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It's Another Day

My day always begins with checking messages. Some messages are from exasperated dog owners at their wit's end about how to handle a dog problem. Some are updates on current problems. Some are mere thank-you's for helping an owner resolve a problem. But as an urban dog trainer, I always get lots of messages.

This morning I'm driving down Lake Shore Drive toward the Gold Coast, a pricey neighborhood in Chicago. I have a ten o'clock appointment with a woman who lives in a high-rise. She and her husband have recently moved into the city from the suburbs. They love the city and being close to downtown, but there is just one problem — when they leave for work their dog barks, and of course the neighbors are starting to complain. The building has given her an ultimatum — either the barking stops or the dog goes.

I am greeted at the door by Betty. She is a beautiful woman who has a distraught look on her face. As usual, I observe the environment. I don't go up to the dog, a 10-year-old cocker spaniel named Ginger. I just stand and observe Ginger and watch how she interacts with her home environment and with the owner. Ginger comes up to me and sniffs. She seems mellow, not an overly-anxious dog. You wouldn't think she was a barker.

"How long has the barking been going on?" I ask as I watch Ginger sit next to my feet.

"For the last few weeks, ever since we moved in. I don't know what to do. I hate to think of moving because we love it here. But if we stay, Ginger must go," Betty says as she nervously bites at a fingernail.



I'm in another high-rise. Tom, a mild-mannered type with a neat appearance, leads me into his very trendy apartment. I quickly observe an open crate and a Wheaton terrier, named Trouble, coming up to me. The dog seems to have a happy-go-lucky nature.

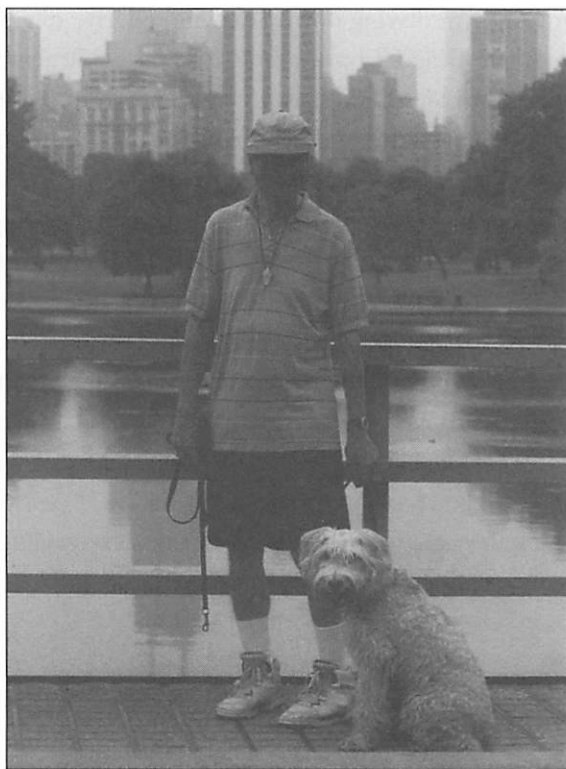
"Sweet dog you got here," I say to Tom.

"Yes, he is a sweetie," says Tom, "but I have a problem. He won't go into his crate, and I'm leaving the country tomorrow morning. I have to take Trouble with me and the only way I can take him is in a crate."

"Has he ever been in a crate before?" I ask.

"No. Never has. I tried to get him in the crate last night but he snapped at me." Tom tries to sound as calm as possible to hide his agitation.

I know I have just one hour to show Tom how to get Trouble into the crate, and make him feel comfortable in there as well. Trouble keeps a wary distance from the open crate as Tom and I talk.



I check my phone messages. Sometimes the calls are a fascinating part of the day.

My recorded greeting sounds like this: *Hello top dog owner, this is the CIA, the Canine Intelligence Agency. Your mission should you decide to accept it is to leave a bark after the beep. You will be contacted ASAP. This tape will disintegrate within two minutes. Good luck top dog owner!*

And here are some of my messages:

“Hey Cis, this is Ellen, remember you trained my dog, Larry, in puppy kindergarten? Anyway, my husband and I just got a new couch and he took a pee on it. I’m really upset, give me a call and help me out with this. I’m really angry at the little bastard!”

“Hello Cis, this is John Williams. I have a nice dog, well, I thought he was a nice dog, but lately, he’s been snapping at other dogs when I take him to the park. Call me ASAP. Thanks. Oh, by the way, did I say he is a nice dog though! Yeah, he’s a real nice dog.”

“Hi, Cis? My husband and I just got a pup and he’s peeing all over the house. Is that normal? Shouldn’t he know better? What should we do? Call me.”



I drive up a long winding driveway to a large prominent house in the suburb of Wilmette. The house, like the whole neighborhood, has an affluent air. The grounds are beautifully landscaped. I park the car and ring the bell. It is one of those low-chime doorbells that I can hear from the outside. The muffled toll matches the stateliness of the house.

A middle-aged, athletic-looking woman named Joyce opens the door. She is dressed in a tennis outfit and she is tanned and has a youthful appearance. I’m led into this magnificent foyer that leads a few steps down into the living room.

As soon as we are in the living room, I notice something isn’t right. All the furniture is covered in plastic. I wonder if they are moving or planning to do some remodeling. Joyce sits on the edge of a couch covered in plastic. I decide to sit on the floor.

“I’m so glad you came,” says Joyce, “we have a problem with our little Mickey, that’s our dog. For the last six years he has been peeing

on all the furniture. That's why everything is covered in plastic."

"Six years?" I try to sound nonchalant, like it's a common thing for dogs to pee on furniture for six years.

Joyce calls Mickey into the living room and a cute Yorkie bounds into the room holding a stuffed teddy bear in his mouth.

"Oh look, he's brought Baby with him. That's the name of his stuffed toy!" says Joyce.

I smile with her, then notice Mickey laying the stuffed toy near me as he begins to hump it with a passion. I can't help but notice that Mickey has an erection.

Joyce coos with pride, "Isn't he big? He's just as big as a German shepherd!"

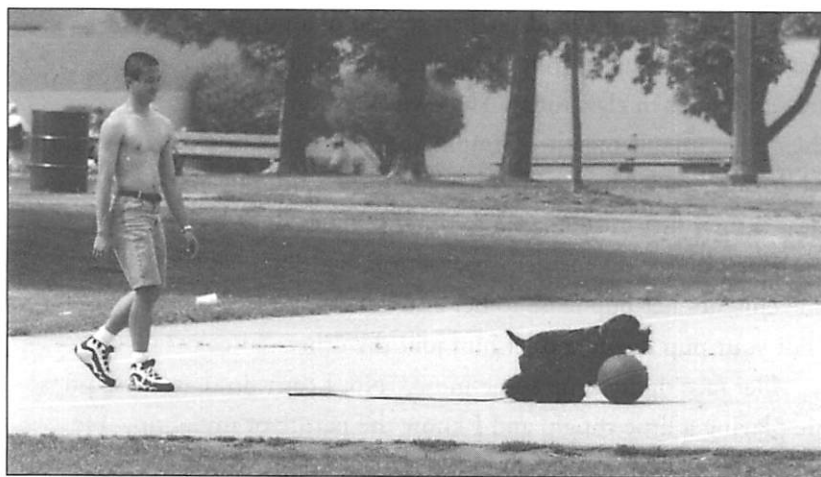
I realize that Joyce is admiring Mickey's unit. I can't disagree with her; it is a big unit for a small dog like a Yorkie. Within a few minutes, Mickey ejaculates on the floor. Since I'm only a couple of feet away, I decide it may be better to get off the floor and sit on the sofa instead. To hell with the plastic.



All hell breaks loose for me this afternoon. The cocker spaniel, Solomon, that I have been training on the street, breaks away from me and is racing down Washington Boulevard with his leash dragging behind him. There is traffic; we are just a few blocks from the downtown section of Chicago. At the rate Solomon is racing, he will hit Marshall Field's department store in no time unless something worse happens.

To make matters worse, Solomon is Oprah Winfrey's dog. We are in front of Harpo Studios and Solomon is running right past Oprah's office window. I can only pray that she is not pausing in a meditative stare out of her window at this moment. I've been working with Solomon for a few weeks now. Solomon has been great — he has been a quick study. I've been happy with the results, and so has Oprah. And now this!

I see my dog training career flash before my eyes. I envision the topic of Oprah's next show, "Dog Owners whose Dogs Were Murdered at the Hands of Their Trainers!" This can't be happening to me! To make matters worse, there is a ramp for the expressway a few blocks away. Thoughts flash through my mind as I try to catch Solomon. I



picture Solomon running onto the ramp and running along the shoulder of the expressway on his way to Wisconsin.

But, an angel appears. A man comes across Solomon's path and catches him. He hands me the dog and I thank him. Lord, do I thank him! As I put Solomon back on the street, the man is gone. To this day, I'm still convinced he was an angel who saved Solomon and me. I was saved!



And there are more calls.

"Hey Cis, this is Annie Cunningham. My husband and I just bought some furniture and our dog has taken a great dislike for the new dining room table. Whenever he comes near it, he barks at it. Can you give me a call?"

"Hello Cis, can you train a dog to stop being too friendly? My dog is so friendly that she literally jumps right into people's faces. She weighs 22 pounds. My friends hate when she does this and refuse to come over to my house. Call me. Thanks." "Hello, my name is Terry Walker. I've got a problem with a dog that keeps stealing food from the counter. My wife and I are ready to murder him already! Call us at your convenience."



It's evening and I hold the first session of a puppy kindergarten class. I like the pups to run about the yard where I hold the class. There are seven pups in class today. The owners watch with amusement as their pups mingle together, jumping on each other in a playful way, while other pups chase each other about the yard. For many pups, this class is their first introduction to other puppies since leaving their litter.

But I notice one owner is not letting her dog play with the others. She clutches her pup close to her and has a tense look on her face. "Put your pup down and let him join the others," I coax her.

Her face tightens up some more. "No, I can't do that, these pups are playing a little rough, and I know the nature of my puppy. He won't like playing with them."

"The other pups won't hurt him," I say in a reassuring voice. "In fact, it's good for him to get in there with the others. Puppies need to play with puppies."

She clears her throat and her voice grows more stern. "I'm a psychologist. I know something about personality types and behavior, and I'm telling you that my puppy does not want to play with those other puppies."



I explain to her that one of the purposes of this class is for the owners to observe their pups in action with other puppies. But this makes her hold her puppy even tighter to her chest.

After some coaxing she lets the puppy down when we work a simple training exercise in "Drop It." But for most of the class the puppy is in her arms.

She never came back to another class. I'm saddened that she created so much fear for her puppy, which I'm sure will forever affect his outlook on life.



I have seen just about every conceivable problem people have with their dogs. These stories are just a small sampling of what most dog trainers see on any given day. And most problems could have been avoided with the right training from the start. This book will help you teach you how to train a brand new puppy to be a well-behaved and "street smart" city dog, and help you prevent future problems if your dog is already an adult. You will learn how to incorporate consistent training that fits the nature and personality of your dog, and just as important, training that will fit your personality type as well. I don't believe in one uniform method. Each technique should be flexible to adapt to your dog's needs as well as your own.

