

The Care and Feeding of Partners

By Marti Ronemus

Today we're going to talk about the Care and Feeding of Partners. Get a cuppa and pay attention.

Husband Gary and I have no children (thusly no grandkids, darn it), but we do have dogs and I imagine we feel the same about them that you do about your kids, although we'll never have to provide bail money or new sneakers. Anyway, a couple years ago we got a new puppy, a chocolate and white Chihuahua, Ozzie. (Gary sez it takes a big man to walk a small dog, especially true with Ozzie, as he was about the size of a robust hamster.) As my Faithful Readers can imagine, this was a Big Event at our house. Ozzie even has a godmother, Shirley, to give you a clue.

When we took Ozzie to his "Meet the Vet" appointment, we received a great bag of goodies, including a little pamphlet, "How to Have a Well-Behaved Puppy." Determined to, for ONCE, have a well-behaved dog, we were excited about that. Sadly, it turned out we were incapable of saying "NO!" to Ozzie, and the pamphlet was thrown into a drawer.

I found it recently and want to share it with you. The advice is sterling. Every time you see the word "puppy," substitute the word "partner."

"Treat your new puppy with respect and love if you want an enduring relationship." Look, people, you *picked* that partner! Respect Pard's point of view. And Compromise. Play Inverted Minors if he will play Roman Key Card.

"Catch your new puppy doing something RIGHT." It's so easy to say, "Why did you do that?" or (my favorite) "Where is the hand you were bidding with?" Or "What were you thinking?" All unanswerable, except to say, "It seemed like a good idea at the time." How about instead, "Pard, you did a masterful job of establishing those long diamonds! You were able to dump the losers on that suit." Pard may not have any idea what the heck you are talking about, but next time she has a long suit, she'll look for a way to drop losers on it. Maybe.

"Keep training sessions short, otherwise your puppy will lose interest." While we know that you can give your Pard ideas to improve on every single solitary hand, it's more important to just enjoy the game. Remember, the word is "partner."

"Small morsels of food are useful in modeling good behavior." This doesn't mean we fill our pockets with Oreos (although you could do worse!). Think of compliments as the Partner version of dog biscuits. Give Pard many small rewards, and watch him shine. (Don't do it in front of the opponents, tho'. It could be hurtful.)

"Your puppy cannot learn a new command right away. Repetition is the key to success." It takes at least a dozen mishaps with Stayman and Transfers before getting it right. Just relax and await victory.

"Never use harsh words. Your puppy is trying to do the right thing. If he isn't learning, it's YOUR fault!!" Nobody wants you to win more than your Pard. And remember Pard is putting up with a lot from you, too. Put away that rolled-up newspaper.

“After a good training session, you should have a nice cuddle with your puppy.” While this is the best advice in the entire pamphlet, you might want to be careful. I’m not sure if your club would approve.

Well, that’s my story and I’m stickin’ to it. Let me hear from you. mronemus@comcast.net