

Trust A Deadly Disease



By Sharon Mathers

There is a deadly disease stalking your dog, a hideous, stealthy thing just waiting its chance to steal your beloved friend. It is not a new disease, or one for which there are inoculations. The disease is called "Trust".

You knew before you ever took your Rescue dog home that it should not be trusted, especially if it is a dog that was a stray and, therefore, has no "history." The foster who provided you with this precious animal warned you, drummed it into your head. Dogs steal off counters, destroy anything expensive, chase cats, may need to be house trained and must never be allowed off lead unless in a securely fenced enclosure!

When the big day finally arrived, heeding the sage advice of the foster, you escorted your dog into his new home, properly collared and tagged, the lead held tightly in your hand. The house was "dog-proofed". Everything of value was stored in the spare bedroom; garbage was stowed in the cabinet under the kitchen sink or in a can with a tight lid; cats were isolated; and a gate was placed across the living room to keep at least one part of the house accident free.

All windows and doors were properly secured, and signs were placed at strategic points, reminding all to "Close the door!" Soon it becomes second nature to make sure the door closes nine-tenths of a second after it is opened and that it is really latched. "Don't let the dog out!" is your second most verbalized expression. (The first is "No!")

You worry and fuss constantly, terrified that your darling will get out and disaster will surely follow. Your friends comment about who you love most, your family or the dog. You know that to relax your vigil for a moment might lose him to you forever.

And so the weeks and months pass, with your dog becoming more civilized every day. The seeds of trust are planted. It seems that each new day brings less destruction, less breakage. Almost before you know it, your untrained but wonderful new companion has turned into an elegant, dignified friend.

Now that he is more reliable and sedate, you take him more places. No longer does he chew the steering wheel when left in the car. And darned if that cake wasn't still on the counter this morning! And, oh yes, wasn't that the cat he was sleeping with so cozily on your pillow last night?

At this point you are beginning to become infected, the disease is spreading its roots deep into your mind. Then one of your friends suggests obedience classes, and, after a time you even let him run loose from the car into the house when you get home. Why not? He always runs straight to the door, dancing in a frenzy of joy and waiting to be let in. And remember, he comes every time he is called. You know he is the exception that disproves the rule. (Sometimes late at night, you even let him slip out the front door to go potty and then come right back in.)

Time passes – it is hard to remember why you ever worried so much when he was a new family

member. He would never think of running out a door left open while you bring in the packages from the car. It would be beneath his dignity to jump out the window of the car while you run into the convenience store. And when you take him for those wonderful long walks at dawn, it only takes one whistle to send him racing back to you in a burst of speed when the walk comes too close to the highway.

This is the time the disease has waited for so patiently. Sometimes it only has to wait a year or two, but often the incubation period is much longer. He spies the neighbor dog across the street, or perhaps it was only a paper fluttering in the breeze, or even just the sheer joy of running. Suddenly he forgets everything he ever knew about not slipping out doors, jumping out of windows or coming when called due to traffic.

Stopped in an instant. Stilled forever. Your heart is broken at the sight of his still, beautiful body. The disease is trust. The final outcome, hit by a car. Every morning my dog, Shah, bounced around off lead exploring. Every morning for seven years he came back when he was called. He was perfectly obedient, perfectly trustworthy. He died fourteen hours after being hit by a car. Please do not risk your friend and your heart. Save the trust for things that do not matter. Please read this every year on your Rescue dog's "Gotcha Day" lest you forget.

Editor's Note: *Published in the RAGofAZ quarterly news magazine, Golden Tales, Vol. IV, Number 4, October 2002, page 43. Sherry not only gave permission for reprinting this article, which was originally published in 1986 in Canine Concepts, but she allowed RAGof AZ to revise it with the Rescue bent. She raises and occasionally shows Salukis, of which Shah was one of her favorites. She lives in Phoenix.*