



Pet Tips 'n' Tales

by Mary Ellen "Angel Scribe"

Deaf dog + sign language = success

Gina's dog-rescue friend emailed her a picture of a deaf Aussie and Gina, who had never been around a deaf dog, was intrigued to meet him.

When her friend drove up with the beautiful white dog, sitting in the passenger seat, he out flew out in a wild white blur like an excited kid home from summer camp, it was a magical moment for them both! Almost!

Gina was so busy watching the white streak that she did not hear her friend quietly empty all his "stuff" out of her vehicle and prepare to leave. In a panic, Gina asked, "Where are you going?" and her friend prophesied, "Keep him a few days. You'll fall in love with him."

Like a young Helen Keller, Riley had no training and did not know how to be a "good dog", so a determined Gina enrolled him into a dog obedience sign language course.

Riley was so bright, so eager to learn and to please, that he learned all the basic communication skills in three days!

Pet deafness is not always easily recognizable. Many pet parents assume that their pet is misbehaving, so they punish the confused animal. This leads to fear and aggression with many of the pets ending up in a shelter, just like Riley had - Gina's home was his third home.

"When he arrived," confesses Gina, "I was afraid of his aggressiveness. Once we could 'talk' to each other, we were both thrilled to understand and be understood. He was a totally different dog! He shined with happiness, just like Helen Keller had when she learned to communicate. I was told that it would take three years for him not to run away, as he had his first homes, but his people probably assumed that he was disobedient. They did not understand that he was deaf. No matter how loud they called, he could never hear their command to, 'Come back!'

Today, when I make the sign for 'ball', Riley retrieves it. I am as thrilled as he is that we can communicate. He is an awesome retriever, which contrasts with our Labrador Retriever, Connor, who doesn't retrieve at all!"

Gina has also created unique signs to indicate her dog's differ-

ent toys and time to go to bed. Because she has always paid close attention to her dogs, she has even created a telepathic bond with him. So, Riley watches her body language, signing, and listens with his heart.

"We are so close," said Gina, "he is always by my side and I often forget that he can't hear. It is fascinating and a challenge having both a hearing dog and a deaf dog, because I have to remember to sign."

And inquiring minds want to know, "Is Riley friendly with other dogs?"

"Dogs have their own body language," explained Gina, "so his lack of hearing does not interfere and he loves playing and greeting them."

Today, he enjoys sitting in her vehicle's passenger seat passionately barking at the cows. Once barked out, he lays his head on her lap. "He occasionally suffers from car sickness," said Gina, "so we are using a homeopathic remedy for car sickness."

Riley's love for learning and play pointed them directly into agility classes.

"We have so much fun," said Gina. "But when the goofball tires of running the course, he flatly refuses to look at me! He knows that he has to see my hands to obey commands, and 'his game' means that I can't ask him to do anything. It is so funny, because we both know what he is doing!"

It must be terrible for a dog to not hear and because Riley is also sight impaired, he is afraid of the dark, so we keep a night light on for him."

Gina's friend was right!

"I love Riley to the moon and back," admits Gina.

TIPS

Teach both hearing and deaf dogs sign language! Find classes in American Sign Language (ASL) on the internet, library books, and many dog trainers know obedience signs. Signs work wonders when a dog is out of voice range.

Try this sign out with your pets. SIT: Place your arm down at



your side and bring your hand up to your shoulder - the bend means sit. With your hand at your shoulder, face your palm towards the floor and bring your hand down - that means down.

"I cannot call Riley," said Gina, "so I initially only walked him on a leash. When he indicated, with his eyes, that he wanted to be 'free' - I let him off-leash. Then, I stay in that location until he returns to me.

Many merle colored dogs are bred for the best and most color. This includes eye color, and many Australian Shepherds are prized for their blue and green or a combination of both. Breeding merle to merle creates beautiful-colorful dogs, but sometimes they produce a white dog who is typically blind and/or deaf. For this reason, I support rescue shelters who save double-merle bred dogs and am passionate about the Amazing Aussie Lethal White Rescue's work in Phoenix, Arizona."

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Local breeder headed back to Westminster

Charlene Sayles recently ran into an old friend. When she mentioned it had been a long time since their last meeting, she barely got the words out before he asked her about her dogs.

"I'm known as the dog lady, I guess. People see me and they think dogs," she said.

Sayles has no qualms about her nickname. In part, because it's true.

She's the owner of 2012 Westminster best of breed winner Gus, a Swedish Vallhund; a breed Sayles describes as a bigger, more playful Corgi. Gus' win earned Sayles notoriety and added to her "dog lady" status and now five years later, Westminster is calling again.

"We had a litter of nine puppies and Annie ended up in New Jersey and she is going to Westminster," Sayles said. Annie, an 18-month-old Vallhund was sired by Gus and has already earned her championship. She'll compete at Westminster for best of breed in February.

"She won best of breed at the National Dog Show which is on TV," Sayles said; an honor that is quite a feat for a female dog. According to Sayles, female dogs are often overlooked for championship titles.

"Some old-school judges think males contribute more to the breed so they overlook the females. There's a saying that if you show female dogs you end up with a collection of red and white ribbons because the males win," Sayles said.

Annie, or "Akutchi if you could see me now at Kanouse CGC" according to her registered name, will be up against four other Vallhunds at Westminster. If she wins best in breed, she'll be featured



on the show's broadcast and start a radio show tour shortly after her win.

If she does win, Annie will do her victory lap in her home state of New Jersey but her father is still making a splash here in Cottage Grove.

Gus is a registered therapy dog and volunteers in the community with programs such as Reading with Rover.

While Gus started with the program in Cottage Grove, he's taking a break from the action while Sayles focuses on going back to work full-time and working with Annie's litter mate, Cooper, who like Annie, was named according to the theme of the litter: everything number one. Cooper is named after the number one comedy "The Big Bang Theory" and Annie gets her moniker from the chart topping song.

"This litter that Annie was a part of had nine puppies," Sayles said, noting that three of the puppies were sent to homes in California, two are in Eugene and Sayles still has three. One of those dogs, though, is on his way to France to settle in with his new show family.

"I wanted these puppies to contribute to the breed," Sayles said. "I wanted this litter to disperse and do its thing."

The Westminster Dog Show will be held in New York City in mid-February. If Annie captures best of show, she will make her way to Madison Square Garden and be featured on the live broadcast.



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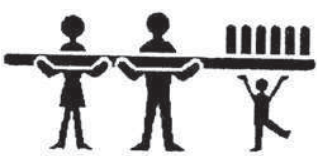
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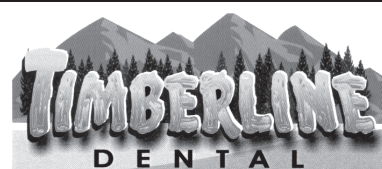
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