

## Mine, Yours, Ours

By Maureen Ross, MA

Everywhere we look in life today, there is a plethora of STUFF for us to devour, amuse and entertain us, children and our pets. When it comes down to it, people will pay a lot of money to have behavior issues resolved. One of the biggest is aggression and resource guarding.

Observing as a witness to my own behavior with my dogs, I have bought, tried and been given almost all of the possible toys and equipment that, oftentimes, they could care less about. I've enjoyed the attention and being able to play with all the stuff.

The dogs would have survived with or without it. Behaviorally, the "much less" may have saved me from having to re-shape behaviors that drove me nuts like begging at the table, leaping up for food and diving into a friend's lap while we drinking a iced tea.

What I have discovered over the years, that is fun for me and my beloved dogs, is a little game we play from puppy-hood into senior citizenship called mine, yours, ours. The benefit of this game is that it can equally and effectively be used in human relationships and interactions with youngsters, adults and elders.

Self-help books, internet, workshops and television specials call it me, you, we. I've heard many, who I consider mentors, like [Dr. Phil](#), [Martha Beck](#), [Cheryl Richardson](#) and [Oprah Winfrey](#) call it variations of the same. In any relationship, there has to be a me, you and a we. If me isn't happy and content, then you and we won't be either.

For the purpose of desensitizing dogs, Mine means just that—"it is mine." Easy huh? Why make it more difficult or complicated than it has to be? When Journey, Newfie, joined our family, at 8-weeks old, we immediately began teaching her what was mine (eating a yogurt, watching TV) and what was "yours" (her toy, healthy treat or her own yogurt).

Together time is much the same as me and my husband or chosen friends. We have me, you and we time. Our dogs have "our" time when we share certain games, walks, hikes, playing and scraps that we choose to share that are healthy for them. Please, don't cringe, because I know for a fact that people have been feeding table scraps to dogs since the beginning of wolves joining us at the campfire. Done well, with guidance and respect, it works. It is always preceded by a request for a sit, down or being grounded (4-fours on the floor, not on the table).

It works! Like any other behavior, project or goal, it takes practice and repetition, consistency and getting others to buy in to it. Whether "others" buy into it or not is no

excuse. You can still reinforce the mine, yours, ours again and again when you are alone with the dog(s).

It turns into a game, which is a positive learning experience. Some have said that with multiple dogs it gets competitive. Possibly, but it is no surprise that you MUST spend time alone and in groups whether with dogs or multiple children. You arrange the times you spend with each dog, puppy, challenged, adult or senior. Quality time amounts to what you can give. 3-minutes is fine for one mine, yours, ours moment. And, moments are as important as longer, boring training sessions. It is integrated as you interact with your dogs in normal family, every day, real living.

In my book, Train Your Dog, Change Your Life, I encourage object exchange for all puppies and adult dogs. That is—you choose two highly motivating, coveted objects (something your dog loves). Pick a special food or toy. You begin with having them sit and choose one or the other. Then you exchange. You can have a third praised item—and add that in for stimulation. You discover what your dog loves! It may be they like none of these, but honestly, how many dogs can live without food?

Play the game fair and well. Eventually, after many weeks of object exchanges, you can transition to drop-it and, of course, the valuable “leave-it.”

Dogs are habitual creatures. They learn through conditioning. When I am lazy, sitting in my lounge watching Dr. Oz—it is very clear to the 4-dogs, ranging in age from 1 to 13 years that “mine” means “mine.” It is no begging, lie down or go away – anything you choose but don’t dare try to take what is “MINE.”

To drive this approach home, I follow through because I am a fair and benevolent pack leader. I will get their dishes and place their healthy food in it—request them to go to their diner, following up with “YOURS.”

On a Friday or Saturday night, we enjoy watching a movie and popcorn. That is the “OURS” night. They all know where to go, age appropriate. Once they are settled, they are tossed or placed (if necessary) their hand full of popcorn. If they remain, they get more “OURS.” If not—then it is back to “MINE.”

Try this out! If it works for you great! If it does not, then be creative with discovering your own Mine, Yours, Ours. You may choose to be traditional, sticking to the “no human sharing of food for dogs.” We choose to integrate. I like interacting with my dogs, and giving them an opportunity to get “[MORE](#).” Enjoy the Journey~