

PRE-MASTIFF PERSONAL HISTORY by Jeanne Cook

At 6 years old, I went to obedience classes with my Father to watch him train our Dalmatian. From that time on, I read every dog and horse book I could find, and "trained" every animal I could get my hands on. I grew up with the Dalmatian, a Chesapeake Bay Retriever cross and a Toy Poodle (whose sole obligation in life was to look cute.) Since I couldn't afford a husband and my Thoroughbred jumper, I regrettably sold the horse to marry and we bought Clancy, the Irish Setter Escape Artist. He kept jumping through windows (screen, glass and all). He was so unprotective, I'm sure he would have let burglars in if only they'd hold the door open long enough for him to leave. We mistakenly bred him, taking pick(?) daughter, Marney. Huckleberry Hound, our sock-eating Golden Retriever, was always a perfect gentleman, even while being stitched up after his leg had been opened to the bone by a badger. He developed severe arthritis and had to be put down around age 4. Barney, a sweet "registered-but-breeder's nightmare" Golden Retriever we bought, taught me how unrealistic we are when we assume pups will always inherit the best of both sire and dam. It was Brea, a black lab cross, who first demonstrated to me the real value of regular group obedience classes.

My best trained was Grizzly, a black lab, because I wasn't working full-time then and I spent a lot of time training him. Since he loved carrying my shoes in his mouth, but would misplace them, I taught him to also find them on command. Together we struggled through our first matches with conformation and obedience showing. From there we did some Schutzhund, then practiced tracking and protection work on a casual basis with a police department. Though he scared me with a tumor (false alarm -- he had eaten a typewriter ribbon), I finally lost him to kidney failure at 9.

My first Mastiff was Kendall in 1977. More non-Mastiffs were Charlie, a Bullmastiff who died of cancer; Sally I, my son's Golden who was so dysplastic she had to be put down at 11 mos.; Spike, a lost black lab who decided to lose all his hair; Daisy-Doodles, my daughter's Toy Poodle (who could leap tall buildings in a single bound), and Sally II, a Golden, who was considerate enough to have her pups late-morning (never to conceive again). She still continues as a demo dog in my classes.

Continually going to obedience classes sparked my becoming an assistant trainer in 1977, then trainer in 1979. I have been teaching 2 to 6 all-breed classes per week year-round at Alpine Kennel since 1982 (also in-kennel training, tattooing, etc.) as well as working full-time as a legal secretary. Dog commands/corrections became such a habit that I had to laugh one day when, upon closing the car door at a store I loudly commanded "STAY". A bystander, seeing no dogs in the car, wryly suggested that I might set the parking brake if the car had been giving me problems. I even dreamed about training, and would sometimes shout "NO, DOWN." in my sleep -- much to my husband's dismay. No, that wasn't why we divorced, but in thinking back, I really should have stuck with the horse.