



Dog Talk Weekly

Where we talk about dogs, share stories, solve problems

Issue 10.8.2 – August 14, 2010

Welcome back to another issue of Dog Talk Weekly. There is so much to know about dogs, isn't there? When I look for ideas, several things come to mind. 1) What will interest and benefit my readers, and 2) What can I cover in such a short space? This second question is the toughest because some things take so long to explain.

Starting in September, I'll begin putting together some short reports on specific subjects that are too long for the newsletter. Then I can cover longer subjects in more detail. Be forewarned. Not all will be free; but price will not exceed \$10.

Watch for the notifications of their availability in your email and in the newsletter.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

1. **Feature Article: Why Teaching Your Dog Tricks Is A Good Idea**
2. **Personal Story: Tyler's Deck Dives**
3. **Dog of the Week: The Chihuahua**
4. **Regular Sections:**
 - Dog Nutrition
 - Dog Trivia
 - Dog Talk Weekly News
 - Member Submissions
 - Free Stuff

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## **Feature Article: Why Teaching Your Dog Tricks Is A Good Idea**

You've heard the expression, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks". Nothing could be farther from the truth. Any dog, regardless of age, can be taught something new.

Now, why teach your dog to do tricks? Isn't that for the circus?

This goes back to what I was discussing last week. Dogs can get bored. My Tyler is often bored because he needs constant excitement. I might have mentioned this before, but he came from the pound when he was about a year old. Since he loves children and any activity that includes a ball, I'm convinced he must have lived with a child, possibly a young boy or two. He perks up immediately when he hears the sound of a ball bouncing or boys playing in the next yard.

Unfortunately, I don't have the time to pay constant attention to him. But fortunately, he is not destructive to his surroundings as many dogs are when they get bored. Instead, he shreds his toys. Same idea, I know, but at least he focuses on his own things instead of mine.

If your dog tends to get into mischief when you are or are not around, there's a very strong chance that he or she is just plain bored. That's where teaching your dog tricks comes in. Not only do they provide stimulation. They also keep your dog in the training mode. Besides, your dog can be quite helpful around the house.

And if you haven't noticed yet, dogs love to train and interact with you. They love to make you happy, so when they do something right and you praise them, they are over the moon. They are eager to play and learn even more things from you.

The next question is, what tricks can you teach a regular dog? In other words, a house pet as opposed to a performing dog act.

There are many books at the library with a variety of dog tricks you can try. (Yes, I spend a lot of time at the library gathering information for Dog Talk Weekly.)

Here's a trick you can practice with your dog, young or old. Retrieving an object.

Most likely your dog already brings toys, but how about having him or her bring you something you actually want, like your slippers or the newspaper? My father taught our Cocker Spaniel to bring his slippers. He also taught her to carry the leash. The neighbors were impressed to see her walk down the street beside him with the leash folded in her mouth. But that's another story.

For now, let's get your dog to retrieve something, a tissue.

The idea is to get your dog to fetch a tissue when you sneeze. You will need a pop-up box of tissues so that he can get them easily. Here's how to proceed.

First, you need to condition your dog to actually take a tissue.

1. Hold the tissue for your dog to take and hold. Instruct him to "take it". Praise him when he does. If you use a clicker, that can work quite well, too. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this item, it's a special training tool that you click whenever your dog does as you ask. It has other uses as well.
2. Move away from the dog and ask him to bring the tissue to you. Reward him when he comes to you with the tissue.
3. Show him the tissue box and pull out a tissue. Put the tissue on top of the box and encourage your dog to take it. Again, reward him for obeying.
4. Repeat the action, only this time push part of the tissue into the box so that there is some resistance when he tries to retrieve it. Reward him with praise or a treat when he does.
5. Once he has successfully completed this part of the trick, replace the words "take it" with a sneeze or the word "Achoo". Put the new command in front of the old one.
6. Now, the final step. Sneeze or say "Achoo" for your dog to go for the tissue. Reward him when he succeeds.

You don't want your dog to shred the tissue or hold it for too long. To make it easy for him to fetch and bring you a tissue when you sneeze, place the tissue box where he can get to it easily, like on a small side table. Keep it there, so he always knows where it is.

The amazing thing about teaching your dog to do tricks like this is that you have the unique opportunity to watch how he thinks things through.

Once he has mastered the tissue trick, move on to other items. Have him retrieve your mail, the newspaper, your slippers, a towel... the list goes on.

Most important, make it fun. Be mindful of how you are talking to your dog, especially if you tend to lose patience. Even though you are trying to contain yourself, your dog can sense the stress in your voice. This will make him uneasy and will distract him from the lesson.

If either of you become anxious or tense, stop the exercise. Take a break and do something entirely different with your dog. Play catch, or something. After 10 minutes or so, return to the trick refreshed. Your dog will learn much quicker when the atmosphere is fun and lively.

### **Personal Story: Tyler's Deck Dives**

I can't begin to tell you how much I wish we had a pond or lake in my backyard. It would cushion the punishment on Tyler's joints when he sails off the deck to catch the ball. But we don't, so at best, I have to make sure he doesn't twist or land awkwardly.

The other day, I was afraid he would smack headlong into the tree. Another day, I cringed when he leaped for the ball and almost speared himself on a broken tree. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me explain the little trick we've been practicing.

The idea is for Tyler to catch the ball while it is still in the air as he dives off the 4 foot high deck. This isn't a trick I planned to teach him. It's something he decided to do himself. He wasn't happy just jumping off the deck and chasing the ball down the yard.

One day when I kicked the ball away, he sped off the deck so that he was aligned with the airborne ball, turned his head sideways, and snapped it out of the air before landing on the grass. The first time he did this, I was awestruck. He seemed to just hang in the air 5 feet off the ground for those few split seconds while he grabbed the ball. It's really something to see. I didn't know a 70 lb. dog could pause in the air like that.

Since then, he's made it his ultimate goal to gain possession of the ball before it lands.

Now, my yard is not that big to start with, and he is a big dog. Little did I realize just how far he could leap. The distance from the edge of my deck to the tree is about 20 feet. He hurled himself so far off the deck one time that he came within about 2 feet of hitting his nose on the tree. He gets so focused on the ball that he seems oblivious to his own safety.

We're now working to perfect the "grab it in the air" trick because he seems to love it so much. Of course, I'm reducing the speed of the ball so he doesn't end up so far out before he lands.

In another instance, he was on the lawn and went up into the air to catch the ball. He can jump about 5 feet off the ground. At that spot, I have an old dying cherry tree. One major trunk had already been cut off, but the stump had rotted and left a point. He came dangerously close to spearing himself in the ribs with that piece, which was about a foot tall. Had he landed on it, he surely would have been killed.

Needless to say, I immediately stopped our game and sawed off the point.

Before starting any rough games with your dog, be sure to check that there are no dangerous objects like this in your play area. I cannot express how helpless I felt for those few seconds when I saw where he was going to land. It's a terrible feeling.

### **Dog of the Week: The Chihuahua**

The Chihuahua is one of those breeds that people either love or hate. Some people have some nasty things to say about them while others can't say enough good things. My neighbor has a Chihuahua, Joey. He's a feisty, brave little guy. Imagine this scenario for a second... my Tyler (a Belgian Shepherd) playing with Joey, a dog that he could eat in one gulp.

I was very nervous when my neighbor decided that they should meet and they were set free in my yard. My biggest fear was that Tyler would accidentally injure the little guy simply by stepping on him. They raced up and down the small side yard with me trying desperately to convince Tyler, "don't hurt him" and "take it easy". Tyler was very excited to have this new friend. Fortunately, Joey knew all the escape routes and plotted how he'd take advantage of every one..

Last weekend, my other new neighbor had a visitor who also owns a Chihuahua. The difference between this one and Joey is that she is very timid and afraid. We introduced her to Tyler and she tried her best to curl into a ball. Yet, oddly enough, she didn't move away. Instead, she hung around him. I'd love to see how she gets on with Joey. That would be fun to see.

So... let's take a look at this brave and sometimes timid breed.

For this, I grabbed the book, "The Chihuahua Handbook" by D. Caroline Coile, Ph.D., Barrons, New York, 2000.

This book provides an introduction that I'm just going to quote verbatim:

"Chihuahuas are among the most recognizable of all dog breeds. They are more than just a tiny dog. They have a unique blend of personality characteristics that make sharing life with one a constant mission of discovery."

From this, I'd say that if you are thinking of getting one, you might want to do some research first to find out what you have in store.

In case you are wondering, the name Chihuahua was given to this breed because the majority of those that were first discovered were located in the town of Chihuahua in Mexico. That was back in the middle of the nineteenth century when visitors to Mexico decided to take this little dog home as a souvenir. The actual name in Mexico is Chihuahueno.

The history of the Chihuahua is shrouded in mystery. No one seems to know how they came to the desolate area of Mexico, but one popular story involves the Aztecs and the Toltecs.

The Toltecs bred Chihuahuas as a specialty food that they added to their menu. Carvings from that era show a small dog that resembles the Chihuahua we see today. It was the Techichi, a name that the Aztecs adopted for the dogs when they defeated the Toltecs.

The dog was believed to have mystical powers and could cure disease by taking on the sickness themselves. The people also believed that the red dog guided the souls of the deceased to the other side.

This dog became a valued member of the Aztec family so that he would be available when a family member died. Then the dog was killed and put into the grave to guide the person on his or her way. This also ensured that the dog could get to the afterlife. The Techichis, painted red, have been discovered in human graves all over Mexico.

In the book, you can read more about how the Aztecs pampered and then sacrificed these dogs as a sign of honor.

When the Spaniards conquered the Aztecs in the 1500s, they abandoned the little dogs, although it is believed that a few might have been taken to Europe.

Other theories on the birthplace of the Chihuahua include Europe and Asia. Potential evidence that the dog came from Asia lies in the gene that causes hairlessness, specific to the Mexican Hairless and the Chinese Crested. Despite all the theories, there remains a gap of 300 years between the Spaniard invasion and the discovery of the small Mexican dogs.

Ever since the Chihuahua was brought to the United States, there has been perpetual mystery as to its breeding. For instance, the story goes that since the dog was so fragile, they were bred with small terriers which can result in long-legged, narrow-headed dogs. But this is only speculation.

Despite much confusion about the breed, it was first registered with the American Kennel Club in 1904. In 1999, 42,013 Chihuahuas were registered in that one year alone.

In 1923, a group that praised this breed formed the Chihuahua Club of America and worked to establish the standards for breed excellence. To show off the breed, they held shows starting in 1946.

Xavier Cugat was a huge supporter and admirer of the breed. He was the Rumba King who made the Chihuahua one of his trademarks. They appeared in movies with him and later in his weekly television show. By 1964, this little dog had established itself as one of the most popular breeds in the U.S.

Sadly, many people took advantage of the Chihuahua's popularity and set up puppy mills for profit. Before long, there were more puppies than people to adopt them. Prices dropped and people who were not a good match were buying them. A great many dogs ended up in the pound.

These unscrupulous breeding activities, which continue today, generally result in the spread of hereditary diseases in all breeds. The Chihuahua, however, managed to escape many and it is believed to be the result of their ancestors. They fended for themselves in the wilds of Mexico where the unhealthiest were naturally eliminated from the pack. This helped to prevent them from passing on their illnesses through the breed.

Now, what can you expect from a Chihuahua?

First understand that despite their small size, they need a lot of time, energy and commitment.

These guys are "loyal beyond belief", as the author says. They will choose one person as their companion, who they can be with all the time. They are intelligent and quick-witted. What's more, they are quite adept at manipulation. Watching their moves to get you to do what they want is what makes them so enchanting.

Interestingly, live Chihuahuas were commonly used worldwide as "hot water bottles" to ease the owner's body aches and pains.

As with Joey, my neighbor's Chihuahua, the breed is incredibly brave despite their small size. While this can impress you, their bravery can get them into trouble. They seem unaware of just how vulnerable they are, but if they have not been properly socialized at an early age, they can feel overwhelmed in crowds and certain situations.

The Chihuahua is easy to feed, groom, transport and clean up after, simply because they are so small. Be careful, though, because this size makes them more susceptible to injury that might go unnoticed. These invisible injuries can occur when they are playing with larger dogs, children and even adults.

They cannot tolerate cold, so it's a good idea to make sure you provide them with some sort of jacket when heading outdoors in cooler and wetter weather. Remember, they did come from a warm climate.

Be prepared to dish out all the love you can, because these dogs thrive on it. In fact, they probably need more loving than any of the larger breeds.

They make excellent guard dogs, as long as you do not expect them to win any battles for you.

Be careful, however, because even though these dogs can be loving and protective, they also can play roughly and snap unpredictably if you come near their food or a toy. This is especially true if they are raised around larger dogs.

### **Health Concerns:**

Although the Chihuahua is relatively free of serious hereditary diseases, there are some common conditions in this breed: patellar luxation (kneecap slips out of place), hydrocephalus (fluid build up in the brain), tracheal collapse (weakening of the cartilage in the trachea can occur in middle-aged and older dogs and obstruct the airway) and hypoglycemia in puppies (low blood sugar levels).

Regardless, the Chihuahua is generally free of inherited diseases and is known to live a long life.

If you want to know more about the Chihuahua, this book is an easy read and has lots more great information.

### **Regular Sections:**

#### **- Dog Nutrition**

Hip dysplasia affects many dogs. It is a chronic, crippling arthritic condition that can cause your dog severe pain and discomfort. It generally is caused by an improperly formed hip joint. Large breeds are more prone to it, but it can occur in other sizes as well. This includes dachshunds, corgis, German shepherds and basset hounds.

While genetics plays a huge role, some veterinarians believe that it is also a result of dogs not getting sufficient collagen and vitamin C during the early years when the hips are formed.

Collagen and Vitamin C must co-exist in the dog's body because one cannot exist without the other. Collagen protects and supports the soft tissues that connect to the bones, thereby maintaining the body's structure.

See that your dog gets sufficient amounts of Collagen, Vitamin C, Glucosamine and chondroitin, which are especially helpful for arthritis, bone and joint problems. Talk to your veterinarian about the proper dosages based on your specific dog's size, condition and needs.

### **- Dog Care**

Arthritis can be extremely disruptive to your dog's life. Here are some things you can do to ease the pain:

- Put your dog on a healthy, wholesome diet
- Make sure your dog maintains a healthy weight as extra weight can aggravate it
- Add supplements to your dog's diet to reduce swelling and to lubricate the bones, ligaments and joints
- Install ramps to eliminate painful stair climbing
- Raise your dog's food and water dishes so he or she does not have to bend during recovery.
- Provide comfortable padding for your dog's sleeping areas.
- Lavish gentle massages on your pet to help ease the pain and tense muscles
- Give your dog easy exercise to provide activity without putting too much stress on the body. Movement is necessary to maintain the flow of nutrients to the joints.
- Consider getting a special bed for your dog that includes a safe heating mechanism built in to help ease arthritic pain.

### **- Dog Trivia**

Alfalfa is an excellent source of vitamins, minerals and trace elements that your dog needs to remain healthy. You can buy it in a powder form which dogs love. Add it to your pet's food to help your dog's urinary tract and intestines, and for its detoxifying qualities.

And you thought alfalfa was just for horses!

### **- Member Submissions**

You don't expect me to do ALL of the work, do you? How about sending me YOUR fun and interesting dog stories?

Need ideas? How about:

- what you did together with your dog this summer
- something you learned about your dog
- a new trick your dog has learned
- playing your dog's favorite game
- new pet introductions
- getting a new puppy
- searching for a new dog
- a unique experience at the vets

- shopping with your dog
- an odd characteristic about your dog

**Here's a tiny piece** that might trigger more ideas.

**My American Eskimo Spitz and I were inseparable.** One day while we were vacationing at the cottage, I climbed into a small boat to go for a quick ride with my sister and a few friends. There was no room for Nikki, so we left him on the shore with my mother, father and brother. As we motored away, Nikki began to follow us.

I thought he'd stop and turn around as our distance widened, but he continued into the water long after he could no longer touch the bottom. He swam after us and I watched in horror that he might drown. I pleaded with the boat driver to turn back, but he insisted that the dog would turn back eventually.

Needless to say, I was highly skeptical. I knew how much Nikki loved me and hated being away from me.

A few minutes into the trip, I began to panic. He didn't seem to be stopping. How far would he go? How far COULD he go? I wondered. Surely he wouldn't go out so far that he'd drown. I was convinced that he would.

When he had swam out a good 200 feet, my father and brother trying to entice him back, he finally had second thoughts and turned towards shore.

That was one of the most stressful moments of my life. It made me wonder if other dogs had done the same thing and put fear into their owners' hearts.

When I returned from our brief trip, I was all over Nikki, so glad that he had not been so stupid as to get in over his head, so to speak.

You'll be glad to know that on subsequent outings, he seemed to know that chasing after me was futile. He simply waded in a few feet, watched us leave, and then returned to shore to await my return. He had learned this valuable lesson.

#### **- Free Stuff**

I'm going to have something for you soon. Watch this space!

#### **- Member Feedback**

It's always good to hear from readers who are enjoying Dog Talk Weekly. Here's one that I received after the last issue was published:

"Always love to hear your stories about you and Tyler. I think he needs a brother, that's why he is subdued. I so enjoyed reading about the Niagara Trip." G. Heywood, Ontario, Canada.

Feel free to send me your comments, feedback and ideas. If you have a story you'd like to share about your dog experiences, do send them along. Remember... YOU maintain all copyrights to the material. You are simply giving me permission to use it in Dog Talk Weekly. (See the note below)

Just send them to me through my contact form here:

<http://sylviadickens.com/contactform/contactus.php>

**- Dog Talk Weekly News**

Did you know you can view Dog Talk Weekly in PDF format online? Simply go to the Archives page where all previous issues are listed. The online version might contain images and other content that is not included in the email version.

You can access the archives here:  
<http://www.dogtalkweekly.com/archives.htm>

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To protect yourself and me, please only send in your own work. That way we will be absolutely sure. I appreciate your help in this regard.

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That's it for this issue. I hope you enjoyed it.

Until next week...

Get out there and have fun with your dog. Take some great photos.  
Collect wonderful memories.

Sylvia

What? You haven't visited the blog yet?  
<http://dogtalkweekly.com/dogblog/>

**Dog Nutrition** is vital to your dog's life expectancy and quality of life. I've written a book on how to make sure your dog gets a healthy, nutritious diet and avoids many of the dangers that come with certain foods. Find out more at  
<http://healthydognutritionsecrets.com/healthydogPP1.htm>

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