

## Love Me Love My Dog(s)

That is how our lives began together. It is our firm belief that whether it be children, friends, or pets, they are put in our lives for a purpose and it is not simply by chance.

We recently adopted two adolescent White Shepherd Dog (WSD) Puppies after we lost our cherished Athena (also a WSD) to a very tragic accident. After our loss, the house needed to fill the void. While Athena came to us as an adult dog with good manners and trained in basic obedience, she eased us back into the dog owner world after being without a dog for over ten years. The puppies have made us all learn more about ourselves and dog behavior. There are two favorite sayings in our house now and here they are:

“It could be a bear!” As with most adopted dogs, our puppies came with their own baggage whether it is genetic or something happened to them along the way, they are both very timid and react different ways. We have had to be attentive and learn the body language of each of them to deal with the ultimate reaction to the situation. One will forcefully retreat while the other may lunge. Both however will bark to warn us of the stranger. Redirecting their attention before any of it happens has been successful only if we have been successful in predicting or reading their body language correctly. This has been a difficult task. Ultimately, being calm and rewarding the good behavior has been successful. Limiting the bark and growl is a work in progress but they are getting the idea that it is fine to warn us of the situation but not acceptable to continue the barking and growling once we have acknowledged their warning.

“Feed them Steak!” Selecting a reward that would actually gain and maintain the puppies’ attention has been a challenge. A reward that they will turn themselves inside-out for is a continuous challenge. Ok, so one of them is easily pleased, as for the other one, it is a more difficult task because he is so frightened of everything that even steak doesn’t divert his attention.

Bottom line, we continue to remind ourselves that they are each a work in progress, separate and as the twins that they are. The Sistine Chapel was not painted in a day and a work of art is not created overnight. All of it takes time, patience and practice to reinforce the desired behavior. We have learned to celebrate small accomplishments. This has also taught us to appreciate the little things in life more, to relax and to stop to smell the flowers once in a while. Best blood pressure medication in the world is the unconditional love from a dog or two.

Submitted by  
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