally understood.

Lick, lick.

“Hi sweetheart. You are such a good dog.” I reached out to rub her ears, but she pulled back.

Lick, lick.

“OK, TG. What do you want?”

Lick, lick.

“I don’t know what you want TG. Show me what you want.”

Lick, lick.

“What, TG? Where is it? Go get it.” Nothing – just more licks. So I stood up and she sat down. I was puzzled. But then I realized that she was pawing at me. She was not touching me with her paw, just pawing the air in front of me. “Give me your foot, TG.” She put her foot into my hand and I felt that it was all wet from her licking it. A little more inspection and I felt the bur. “Oh, TG. Your foot is owie. Lay down and relax so Daddy can fix

your foot.” When that ordeal was over I received a really big thank you from TG. This time instead of a single quick kiss, TG literally gave my face a bath.

I felt she was both telling me “Thank you for fixing the owie in my foot” and “You were a good boy, Daddy. You finally did what I was telling you to do! Here’s some positive reinforcement.”

“Thanks TG, I got the picture.”

TG does not limit her talking to just licks. Sometimes she will just give me a short, quiet whine which is more like a short whistle – just a little squeak. We were out working in the yard on a very hot day this summer. After a couple of hours, TG walked over near me, stopped and gave a short squeak. “What do you want, TG?” Without looking directly at me, she immediately walked over to the house and stood at the door. She wanted a drink of water, so she just told me. Most dogs would have scratched on the door, lapped up a mud puddle, or have laid in the shade. TG knows she can communicate with me on a higher level. The ability to understand human speech has been bred into Border Collies over the years according to the United States Border Collie Club, Inc.

TG is a very caring dog. She has always been this way. My mother stayed with us for a few days while Dad was in the hospital. TG was only six or seven months old at the time and she showered Mom with affection. When Mom sat on the sofa, TG jumped into her lap. This active little puppy would not sit still and bounced all over the place. The plans were to have Dad move in with us for a few days after his release from the hospital. Dad was very weak after his chemotherapy and we wanted both of them to stay with us for a few days before they returned to their two-story condo. Mom was very concerned that TG would inadvertently hurt Dad.

When we arrived at home with Mom and Dad, TG greeted us with her usual enthusiasm, but when she saw Dad, she instantly got calm. Mom and Dad made their way through the house to the den and sat on the sofa. Dad sat at one end of the sofa and Mom sat next to him. We felt that this was the best way to keep a barrier between TG and Dad. TG had been walking along behind us and jumped on the sofa next to Mom. But she would not climb over Mom to bother Dad. TG stayed away from Dad. He finally put his hand out to TG who then gave him a couple of very soft, slow licks. She never did anything to disturb Dad during his entire visit. Although only 6-7 months old, TG had properly evaluated Dad’s situation and she treated him accordingly.

In the first chapter, I told you about the way TG learned to trust me with food on her first day with us. Her trust continued unwaveringly. Gail has observed many times that TG trusts me so much that she will let me do anything to her or with her. TG is very afraid of her vet. She wants to be out of there more than anything. But she will tolerate his probes and prods as

long as I am there with her. She has never growled nor threatened her vet in any way. She just pushes into me and trembles until the ordeal is over. One time after an especially difficult blood drawing, TG licked the vet's hand when it was over.

Did you know that some dogs need to learn to swim just like people need to learn? Well, we didn't. The first time that this was brought to our attention was way back when Teddy and Scotch were small puppies. We had a miniature cock-a-poo named Missy at the time. One spring day on a walk at a campground, both Teddy and Scotch jumped into a very small creek that was about two feet deep. The water was crystal clear but the ditch that it was running through was about four feet deep. The puppies were having a good time so Missy decided to check it out, too. She made her way down the steep, soft dirt bank and sniffed the water then the bank crumbled under her. She fell into the water and went to the bottom. But she started walking along the bottom of the creek instead of swimming! We had never experienced anything like this before – a dog that doesn't swim? Then our emotions turned to, "Hey, she hasn't come up for air. She is in trouble!" The water was moving very swiftly, but she was still on her leash. I had to reach way down the deep ditch to scoop her up. She coughed a couple of times, but came through her ordeal without any ill effects. We were the ones most affected. We were shocked that a dog couldn't swim.

So when we took TG swimming for the first time, we were ready for anything. We chose the swimming beach in Grandma's subdivision. At that time dogs were not prohibited from using the subdivision's "lake" or beach. I walked into the water and called TG to join me. She ran back and forth across the beach, but wouldn't go near the water except to drink it. Despite my encouragement, TG would not venture beyond ankle depth.

I went back on shore and collected a few dried sticks that had been used countless times in sand castles. She knew right away that the sticks were for her. She snatched one from me and ran with it, crunching it with glee.

I went a couple of feet back into the water and encouraged her to take another stick from me. She wasn't at all sure about walking in the water, but she trusted me to at least try it. It took a while, but I finally got her in up to her chest. She found that walking in the water was OK. She gained more confidence and began to run and splash, "Whoops! The water splashed in my face." She didn't like that at first. It took a while to overcome the splashes.

After more encouragement, she finally ventured deeper and deeper into the water. Each time she got a stick from me she would run back up onto the beach to crunch it up. I had to return several times to reload with a fresh supply of sticks. Finally, when she was nearly at swimming depth I teased her to lunge at a stick. I will never forget the look on her face. "OH MY

GOSH! MY FEET AREN'T TOUCHING THE GROUND!" Her eyes got really big and for a moment she was really scared. I wrapped one arm around her and gently guided her swimming to turn her around and point her in the direction of the beach.

Back on the beach, she was like a kid on a sugar-high that had just had her first ride in a race car! She ran around the beach at top speed, bounced into the water at me, then back on the beach to run around again. She really enjoyed it! We went back in to swim with sticks a couple of more times to reinforce that this was a good experience. She loved it. But, she would not have even tried if she did not have complete trust in me.

Here's another example of trust. When TG is shaking her head a lot, it is a good indication that her one ear is overloaded with wax again. I sat down in my office chair and said, "Come here. I want to look in your ears." She hung her head low, but walked slowly over to me and sat. "Chin up TG." Well that works about half of the time, but not today. So it is "chin up" while I lift under her chin and pull up her head. I think her head must weigh about 25 pounds, but I got her head up off the floor. "Let me look in your ear." I flip up her ear that she has put in the "I really don't like this" position and shone a flashlight down into her ear canal to get a good look. "Lots of stuff in there, TG." She let me put a Q-tip® down 1 ¼ inches into her ear to get out the excess wax. Sometimes there is only a foreign hair stuck down in her ear and she lets me work it out with a Q-tip. She always wants to smell the Q-tip after I take it out and before I toss it into the wastebasket. After she has it analyzed with her keen sense of smell, I get a thank-you kiss.

At other times during the allergy season, she will get matter in the corner of her eyes. I roll up a Q-tip tightly to keep the excess fuzz to a minimum then roll the side of the tip next to the corner of her eye. This lets the Q-tip grab onto the sticky matter and pulls it right out of her eye. Except for a mild show of reluctance, TG trusts me enough to let me perform these hygiene tasks for her without backing away.

Chapter 12



Obedience Lessons

We lived on the corner of a very busy street. Several neighbor dogs have been hit by cars on our block. Thankfully none have been killed – not even the one that I saw roll like a tire down the street and across to the other side. So we have always restricted our dogs behind an imaginary line that extends in both directions from the front of our house. To emphasize this restriction they were not even allowed to be on leash in our front yard.

I was gaining trust in having TG off-leash in our back yard when she took off on a run for the front yard. She had a look of “catch me if you can” in spite of my yelling at her. Hoping that she would hug the house on her run and not head for the street, I ran the opposite way around the house and caught her coming around the corner of the front of the house. I grabbed her roughly and scolded her without hitting her. She yelled like I was killing her. I told her on no uncertain terms that she should NEVER do that again. And she hasn’t.

I also taught her to stop chasing what seems like 200 chipmunks and 100 squirrels that live in our yard. Each time she started after one of our critters, I said firmly, “No Chase!” And she didn’t. The last thing I wanted was for her to chase an escaping squirrel across the road and into the path of a car. (Chipmunks don’t usually run that far – they have so many burrows all over our yard. They just duck into one of them.)

TG was learning commands so fast that by the time she was two we knew we should get some formal obedience training for her. Teddy and

Scotch had some puppy school lessons at the Greater Racine Kennel Club (GRKC) some twelve years earlier so we decided to try TG there, too. We had to wait before the next 8-week class started, but we were able to get into the class before it filled up by arriving 45 minutes early. I soon found out how popular the GRKC classes were.

Ellen Hauerwas started each weekly lesson with a short lecture on behavior, grooming, and dog care. One time she was teaching us how to feel our dog's ribs by running our hands down their back with our thumbs on their spine. Gail was doing this as Ellen glanced our way while she was talking. Without breaking her stride, Ellen said, "TG doesn't have any ribs" and kept right on talking. Poor TG was essentially called a fatso right in front of everyone. Seven years later and she still doesn't have any ribs.

TG absolutely loved these classes. She learned quickly and I learned slowly. But somehow our team graduated into the Intermediate class on October 24, 1995 after eight fun weeks. I was kind of surprised that only a few of the dogs advanced to Intermediate. The rest were held back to take Beginner's again. We were so proud of TG and she couldn't have been happier.

Alice Applin was our next instructor and TG again did well. But this class was also designed to prepare dogs for confirmation trials. These trials are for purebreds to determine which dog best conforms to the breed standard. During the judging each dog is to stand while the judge runs his or her hands over the dog to examine them. Nope, TG didn't want any part of anyone else even touching her until she decided that it was OK.

I cannot emphasize enough how special these two wonderful ladies are. Ellen and Alice both individualized their instruction for TG. Neither of them ever pushed TG to be a more social dog nor made any demands on us. They allowed TG to explore her interactions with other humans at her own pace.

I will forever thank all of the members of GRKC for helping TG to grow socially. I asked everyone to offer TG a treat from their pockets. (Dog lovers, it seems, always carry dog treats in their pockets.) This is when I discovered that TG's original owner always wore a cap. TG would not take a treat from Bob Hansen until he took his cap off. Bob's gentle manner finally won her over. So I started wearing a cap during training. TG did not like my cap at first, but she soon lost her fear of men with caps.

We took this class over several times as it was helping TG. One of the instructors felt TG was ready for more socialization. She had me stand in front of the group with TG. Then the instructor held the leash of one dog at a time while their owners came forward one at a time to pet and stroke TG. I could feel TG tense up when each person approached, but she soon found that no one intended to harm her in any way. She immediately warmed up to the

whole class. I was so thankful that they would all take the time out of their training session to help TG. That is the way GRKC is – always helpful and friendly – a wonderful bunch of people. And that is why we became members of this club.

Among the best commands for TG were “wait” and “stay”. Both involved putting her at a sit or down position then walking away. The distinction is that “wait” means I will later call her to me, but “stay” means I will return to her. And I’d better not mix them up or TG will voice her disapproval with a groan. To reinforce her stay I sometimes gave her leash a gentle but firm pull and she planted her feet firmly to stay motionless. Sometimes I placed a yummy treat some six feet in front of her to help her focus on the treat and on me while ignoring the other dogs. She is nearly flawless on this. Her five minute stays while I was out of her sight were fantastic.

Our walks in the neighborhood are often in the early morning – especially in the summer when the pavement can get very hot for her feet. I like to have her at a heel while we walk across the back and empty parking lot of a nearby mall. We do figure-eights around a couple of closely spaced telephone poles and a few other exercises. Often there is a parked police car working on their reports. That is when I like to show off with TG. I put her at a sit/wait and take her leash off then turn and walk some 50-60 yards away before turning around. TG is always sitting and I can see the officer watching. Then I say “front” and TG races to me and sits in front of me. We are both happy. I reward her with a run up a dirt hill at the other end of the parking lot. My reward is that we had fun without having someone remind us that the mall is posted with “No Dogs” signs.

I am sure that one of the reasons for the signs is that they do not want any dog messes on their property. All good dog owners should carry their little plastic bags, but some do not. I don’t carry any. It’s not that I am being irresponsible, it is just that I know that TG will NEVER wet or mess anywhere that she is not supposed to.

The obedience classes had another wonderful benefit. While TG was always quick to learn to repeat some family routine, the obedience training sharpened her understanding that there were many things that I want her to learn to do. In fact TG learns most tricks after being shown only twice.

Cathy taught Scotch to “bow” by stretching his front legs out as far as they would go in front of him and lowering the front of his body. This is a normal front-leg stretch for a dog. Teddy learned to bow by watching Scotch bow on command and getting praised for it. When Scotch was given the “bow” command, Teddy did it too.

When I decided to teach TG to bow, I waited until she first did it on her

own – just a normal stretch. I told her, “Bow” in a long drawn out tone. Then before she got up I said, “Good bow, TG. That’s a good bow.”

She looked at me with “Let’s see now, I was getting ready to go outside, I stretched my front legs and I yawned. I wonder which one was the ‘bow’? Hmm, let’s try this one.” So she stretched out again and I said, “bow” again along with more praise.

That’s it. She now had learned a new trick which she has never forgotten. That is how fast TG learns new tricks. I feel that I could teach her anything that fast, as long as it is a fairly natural action for her. I couldn’t expect that speed in teaching her to jump off a ladder, for example, because there would be a big fear factor that would be difficult, if not impossible, to overcome before any learning would set in. Of course I would never ask nor allow her to do such a dangerous thing.

One of the dog tricks that is taught in a more advanced class is to have your dog “drop on command.” In this one the dog can be quite a distance away from her handler and off leash. With just a wave of the handler’s arm, the dog is to stop and sit or lie down – depending upon the specific signal. One day when TG was running around Grandma’s one acre yard, I decided to give it a try. We had not learned this in any of our less advanced classes so I was not sure how I should go about it.

I yelled out, “TG, Come” to get her attention. TG immediately responded by coming towards me on a dead run. Then I raised my hand straight up on the air and yelled, “TG, Sit!” I had to repeat “Sit” several times. Each time I called out “Sit”, she slowed down more until she finally just stood there looking at me with wonder. She finally sat when I called out, “Sit” again. I kept holding my hand in the air and praised her for sitting. Then I dropped my hand, crouched down and clapped my hands calling her to come. Her tongue came out in a big smile and she came at me so fast and hit me so hard that we both went tumbling. She knew she had done something good and she was very happy that she had pleased me.

To reinforce it, I sent her out into the yard again by saying, “Run!” I waited until she had gotten back near her earlier position in the yard where she was sniffing out the Canadian Goose droppings. I called, “TG, Come” and as soon as she had built up a head of steam and was charging toward me, I put my hand straight up in the air. But this time I didn’t tell her to sit. TG came to a screeching halt and sat right down. “Good sit, TG. What a good girl. Good sit.” I dropped my hand, “Come.” She now has it firmly remembered.

And that is all there is to teaching obedience tricks to TG the Terrific. I can not begin to tell you what a wonderful feeling it is to be able to communicate with this incredible animal. I have a lot of pride in her, but the

real pride is in being able to communicate with her and to realize the joy that she has in understanding me.

Chapter 13



Agility Lessons

Agility teaches dogs to be able to use dog-playground equipment safely. And it hones the communication between dog and owner to an even greater level. The equipment is described in detail at www.akc.org/registration/rules/realigl.cfm?page=4. We decided that this would be good physical and mental stimulation for TG. We signed up for the very first agility class that GRKC had.

Jumping over a pole between two posts was her first task. Following, Deb Chvilicek, the instructor's direction we approached the jump. TG was supposed to wait while I stepped over the jump then I would coax her to follow me while saying "over." TG looked at me thinking, "Do you really want me to jump over that? Are you sure that it won't fall down on me? OK then, here I go."

And over she went just before I was told to give her the command. I was able to say, "over" while she was in the air so she got the connection between the command and the action. Of course I praised the heck out of her for learning her first trick so fast. When it was our turn to do it the second time, I had to tell her to "wait" before I stepped over the jump so she wouldn't go before Deb told us to do it. Then "over" and she bounced right over. From then on I did not need to step over the jump, I just lined her up in front of it then I walked around the jump while she went over it. Some of the other dogs still needed to follow their owners over the jump for several more weeks.

For some dogs the tunnel and especially the chute were difficult obstacles for them to overcome. Both are 24-inches in diameter at the entrance. But after the first three feet the chute is just that – a collapsed tunnel made of ripstop nylon. The tunnel was initially straight so that the dogs could see through it and out the other side. The instructor held the dog at the entrance while the owner coaxed the dog through the tunnel. After the dogs were confident with a straight tunnel, the tunnel was laid out in an arc so that the end was not visible from the start. A similar learning technique was used with the chute. In this case the chute was held open for the dog to run through. As they gained confidence, the chute was dropped on their backs. Eventually the dogs could run through the collapsed chute with their owner running alongside shouting encouragement.

As you might have suspected by now, TG did not have to go through all of these consecutive steps in her training. She exploded through the tunnel on her first try and nearly knocked me over while I was crouching at the other end. She bounced around and would not settle down while she was waiting for her next turn. The next time I just stood and called, “Tunnel!” She was so excited. She LOVES the tunnel and to this day it is her favorite.

The chute was no problem for her either. She plunged right through the chute and “encouraged” me to get right back in line for another turn.

TG may have her favorite, but mine is the dog walk. This is a dog’s equivalent of a kid climbing up and walking along a railing that is at least twice his height up in the air. Although kids can walk along a fairly narrow railing by putting one foot in front of the other, this presents a problem for our four-footed canines. So the dog walk is 12 inches wide and eight feet long. There is a ramp at both ends so that the dog can get on and off the railing part with ease. AKC insists that dogs do this safely and thus there is a contrasting color on the lower 42 inches. The dog must make contact with a paw on this special area for them to have executed the dog walk safely. Since the larger dogs usually do not have any fear of jumping off before they come in contact with the safe area, they are taught to exit safely by having them pause on the safe area and wait for a command to continue.

I like this one for several reasons. It puts TG’s head at the same level as mine and it is like going for a walk with your best friend. To me it is the essence of why we wanted TG to do agility work. It is very confidence building and offers her both mental and physical stimulation which is so important to her breed.

The biggest physical stimulator in the agility equipment and incidentally the biggest piece of equipment is the A-frame. The height is adjustable, but is usually set at 5-foot 6-inches. It is about three feet wide. And it too, has a contrasting color near the bottom so that the larger dogs

especially, do not lunge off while still very high up in the air. The A-frame can be dangerous and is taught with the instructor on one side and the owner on the other side while the dog is on it. The owner has a treat in the hand that is closer to the top and his or her other hand is on the dog's collar. Both people are there to keep the dog from getting dangerously close to the edge. Accidents can always happen though and once I saw a large dog fall from about four feet up in the air and land right smack on his side on the floor next to the owner. It knocked the wind out of him and dislodged tears from everyone else. He just laid there for the longest time catching his breath. He seemed to be fine afterwards and we were all thankful to hear the next week that his vet checked him out and found that nothing was broken. He was lucky that the GRKC has expensive cushioned matting covering their entire floor. From then on he had several of us on each side of him when he went up the A-frame. I remember pushing him back from the side when he stepped off into the air in front of me. I guess some dogs were just not meant to do the A-frame.

The A-frame's surface has a non-slip texture and one-inch boards are secured in one-foot intervals up one side and down the other. TG seemed to like it fairly well, but when she scrambled up in her quick-start fashion it seemed like her feet were sliding as she pawed furiously at the surface. She made the sound of six dogs all scratching at a door at the same time wanting to come in.

The table as well as the dog walk also had a non-slip surface. Tables come in various heights to accommodate different size dogs. They are all 36 inches square with a picture of a dog's paw print in the center. I don't think the dogs care whether it is there or not, but it reminds the humans that their dog must pause there (paws there.) The instructor, or judge during an actual competition, decides before hand whether you must have your dog sit or lie down after she jumps up there. Once the dog does that, the judge counts out five seconds before allowing you to continue.

Probably the most photogenic piece of equipment is the tire. Many people call it a "hoop" or something else, because there are, in their minds, too many "T-" words. Tunnel, table, teeter (as in teeter-totter) and tire all sound the same to their dogs. Well they never did to TG so I just kept on saying "Tire" to have her jump through it. There is something so graceful about a dog jumping through a tire. They can jump as high as they want to go "over" the standard jump, but they have to reach out and streamline themselves to jump through a tire. The result is a sleek, flowing, graceful animal with a smile on her face as she confidently performs another trick for her best friend.

Weave poles are about as thin as your finger and are set vertically in a

straight line about 22 inches apart. There are usually eight of them, but during training the number could vary. The first space between poles must be entered from the dog's left side and the dog must weave back and forth through the remaining poles. OK, TG wasn't the fastest one here, but she did not mind doing them. One other Border Collie in one of our agility sessions went through them flawlessly like a speeding bullet. He shot through them faster than a kid on a sugar-high playing hop-scotch.

Almost all the dogs were reluctant to negotiate the teeter-totter. TG was no exception – it took her longer to build up confidence with this equipment than with any other. She knew what to do; she just did not like to do it. The “teeter” is off-set slightly on its balance point so that one end is always on the ground. TG went up the incline and stopped at the center waiting for the other end to drop to the ground. Next she went to the safety section and waited for me to tell her to go to the next piece of equipment. As her weight left the teeter, it returned to its original position with a bang. She jumps and looks back every time. “Not a fun thing,” she thought.

The worst part of the agility classes for TG is when only one dog at a time is allowed on the floor for a timed run through a course of all of the equipment. They take about 1-2 minutes to complete. TG is not very patient. She wants to be out there having fun. Each time the person would call out a command for his or her dog, I could feel TG lunge at her leash. She wanted to be the one doing all that fun stuff. A couple of times I even heard her groan when a dog would refuse to negotiate a piece of equipment. The Border Collie blood in her kept urging her to go out there and make sure that the reluctant dog did what it was supposed to do – and do it NOW!

So you can imagine what was going through her head when we were out there solo and I screwed up. TG came roaring out of the tunnel that had a 90 degree right-hand bend in it. I cut across running for the table. As she came out, I yelled out “Tunnel - Sit” and I ran up to and stopped next to the table. But TG was not sitting on the table. I looked to my right to see where she had gone, and then I looked left to the table. No TG. By this time the instructor and all my fellow human classmates were all howling in laughter. Then I found TG sitting in back of the table, but to my left and behind me.

The instructor said, “Lee, you told her ‘tunnel’ and that is a table! TG knew that wasn't right, so she didn't do it. Actually, that is a sign of a very smart dog.” But it gets so embarrassing when your dog is smarter than you are. I continued making mistakes in naming the different pieces of equipment from time to time. TG caught on to my goof-ups and compensated for them. She changed from listening to my words to watching for my body language. Deb picked up on this before I did. She walked over to me and said, “Lee, TG is watching your body movements. We don't usually teach that until

much later, but you will have to be very careful in how you place your body.” I had to be sure that my hips were lined up with the next piece of equipment so that she would know which one to negotiate next. At times I felt like she was behind me with a tape measure and a protractor to see which way I had lined up and what I was pointing to before she would decide which one she would do next.

She really liked this sport. At the end of one of our 8-week sessions, she posted a time of 52 seconds for the entire course. A couple of other dogs barely broke a full minute while the rest in her class were slower than one minute. I was urged by many of our club members to enter the AKC agility contests because she was so good. But my reply was always the same. I explained that I am doing this for TG. If I entered her in a contest, it would be for me. She would not like waiting for her turn. I do not need ribbons to show me how wonderful she is; I already know that. I am doing this to entertain and to challenge her.

Since we do not have any of the agility equipment at our home, it is difficult to practice at home. TG always tries to climb a ladder every time I go up on one, but I discourage that for safety reasons. We found that the body language and hand signals did, however, carry over into our daily lives and our communication between each other reached new heights. TG’s behavior changed from being less like a good dog to being more like a constant four-footed human companion. Stop a moment and think about any hand signals that you would use with your child or friend - one that you had not first arranged with them. This is what I could do with TG.

Once when I was mowing the grass, she just stood in my path wondering which way I was going next. Without moving my lips I just pointed to her then moved my open hand to my left. She immediately went to my left and got well out of my way. Left or right – it doesn’t matter. She knows where I want her to go and she does it. She even follows more complex movements. If she is near the end of the driveway and I want her to go into the house I can point at her then raise my hand into a “stop” position with my palm facing me. Next I pull my hand towards me then sweep it pushing my palm in the direction of the door (to my left.) All of this is done in a continuous sweeping motion. TG trots towards me then turns and goes to the door. Try that one with your four or five year old and let me know whether you have consistent results or not. That was a signal that she learned in agility school – to come this way and go over that jump. It saved me a lot of running around on the agility course.

Our club held agility classes on Mondays with the rest of the days devoted to conformation and obedience training. This meant that all of the agility equipment had to be set up on Sunday evenings and taken down after

the last class every Monday. We usually signed up for the thirteen or so Sunday set-ups in the winter and spring time period. Three to six people show up to set up the equipment which only takes about ten minutes. Then we have exclusive use of the equipment with our dogs for the rest of the hour. All of the other workers usually either left their dogs in their cars or crated them in the building. I always asked the others if TG could be left loose and they always said it did not bother them as long as TG left their dogs alone. I told them that TG will stay with me and will ignore the other dogs which she always did. In the warmer months the doors were sometimes left open and they expressed shock that I would chance giving TG an opportunity to run away. But TG never left the building as long as I was in there. Ever! She just wanted to help her Daddy. I said, "If she gets in your way, just say 'move' or 'beep-beep' and she will get out of your way." I heard an occasional "beep-beep" usually accompanied by a giggle while we were working.

TG went in and out of the equipment storage room with me. But I could never get her to carry anything out for me. She just looked at me and said, "Do I look like a retriever to you?" As each piece of equipment is set up, TG checks it out by negotiating it – all on her own – without any commands. With some of the people, she is known as the quality inspector and that it isn't OK until TG checks it out.

One evening our crew chief was making the final check to see that we had placed everything just right according to the instructor's diagram. While we were standing there waiting, Barb Allen and I got into a conversation about how most of the equipment was an extension of something natural that a dog would do – like climbing the stairs at home. "But," she said, "not the weave poles. That is a very unnatural thing for dogs to do and they don't like to do it."

"Er, Barb. Look behind you." And there was TG weaving through a line of eight poles that had just been set up.

All Barb could say was, "Well, then there is TG." And we both laughed. It was so cute. She was just walking in and out of all the poles. Just checking them out, I guess.

Since we were free to do anything, I liked to create even more challenges for her. I had her sit in the middle of four jumps. Then I walked around her about two times just saying, "Watch me." She was watching eagerly. Then I quickly pointed my hips at one of the jumps and said "Over." And that was the start of one of our runs through the fun stuff. Sometimes I concentrated on lots of control with just jumps. Numbering the four jumps around her, I might have her go "Over" #1, "This way – Over" around to the back side of #2 then over and back to the center, "Over" straight across to go

over #4, “Turn around – Over” to come back over #4, etc. Just a few quick sequences that were never the same thing twice (or she would memorize the pattern.) She is a bit overweight so I always lower the jumps. I am looking more for control than for hip-breaking athletic achievements.

She loved it and always gave me a few appreciative thank-you licks after we got into the car to head home. “That was fun, Dad. Let’s do it again soon, OK?”

Chapter 14



The Tracker

TG has a fantastic nose for tracking. Besides the gerbils, she has tracked our rabbits, cats, dogs and especially us. She keeps her nose right on the ground and does not look up when she is tracking. Her front feet make a very characteristic thump-thump sound only when she is tracking. We can tell when she is tracking in our house just by this sound. Gail will say, “TG is looking for you.”

After a ride in the car, Gail may go into the house first. When TG and I go in, I will ask, “TG, where is Mommy? Go find her.” When Gail hears the thump-thump coming down the hallway, she just stands still. TG may track right past her to follow the actual path that Gail took before TG finds her. For instance, if Gail walked down the hall to the bedroom, picked up something and took it to the bathroom, then TG will follow this path exactly. She will track right past Gail to the bedroom then back to the bathroom where Gail is standing and watching her.

That was a “fresh scent” example. Here is a more difficult challenge. After an hour class at GRKC, I ask TG, “Are you ready to go home now?” She heads for the door to let me know she is ready. “Wait while I open the door to check for cars.” Since the training building opens onto a busy parking lot, I don’t want her to rush out into traffic. “OK TG, let’s go home. Find the car.” TG puts her nose to the ground and guides me right to our car. At least 20 cars, 30 people, and 20 dogs have crossed our path that we traveled an hour before. It may have rained, too. But TG just follows our old and

contaminated scent trail without a problem. Do I always park in the same place, you ask? Emphatically, NO! In fact, I deliberately park in a different location each time, just to test her tracking skills.

We have often said she would be a great SAR (Search and Recovery) dog. Like any community we have had our share of “lost child” situations. The next time that I hear about one, I will ask if TG may be permitted to help. While fully trained SAR dogs have gone through at two to five years of intense training covering all aspects of searching, I believe TG is ready now for a lost child rescue. All she would need is a smell of the child’s clothing and an explanation of what I wanted. I could tell her, “TG, Bobby (or the child’s name) is gone. Bobby has to come home by his Mommy. Where did he go? TG, find him.” I truly believe that is all it would take for her to track him down. The part about “Bobby has to come home by his Mommy” is necessary to let TG know the urgency of the situation. She is such a compassionate and understanding dog that this would be the driving force leading to a successful find.

TG and I attended a K-9 Search and Recovery Seminar. It was presented by A. J. Marhofke, a Search and Recovery Specialist from Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. He has Border Collie SAR dogs and is the president of 911BC (“BC” for Border Collie.) He has a very interesting website at www.911bc.org. The morning consisted of presentations by a specialist in forensics, a crime scene investigator, a search manager, a mental health provider, and a veterinarian. Mock searches were held in the afternoon in a large hilly field dotted with trees. There were about forty of us that searched in waves of five person/dog teams. The 911BC members went in the first wave followed by the forensic expert. The plan was to alert the forensic expert whenever a dog “indicated” on anything. The next wave was a team from Illinois and we were in the third wave.

We were told that this first exercise was a cadaver search. TG found a spent shotgun shell and a current dog license. Since the forensic expert had planted the cadaver (dummy soaked in old human blood) the night before, he was not interested in the shotgun shell. The dog license had been lost just moments before by a dog in our wave, but the owner did not even know it was missing.

Zip, A. J. Marhofke’s beautiful Border Collie, was the first to indicate on the scent near a tree. (For more on Zip, see <http://www.911bc.org/animalplanet.html>.) The rest of us were invited to take our dogs one-by-one to that tree to see if they would also indicate. By that time, it was so hot that all TG wanted to do was to lay under the shade of the closest tree. It was about 95 degrees. I had a slight breeze, but TG was down in the tall grass where there wasn’t any breeze at all. When I led her to the

tree, all she could do was pant through her mouth, but she did look up in the tree. She could not close her mouth long enough to smell anything. Right there I failed to heed one of A. J. Marhofkee's SAR rules to "always trust your dog." We were all carrying extra water for our dogs, but it was not much help. TG turned and started back to the car all on her own. We walked back slowly stopping for a rest under each tree along the way.

There was a horse back at the seminar site. Its saddle blanket was bright red with large white "SOS" letters on it. This was one of the horses that was waiting for one of the other search exercises later in the day. As we approached, I told the rider that I was concerned that TG would freak-out as she had never seen a horse before. She said, "Well, that is why we are here." She neck reigned her horse and it took two steps towards TG. To my surprise TG showed absolutely no unusual concern. She just side-stepped a couple of steps to get out of the horse's path.

They had planned to also have a rescue helicopter participate, but they were too short on funds to bring it in. They did have a local fire engine and a four-wheeled ATV from the fire department.

When we got back to the car, I let TG stay in some shade while I got the intense heat buildup out of the car and cranked up the air-conditioning to max. Then I let her jump in and sit in the front seat with the A/C blowing directly in her face while I went back to collect our stuff. During the lecture portion of the seminar we were in the hot sun, but we were both comfortable thanks to some good planning on our part. We had purchased a vinyl-covered sponge pad made for dogs that could hold eleven quarts of cool water. I brought the measured amount of water and loaded the mat, laid it on a braided rug to keep it off the hot ground and shielded it from the sun with a large golf umbrella. I fastened the umbrella to my collapsible chair with plastic cable ties to keep the breeze from upsetting the umbrella. To keep from burning, I wore long pants, a long sleeved shirt and a hat. For the next four hours we were both very comfortable. Together we went through another five gallons of ice water. The 911BC staff was well prepared with sun shades and six big wading pools for the dogs. It was obvious that they care deeply for their dogs. It surprised me that although all 40 dogs were out in the hot weather and in close proximity to each other, there were absolutely NO confrontations between any of the dogs. In fact they paid almost no attention to each other.

By the time that I had the umbrella down, the cooling mat dumped out, and everything back into the car, TG was lying comfortably in the back seat panting slowly with her mouth nearly closed. She had cooled down very nicely.

Before we left the seminar grounds, I did go back to attend the debriefing for the cadaver search. The forensic expert asked what we had

learned and explained that the night before, he had put the dummy up high in the tree, where Zip and the other dogs indicated. Walking back to the car with him, I told him that I wondered at the time why we did not look up into the tree. After all, TG and several other dogs looked up into the tree after they indicated. He agreed that we all missed that clue – even the experts missed it. I had been thinking about it all the way back with TG. If we had not been forced to leave by the weather, I believe I would have studied that tree in more detail and might have been the only one to have solved the first search. Although the forensic expert did say that the dummy was very high up in the tree.

I really enjoyed this seminar. If both TG and I were slimmer and younger, I would definitely give serious consideration to training and certifying her as a SAR dog.

My most sincere thank you to all SAR dogs and their handlers. You are doing a tremendous service for all of us!

Chapter 15



Odds and Ends

There are a lot of items left in my list of 70 things about TG that I want to tell you. Most are not long enough to have their own chapter so I will just list them here. Like TG eating an ice cream cone.

OK, lots of dogs eat ice cream cones. But I will bet most of them make a yukky mess out of it. TG catches every drip – even in the hot summer. She licks it on command. I turn the cone and tell her, “Lick it” or, “Hurry, it is going to drip.” When she has all the drips temporarily under control, I tell her, “Bite it.” She then takes a chomp out of the top of the ice cream cone. By the time she has enjoyed and swallowed that she is back to licking it some more. “It is dripping TG.” She works harder and faster to catch all the drips. She licks it right down to the cone and tries to scoop out the ice cream from inside the cone unless I tell her to “Bite it.” Then she bites the sides of the cone. When that has progressed down to just a mouthful, I tell her, “Take it.” And away it goes without a drop ever spilled in the car or on my hands. Even on the warmest days she can lick it fast enough to keep up with any potential drips. On that 95 degree day after the SAR seminar, we stopped for ice cream cones on the way home. TG and I both had to lick our cones quickly to keep from dripping ice cream in the car. TG caught all her drips - - I wish I could have done as well with my cone.

She thinks that my French fries are for her to share, too. She is not demanding, she is happy just to be able to share them with me from the back seat of the car. The usual routine is for me to pull out a fry then take a bite of

one-half to two-thirds of it and offer the rest to TG. That is the sanitary way of doing it – my hands get wet from her mouth, but the part of the fry that I eat is never touched by my hand. Sanitary, but not nearly as much fun as the other way. In this method, I put the fry into my mouth and turn my head towards her. She bites off the part that is sticking out of my mouth and I get the rest. She is so gentle and careful that I have to actually do the biting or she will not get any of the French fry. If there are a lot of French fries, the first method is a lot faster. But if there is someone in the next car watching us, as there usually is, then we do the mouth-to-mouth method for their entertainment.

TG is very patient and does not beg while we are eating a hamburger, chicken, or fish sandwich in the car. She watches closely though to see how much of the sandwich is left. When there is only one bite left, she will make a little vocal-style whine to remind us that she is in the back seat waiting for that last little piece.

Many readers will wonder why we don't use crates for our dogs both in the house and especially in the car. We do have crates - - but they are currently in use as rabbit cages in our third bedroom. TG comes into the act with our rabbits, too. All Border Collies should have a few sheep in their back yard to keep them alert and in good training for herding. TG has furry critters that are a lot smaller than sheep – more like rabbit size.

She really does a good job herding the rabbits into their cages. When it is time for the rabbits to back to their cages, we just say, "Round up, TG."

Suddenly each perfectly comfortable and relaxed rabbit is given a wet-nose-lift and they dutifully stand up. TG then gives them another wet-nose-push to get them to start moving. TG never had any formal herding training so she just follows what is in her DNA. Instead of always pushing from the rear and sides, TG just says, "Follow me" and puts her head into one of the cages. When the target rabbit does not go into the cage, TG gets downright disgusted. She turns and stares at the rabbit and puts her head back into the cage saying, "In here, dummy!" She will sometimes make references to knowing why some people call them "dumb bunnies."

"TG, they are not as smart as you are, but you don't have to call them 'dumb bunnies.' Just tell them 'Round up' again and help them move into their cages."

TG backs out of the cage and goes through the whole routine one more time – target one of the rabbits, give it another wet-nose-shove, and run over to show the rabbit, "This is how you do it. Go in here." After a short wait without getting any cooperation from the rabbit, "Sheese," along with an audible sigh. You can just see her thinking, "OK, bunny. I tried the easy way, but you want to play rough, so here goes." Then TG gets down to the

real herding. The rabbits are ready. (Who says they are dumb?) TG starts moving more quickly and the rabbits are scattering and looking for hiding places – behind the door, behind a box, under a shelf, around the side of the daybed, any place they can get out of direct line of sight with TG. It doesn't hamper TG of course. If a rabbit is wedged into a tight corner and TG can't get behind it to give it a push, she will just reach over the rabbit with her paw and scoop it towards her. It is usually on the move and does not need another wet-nose-shove at this point. TG dodges to the left and right and works the rabbit into its cage. A quick close of the cage door by me and TG is off again to round up the second rabbit.

They are not at all afraid of TG. In fact they both come to the sides of their cages when TG walks into the room. They all like to bump noses with each other.

Most people do not like barking dogs. Barking dogs are considered to be unfriendly and annoying. That is, of course, one of the purposes of a guard dog – to keep intruders out. A house pet does have some guard dog duties for both raising an alert and for general protection. Some dogs greet strangers without regard to any guarding – they just wag their tails and rush to greet anyone that is not showing anger or danger. Some dogs bark incessantly non-stop when strangers are around. In my opinion, the best dog is one that controls his own barking to exactly match his owner's needs.

TG started out as a barker. She barked at everything and everybody. As she matured, we were able to usually control her barking when we were right next to her and inside our house. At least that was a good start. But we went through the next three summers carrying squirt guns in our belts or pockets when we were at the trailer and she was tied up outside. She was controllable when we were outside with her. But as soon as we went inside, she barked at every person that went past on our road – and we were on one of the two main roads leading to the campground's general store. We wore out several squirt guns, as it took several years to wear out TG's determination to bark.

As she left her puppy stage, her barking became more controllable. A sharp, "No bark" would stop her temporarily. The reminders became less frequent until "No bark" meant "No barking any more."

About this time our oldest son, John, was on a states-side leave from his first tour of duty in Okinawa with the USMC. He told us about some of the Japanese customs that he had learned. He said that when the Japanese said, "No," that was not necessarily a final statement. But if they crossed their arms in front of their chests in an "X" and said, "No," that was absolutely final and could not be argued.

There was something about the crossed arms that appealed to me. I

began crossing my arms when I said, “No bark.” I did this several times with great success.

TG was inside the house one day when Ernie and his dog, Rocky, a shepherd/collie mix, came by on their afternoon walk. TG saw them out of the window and started barking up a storm. Rocky walked right up the driveway for his daily petting. TG went ballistic and was bouncing up and down on the sofa making her point as emphatically as she could. In the past I would have tried to out-shout her and yell loud enough so she could hear me through the window. But that never worked to reduce her barking – it only served to let the person I was talking to know that I wasn’t suffering from selective hearing loss. This time I decided to try our new trick from a distance. I turned to face TG and gave a straight arm finger point right at her followed by a quick and firm crossed arms. And - - - it worked! TG dropped her head, closed her mouth, turned her head, gave one final very low volume bark, and left the room. I was in shock! My jaw dropped and when I recovered, weakly said, “She did it.” “What a terrific dog – she actually did it!” Ernie was equally impressed.

That “final low volume bark” has become a standard for TG – she just has to have the last word on the topic. “OK Dad, but I want you to know that I do not agree with you. This is definitely an alert situation and I need to keep sounding the alarm until the intruder goes away and stays away. You want me to stop the alarm, so OK. I’ll turn the situation over to you. Try not to mess it up, OK.”

Recently TG was in the car and started barking when Alice Applin, our former obedience instructor, walked by. She stopped to chat and I said, “Watch this.” I turned and pointed to TG then crossed my arms. TG gave a single bark and went quiet.

Alice said, “Impressive.”

Probably my favorite “show-off” trick with TG is to alter her behavior on command in front of someone. If TG is outside with me when Ernie and Rocky stop to talk, TG runs to the end of the driveway to bark at them. She turns and barks at me, “Hey Dad. Rocky is here. Do you see him? He’s over here. Should I let them in the driveway? Drop what you are doing and come over here.”

“OK, TG. I see them. Knock it off, TG.” She continued to bark even after I walked up to Ernie. “Quiet TG!” She continued to bark. Finally I said in a normal voice, “Come here TG. I want to talk to you.” TG instantly stopped barking, closed her mouth, hung her head down, walked slowly over to me and sat down in front of me. She just hung her head in anticipation of getting a good scolding. I have never scolded her in this situation. I don’t believe in calling a dog to you and then scolding her. Most dogs would

confuse the scolding with their obeying the “come” command. I told her, “Ernie is nice and Rocky is nice. I do not want you to bark at them, OK? No barking.” The barking stopped and the two dogs went about their normal routine of sniffing each other while Ernie brought me up to date on his Little League softball team. Any eleven year old would be lucky to have him for a coach. Each year he has a championship team – even though the players change every year. He is a very good coach and he treats all his players with respect.

TG listens to everything we say. Because of her extensive vocabulary, we have to be very careful if we want to talk about anything that we do not want her to know about. We can not say, “Should we go to the grocery store with or without TG?” without getting her all excited. We also cannot spell R-I-D-E, G-O, nor C-A-R. We have had to resort to, “Shall we traverse in the four-wheeled transportation unit with a destination of the market with or without the canine?” It is only a matter of time before she has that figured out, too.

She does not wear a collar in or around our house – she only wears it when we go somewhere in our car. Our thinking is that she never strays from our yard and would not get lost here. But if we were ever in an automobile accident, she could get out and wander away. For that reason, she wears her collar in the car and she is also microchipped as an added precaution. Her collar is hung on a closet doorknob. Sometimes she will tell us that she wants to go for a ride by nuzzling her collar or even by flipping it off onto the floor. If we tell her to go get her collar, she will flip it onto the floor then pick it up and bring it to us. But it was not always like this. She used to refuse to pick up her collar. She just said, “Do I look like a retriever? I don’t do ‘Fetch.’ If you want it, get it yourself.”

It took several days of concentrated encouragement to get TG to actually pickup her collar and not just keep pawing at it until she dragged it to us. I kept telling her, “Bite it TG. It is OK, just bite it.” I even put it into her mouth, but she pushed it out with her tongue like it was dead skunk.

“Yuk! I do not want that in my mouth.”

“Come on TG, bite it. Pick it up. Bring it to Daddy.” We worked and worked on this. TG fully understood what we wanted. She was just obeying her puppy training of never biting her collar or leash.

Finally, she decided to try to change her habit (which is very difficult for a Border Collie.) She flipped her collar off the handle, pawed at it a couple of times, and picked it up in her mouth. We both praised her. TG was so happy and proud of herself that she trotted right past me and paraded all over the house before she brought it to me. “Good girl, TG. Sit. Chin up” and her collar was on. She started her normal frenzied barking that she

always does whenever her collar is put on. She pushed us to and out the door. Then she ran for the car. She continues to bring us her collar whenever we ask her if she wants to go for a ride or R-I-D-E.

I have to be careful how I pronounce “Border Collie” around her. My usual pronunciation of “Collie” sounds like “collar” to her. So she is now a Border Colleeeee. That works.

Sometimes TG does something that is just too cute for words. We were going to bed and TG had been outside an hour or two earlier. So when I asked her to go out one more time before bed, she refused. “Come on TG, let’s go outside.”

She just stood on the top of the stairs and turned her head to the left. “No thanks, Dad. I just don’t need to.”

“TG, we are going to go night-night. Let’s go outside.”

“No thanks.”

I patted the top step three times. “Come on, I want you to come here.” Then I patted the second step three times. “And then I want you to come here.” I patted the third and bottom step. “And then I want you to . . .”

My little persuasion tactic was abruptly interrupted with a playful lick on the face. “Oh alright. You are so funny when you try to tell me to do something that I don’t want to do. OK, here I come.”

Down the steps she went and out through the garage to her yard. She was out there sleeping in her yard when I went out to get her a few minutes later, but no visible evidence that she did anything along the lines of what I had in mind for her. She was right. But she has the cutest way of giving into what I want her to do.

Chapter 16



Annie

Gail says that TG is so good with our grandchildren and the other animals in our house that she feels that TG would have been a good mother. That is not going to happen, of course, because TG has been spayed. We felt that she would have been very interesting to watch with some puppies to manage. Little did we know that we would get our wish.

Just before my October birthday three years ago, our daughter Anne (pronounced “Ann”) secretly called my wife. Anne and her next door neighbor had become very upset over the mistreatment of three puppies about a block from her house. One puppy in particular had escaped from its yard several times. Anne’s neighbor put it in her car and kept it with her for most of a day. Anne called Gail to see if I would want it for my birthday. After hearing the explanation of how she got it, Gail told her, “Your Dad will not have anything to do with a ‘stolen’ dog.” Anne took the puppy back and bought it from the owner.

The first I knew about it is when we went to Anne’s house on some phony pretext. Anne said, “Come in the living room, I want to show you something.” Along the way we greeted her four cats and Sasha, her Alaskan Husky. But there, under her coffee table, was an adorable golden retriever-colored four month old female puppy. Her coloring was so intense that she looked like caramel. She was a very friendly lab puppy that instantly wanted to play.

I was down on the floor playing with her and asked Anne where she got

the puppy. Her answer was, “Do you want her?” I thought she was just kidding around and asked again. Again she asked, “Do you want her?”

“What do you mean? She’s yours isn’t she?”

“Happy Birthday, Dad. She is yours if you want her.”

I was caught completely off-guard. I certainly was not out looking for a second dog and I did not know if we were up to training another puppy. In the last year or so, TG spent most of her time sleeping and was perfectly comfortable with our routine – and so was I. When I heard the story of how Anne had gotten this new puppy, there was little else that I could do but to thank her and tell her that I would love to have this new puppy. Anne is very good at reading people’s true feelings and said later that she knew that I was less than enthusiastic.

The puppy’s collar had a tag that was engraved with “Little Princess #1” on it. I remarked that we would have to rename her with something that would be easier to say along with obedience commands. I certainly was not going to say “Little Princess #1 Sit.” Then it just hit me as we were backing out of Anne’s driveway. “Let’s call her Annie.” Gail thought that was a great idea. We went back up the driveway and told Anne, but she was not very pleased.

“Sometimes you call me Annie. I don’t want the same name as your dog. Why don’t you call her something else?” I was tempted to tell her that “Something Else” wasn’t a very good name either, but I didn’t. But Gail and I both thought “Annie” was a good name and so we kept it.

As we drove home with this newest member of our family in the car, we wondered how TG would accept her. TG is a lot better with strange dogs invited into our home than Teddy and Scotch ever were. And they, after all, accepted TG, but we were not sure now that TG had been our ONLY dog for the last several years. Annie obviously enjoyed riding in our station wagon. She sniffed around and found several of TG’s chewy things and settled down to chew them on TG’s soft dog mat.

The introductions at home went well. TG was fascinated by this little puppy. Annie wanted to play with TG, the cats, the rabbits, and certainly the parrots. I think TG kept wondering when we were going to take the puppy home again, but we said, “Annie stays here. Annie and TG are at home.”

“Really? Well, she had better learn to mind me then.” TG’s mother instincts kicked in right away followed by her ideas of what Annie could do and what she must not do. TG had just had her last day of uninterrupted sleep for a long time. We realized immediately that we were going to have to crate Annie – especially at night. TG was not sure she liked that idea, but soon discovered it was the only way to get a good night’s sleep.

“Well, Annie is only four months old so we will need to get some

puppy food. TG is on a weight-loss adult dog diet so that is no good for Annie. I wonder if they will eat just their own food?" I must have been dreaming. Annie ate TG's food and TG ate Annie's food. I am not sure why, but we mixed the foods. They were both happy. Annie grew fast – she seemed to get bigger each day. I weighed her weekly and plotted it on a chart along with a statistical prediction out to one year. I showed it to our vet and told him that at this rate she will be 400 pounds when she is a year old.

He smiled and said, "What is she, a heifer?" He looked at her beautiful deep golden-caramel color and added, "She is the right color for one."

Unfortunately, TG also put on a lot of extra weight. My excuse is always, "She has been eating puppy food." Now at three years old, Annie is 60 pounds. After the first year, TG went back to her pre-Annie weight.

Annie loves having TG around. "Oh, Boy! Someone to play with." She constantly puts her paw on TG's back and TG tolerates it. TG has never tolerated having any dog touch her before this. People say that putting your arm on a dog's back is a sign of dominance over that dog. But apparently TG does not consider Annie's paw to be an act of dominance. She knows that Annie is a little puppy and that she is not challenging TG's leadership position in our family pack. We just can not believe how well TG tolerates Annie's behavior. TG has suddenly become a mother and she is doing beautifully in her new job.

When Annie wants to eat, TG backs away from the food dish. When Annie wants to drink, TG backs away from the water. TG follows Annie around the house all day long. This is a big departure from TG's activity level before Annie's arrival. TG had been sleeping most of the time but now she is awake all of the time and following Annie. The only time TG gets to sleep is when Annie is napping. TG prefers to sleep at least a few feet away from Annie, but Annie prefers to have at least some body contact while they sleep. Annie frequently wakes up from her nap long enough to get up and move over to where TG is sleeping then flop down next to TG for the rest of her naps.

At times Annie is just too much of a pest for TG. She wants to be in TG's face all the time. When we are riding in the car, Annie continues to pester TG. TG barks at her but Annie ignores her "mother's warnings." It got so bad for TG that we had to purchase a set of metal bars to separate the girls. TG could lie in the back seat area of our station wagon, where she spent most of her travel time with us before Annie arrived. Annie had the cargo area of the station wagon along with a large fluffy dog bed.

One time we left them in the car while we sent into Mom and Dad's condo for 45 minutes. When we got back to the car, TG was cowering, "I'm sorry Dad. I tried to make her stop. Didn't you hear all my barking? I

wanted you to come out and make her stop.” Annie was in the back and the ceiling fabric was falling down in three or four places. She had gotten bored and pulled it down. She had chewed up several of the pieces.

We waited until she was two years old before we spent \$578.05 to have the ceiling header replaced. She has left it alone since then.

Annie was introduced to TG’s toy box – a plastic crate that we have now moved from the den to the back hall. Annie likes to pull out the knotted rope tugs and tennis balls. She is a typical Labrador and needs to have something in her mouth most of the time. When we come home from our errands and we have left the dogs home, both of the dogs, of course, greet us at the door. But Annie has to quickly run to get something to hold in her mouth before she can continue her greeting. TG uses that very short time, when Annie is hunting up a toy, to get some exclusive time with us. When they are both looking for affection, TG will let Annie squeeze in front of her. It is as if TG is acting like a human adult letting a younger child in front of her so that the child can be greeted first.

TG has thought up a ploy to trick Annie so that TG can get more exclusive time with us. When we come home from errands and have gone through the usual excitement of greeting and carrying a toy, I will ask the dogs if they want to go outside. TG heads for the top of the three steps to the garage door, but stops there. Annie shoves past TG and waits by the door. I open the door, Annie shoots through into the garage and I ask TG if she wants to go out. TG gives me her usual look to the left so I leave her there, close the door and let Annie out into her kennel in the back yard. I lock Annie’s kennel door and return into the house. TG is still at the top of the stairs and is wiggling all over. “Thanks for coming back in, Dad. Now we can play together while that puppy is outside.” Before Annie went out, TG did not give an indication that we were going to play. She just wanted Annie to go out and leave us together. After we play for a while, TG wants to go outside, too.

We added another 4x8 kennel for Annie adjacent to TG’s 6x6 kennel. Both dogs have their own kennel areas.

Twice I made the mistake of leaving the overhead garage door open when I let Annie and TG back into the house. Annie saw the open door and shot out while I was yelling for her to stop and come back. By now Annie was on a dead run for the neighbor’s yard. I tried to get TG to herd Annie back to us, but TG’s herding was better with rabbits than with other dogs. TG was herding Annie away from us. We called TG back and put her in the house while I went looking for Annie. I found her doing circles around two of our neighbor’s houses. She eventually came back and ran close enough for me to catch her. She knew I was mad at her for running away like that, but

she had soooo much fun. She also got loose and ran around our campground twice.

Now that she is a bit older and has had four 8-week obedience lessons, Annie is a little bit more controllable. At three years old, she is still a puppy in spirit even though she is full grown. A teenager from our neighborhood came to our door recently. Annie was quick to greet her at the door and pushed her way out the door to prance all around her. Then it happened. “Oh, look. Freedom!” And off she went. TG ran out of the door barking commands to Annie, but Annie only put on more speed and shot into the neighbor’s yard.

TG ran to the edge of our yard and stood there barking at me. “Dad! Do you want me to go get her? I’ll bark at her until she comes home. Please?”

“No TG. Please come back in the house and I will go get her.” I said that in a normal tone of voice without yelling and TG quickly returned to the house. I got Annie’s leash and collar and went back to the spot where TG had been barking at me. Annie was in the next neighbor’s yard in full view of where TG had been standing. I just called out, “Annie! Front!” Annie stopped smelling the ground where the neighbor’s dog, Brandy, usually lies and ran right up to me and sat down. I slipped her collar on and praised Annie for obeying the “Front” command. The walk back to the house was uneventful. Once again TG knew what I wanted and was very obedient in returning to the house without any argument and did what I wanted instead of what she wanted to do. Of course TG had several minutes of scolding Annie when they were both together again.

Dogs like Annie need to run. We make opportunities for Annie to run whenever we can. Our dog club has a nice big outside, fenced-in yard along the side of our main club building. We frequently take Annie and TG out there for a run. TG runs after Annie, but the younger Annie is much faster. TG goes into her herding mode – barking and chasing Annie. It is beautiful to watch Annie run. Without the confines of our house, Annie stretches out into long, powerful, graceful, cheetah-like lopes through the grass. She looks just like a caramel streak ... with a noisy, black and white, barking Border Collie following behind. TG, though, doesn’t just follow Annie. TG anticipates when Annie will be making a turn and takes a shortcut to intercept Annie. Seeing TG getting closer, Annie compresses her body, brings in her rear with her tail between her legs, and really turns on the power with faster, shorter digs into the turf – turning on a burst of speed, leaving TG in a cloud of dandelion seeds. Sometimes Annie just makes small circles. TG, being a Border Collie, can make very quick turns so she can get very close to Annie until Annie breaks out of her circles into another long run.

Annie can easily outrun TG. TG had gotten very lazy over the past couple of years and really was not in good shape for all of this running. The more running sessions we had like this, the stronger TG got. It was really good for both of them.

Annie really met her match one night before her class at GRKC. I liked to run her alone in the club's side yard before class to get her just a bit tired so that she pays better attention to me during class. I found this really worked well and I was not the only person to "exercise" their dog before class.

One evening, one of the class members asked if she and her dog could join us in the yard. Of course, it was fine with me – Annie likes running with TG and since TG was at home, this was a good "running mate" for Annie. Besides both dogs already liked each other. They both took off on a run. But this was no ordinary running dog - - this was a Greyhound! Instead of easily out running TG, Annie found herself in the lead running as fast as she could with a dog behind her just lopping along comfortably. Annie looked back several times with a look of disbelief on her face. The Greyhound was just comfortable prancing along and smelling Annie's behind as if they were standing still. But Annie was running as fast as she could. After a few circles of the yard, they both settled down into some good running. We thought Annie was the "caramel streak", but this dog was "gray lightening" when she turned on some of her speed. After all, she was a retired professional racing dog. Her owner said that her dog had a very good time. We both had well behaved dogs in class that evening and we met several more times for a good run like this.

Annie did very well in her obedience lessons. Training with Annie was extremely different from training with TG. TG always caught on to everything extremely fast. Annie was so much slower that I had to make mental adjustments to keep from being unhappy with Annie's progress. As soon as I realized that "Annie is no TG", my attitude improved. I could see that Annie improved quicker than the other dogs in her class. Instead of thinking that Annie's elevator did not go to the top floor and that her ladder was missing a few rungs, by looking around us, I could see that Annie was a bright little dog. In fact after one of the 8-week sessions, we won a class game of modified musical chairs, which was based on your dog's quick response to a sit-stay command. We could not sit in the chair (or in this case step on a chalked "X" on the floor) until our dog sat. If the dog got up, that person had to go back to his or her dog and have it sit again. In the meantime the person without a chair (or "X") could run and occupy the vacant "X" as long as their dog was sitting. Since Annie is good at sit-stay, we won the game.

Even though Annie graduated from her beginner obedience class, I held

her back for an additional 8-week session. I wanted her to improve in several areas including walking on a leash at a heel. I had not yet stopped comparing her to “TG the Terrific”.

In fact Annie received an award in her next class that TG has not and probably will never achieve. At the end of Annie’s 8-week intermediate-beginner classes, she earned her CGC (Canine Good Citizen) award. While this is not based on a dog’s brilliance, it is based on the dog’s ability to behave in a group of people - - as a good canine citizen. (For a full description of the nine stages in this test see www.akc.com/cgc.)

TG is very wary of most people and would not let strangers pet her and certainly would not let them comb nor brush her. TG would fail on these points.

One day when Annie was a small puppy, I took both dogs on leashes into the local PETCO store. TG walked nicely, eager to check out her favorite aisle with the rawhide bones. Annie pulled on her leash, eager to go in four directions at once. There are so many wonderful smells in a pet store and both the staff and the customers are friendly. As we passed one aisle, a woman saw TG first and exclaimed, “What a beautiful dog! May I pet her?” I said she could, but before I could caution her to avoid the top of TG’s head, she reached out and TG ducked out of the way. “OK,” she said calmly. “I can see that you do not want to be petted.” Then she spotted Annie leaving the cat food boxes and running towards her.

The woman bent down to pet Annie and caught the full force of a running, happy puppy in her face. “Oh! Aren’t you the sweetest thing. You are sooo soft.” Annie wriggled from one end to the other. She was rubbed and stroked all over.

Annie was obviously having a good time while TG watched from a safe distance. Soon I could see that TG knew that she was missing out on a good time. After watching for a while, TG went over to the woman and bumped under the woman’s arm with her nose. “Oh, you are ready for some petting now, too. OK, I will pet you both.” We were pleased that TG was able to learn from Annie. This was not a simple jealousy thing. TG actually learned that this woman was OK from Annie.

One memorable day, we were at our dog club for a run. Annie was on her 26 ft. leash and TG was nearby. Another member stopped to chat so I reigned Annie in and locked the leash. Annie wanted to keep running so she tugged on the leash. I raised my arm to absorb some of her powerful pull. She darted out again and I automatically raised my arm, but ... there was no pulling force to absorb ... and Annie was still running. I looked at my raised arm and there hung her leash that she had chewed in half in just seconds. TG started herding Annie, but Annie was too fast for her. I excused myself and

ran for the gate to the fenced in yard yelling, “Come on girls. In the yard. Let’s run!” I ran into the yard clapping my hands. Both Annie and TG ran into the yard right behind me. This was one of my better catches. I suddenly felt more intelligent than my dogs – it felt good.

Annie is such a screwball. She likes to run onto our bedroom and bark at the dog in our mirrors on our sliding closet doors. She doesn’t seem to understand that it is her reflection. TG, on the other hand, uses mirrors to her advantage. If TG is next to me and we are in front of a mirror when I ask her something, TG will look at me in the mirror instead of turning her head to look up at me. Lazy perhaps, but definitely a smart move.

The interaction between TG and Annie is interesting to watch. Annie is still in her puppy stage (at two years old) and likes to smother our 3-year old grandson, Jordan, with kisses when he walks into our house. Although we intervene, Annie keeps trying to get her smooches in with Jordan who is just as tall as she is. The next time Jordan walked into our house, Annie only got a couple of licks in. TG silently wedged between Annie and Jordan. She would not let Annie touch him. Annie tried end runs and tried to get both under and over TG, but TG successfully kept Annie at a safe distance.

This is much like TG’s control over Marley’s playing with thread or string. TG observed a problem and she corrected it without being told. It is her job at our house to keep everything under control. That is what Border Collies do.

But TG takes it a bit too far. Annie wants to play – all of the time. TG doesn’t think that Annie should catch a ball or pull on a tug. There is a lot of “Mother TG” scolding when Annie wants to play. TG is constantly telling Annie that Annie must not pull too hard and “win”, because her daddy is the leader of the pack and his authority is not to be challenged. I have frequently tried to put my end of the rope tug into TG’s mouth so that the two dogs could tug with each other. TG flatly refuses. But when Annie is outside in her yard, TG will pick up one of Annie’s tugs and bring it to me. It has probably been three or four years since TG and I played rope tug, but now she wants to do it again. But Annie gets barked at when she tries to do it.

One time I was playing rope tug with both dogs using two tugs – one in each hand. Annie happened to catch one of my fingers with her teeth and I yelled “ouch.” TG stopped suddenly and refused to continue. Annie wanted to keep right on playing.

OK, you dog psychologists, figure this one out. TG scolds Annie for doing almost anything. But TG will prod Annie to wake up and play “Run Around the House.” This is very enjoyable to TG (and Annie, too), but it is opposite to TG’s “protection of our household” rule. We have a T-shaped hallway with the dining room above the top of the right side of the “T” and

the kitchen with its two doors along the right side of the “T”. After prodding Annie into motion, TG usually stays in the kitchen running from one kitchen door to the other barking constantly at Annie. During all of this, Annie is running as fast as she can down both halls and around the dining room table. Unless you want to live dangerously, you had better stay out of Annie’s pathway or you may get your leg broken. Annie can run at top speed down the hall to the kitchen door and literally turn on a dime to appear in the blink of an eye at the other kitchen door. TG gets her exercise by running between the doors trying to intercept Annie and keep her from cutting through the kitchen. I can understand TG’s behavior of trying to keep Annie out of the kitchen, but the only explanation that I have of TG’s prodding Annie into action is that TG wants to play.

Life with TG the Terrific is never dull. She is so human-like in her love and emotions, that it seems like we have a four-footed human living with us. She is always thinking. Nearly everyday, we ask ourselves, “How did she figure that out?”

Happy 10th Birthday, TG.
We love you!



her first swim



Marley's buddy



1993 - 2005



posing for the
watermark on our
stationary



by the agility tunnel