

Good Dog, Clyde

Throughout our married life, Bonnie and I have always owned a dog, and for several years we owned two.

We started with a black lab, whom we called Schenley. We were living in Delano at the time. Bonnie was on a field trip with our daughters, I was working at home and needed to take a break. I called to Schenley, and off we walked to a nearby park. The minute we set foot in the park, Schenley took off like a flash, full speed. I called, he would not respond. I ran after him. He was pointed in the direction of a picnic table where sat a middle-aged woman reading and minding her small dog, frolicking nearby. Schenley swooped in, picked her dog up, gave it a shake, and tore his hide off, starting at the base of the neck and continuing nearly to the tail. He skinned that dog, literally. I was horrified, the woman let out a shriek, and I finally caught up to Schenley and pulled him away. I was speechless, completely dumbfounded, but she recovered quickly, scooped up her dog, and said she had to take him to the vet immediately. I assured her our insurance would cover the cost, I gave her my name and number, apologized profusely as she rushed off.

Isn't this pet story just an incredible and horrible incident? Even though it happened 35 years ago, I am still unable to erase the picture the little dog's fur flapping off his body. (Dog lovers will be pleased to know the vet sewed him up, the dog survived just fine, and we did pay for the damage inflicted.) Soon after, I was transferred to Los Angeles, and we happily gave Schenley away to a farmworker couple who lived in the country.

Sorry to get off on a dog tangent, but sometimes good therapy requires that traumatic events be reduced to writing.

Back to our good dog, Clyde.

Clyde is a smooth collie who graduated with his 15 points earned in a year's worth of competition in Northern California dog shows. We don't talk about this around the house, but truth be told, Clyde was not our first choice. Bonnie wanted a collie, and I agreed. We found a breeder in the Auburn area and set out to explore our options. We were shocked to learn that there are two kinds of collies, rough and smooth. Rough are the long-haired, smooth

are the short-haired, and both smooth and rough come from the same litter – a recessive gene is responsible for the short-haired.

Amber, the breeder and a graduate Latin student at the University, showed us a smooth collie who had already received nine points in competition. He was for sale, but not until he had earned his required show points, which might take three or four more months; she did not know for sure. We loved him, he would be our choice, but since there was no urgency, we would wait until he was finished. Less than a month later, she called to say that our choice had been sold. We were flabbergasted. What had we done wrong? Too late, our first choice had been sold, even though Amber would not release him to the new owners until the 15 points had been secured.

What can we do, we asked? Your first choice has a litter mate (that's kennel talk for brother) in San Jose under the direction of one of our contract trainers; I will send you pictures. When the photographs arrived, we couldn't tell the difference between the collie we had lost and our soon-to-be Clyde. We had learned our lesson and we bought him sight unseen. During the specifics, i.e., money, of the transaction, Amber told us he had only achieved eight points (of the required 15), but he was being shown in Petaluma next Sunday. Don't worry, we'll be there, and we were.

What can I say? Clyde was the best entry in the entire competition, and like soccer parents, we rooted openly for him, but alas, no points were earned in Petaluma that day, just an honorable mention. Bonnie and I were steadfast, this was our dog, we stood by him, whether good judges or bad, he was our dog.

Two months later, Clyde had earned his 15 points, and we could not have been more pleased. It was as if one of our daughters had made the dean's university honor roll. All that remained was for Clyde to be fixed, as they say, so that he could come home with us. When that day came, we were excited, Clyde was excited, Amber was excited – it reminded me of a trip home from the hospital with a newborn.

Amber's decision not to release her collies until they achieved their 15 show points meant that he was no longer a puppy. He was a year old, trained, and ready to adjust to a life with two senior adults, one significantly more senior

than the other. However, there was one small hitch in this arrangement: Clyde was not Clyde, he was Lager. Amber had named him Lager. As newly adopted parents, Bonnie and I had never faced such a decision before. Was it ethical – even appropriate – for us to change Lager’s name? What would Amber think about it? How would Lager respond to such a change? Would it really make any difference if we did or did not give him our choice of names? Of course, there is no suspense intended here, the reader already knows the decision we made, but still, it is important to linger a bit over our hesitation, lest we come across as insensitive or canine incorrect.

Bonnie chose the name; Bonnie & Clyde, she said. Good choice, and the name Clyde brought to mind the Scottish Highlands, where no doubt Clyde could have traced his ancestral line if he had wanted us to do so.

Smooth collies do not walk, they prance with a gait, touching the ground only with the tips of their toes. Our next-door neighbor, an elderly woman and a dog lover, remarked that Clyde walked like a little prince. It’s true, I thought, smooth collies must have been trained in a royal court somewhere. Clyde is not unfriendly with strangers, but diffident. He hangs back and looks away. He ignores their offerings of food, or outstretched hands with palms down, or words of praise and cooing. The only attention Clyde seeks must come from his master or mistress.

Collies come wired with a centuries-old herding instinct, and Clyde is no exception. If I am working in the office at home, he needs to come and lie close by to keep track of me. If I move to another room to work, he soon follows and lies where he can see me, even though his eyes may be closed, it seems. If Bonnie is in one room and I another, he solves this dilemma by choosing a place in between where he can keep an eye on each of us. If Bonnie and I walk together in William Land Park and she decides to tack on an additional mile to her walk, Clyde becomes quite upset with the breakup and begins barking first at her, then at me, trying to bring us back together again. Poor Clyde.

Here I go, prattling on about our dog even as a doting father might do about his newborn. Next, I’ll be fishing a photo out of my wallet to show all around. Suffice it to say, Clyde has trained his masters well, because their daily regimen revolves around the principle that his daily needs and perceived desires must

be met first, and in return, he alerts them the instant anyone sets foot on the property and keeps them under careful surveillance at all times.

What a good dog, Clyde.