

## **Obedience Training and Two Anatolian Shepherd Dogs**

While about two dozen dogs heel next to their owners, my Anatolian Shepherd decides this is a good time for a quick nap and flops himself down on the floor. Looking up at me with his huge almond shaped eyes, he raises one eyebrow and then the other. I snap the lead. I bark commands. I do a tap dance. My ASD calmly watches me and watches all the dogs and all the handlers. He has their full attention. The instructor comes over and says, "So Aladdin, are we boring you tonight?"

Anatolian Shepherd Dog and Obedience Class are terms that are at odds with one another. The ASD, with his fierce independence and intelligence, isn't always ready to offer his complete support to the level of participation required in obedience training. However, this training provides huge benefits to handlers / owners as well as providing the ASD with a tremendously positive and rewarding way to demonstrate his skills.

When we picked up our 18 pound fur ball from Ann Collins and her **Anatolians Shepherds of Caatskill** we agreed that we would take our new charge, *Caatskill's WenWood Aladdin*, to Obedience School. Ann insisted that having a large dog with an independent streak was a bad combination without obedience training. While we had had big dogs in past, and had never actually enrolled them into any obedience training, Ann sufficiently impressed on us that we would not have one of her ASDs without obedience training in that dog's immediate future.

We researched what was available in our area: private lessons,

local pet store classes, sessions run by dog groomers and pet sitting companies, and our local Parks and Recreation group. The Park & Rec program offered a ten week Beginner Dog Obedience class for \$40. The instructor, an AKC Sanction Judge with 45 years dog training experience, is a remarkable person named Bruce Giannetti.

By day, Bruce works as a manager for HR Block. But on Monday nights, Bruce is the Dog Obedience Instructor. He has a big booming voice and a natural inclination towards bringing out the very best in the dog. Bruce is not shy about telling handlers that they need to do more work. "There is no such thing as a bad dog," he says. "People, you need to do the homework. I can tell which of you work with your dogs during the week and which do not." And Bruce is very keen on bringing out the best in the handlers as well. "With ENTHUSIASM, people! The dog has to WANT to do the commands and that comes from YOU."



*Leyla does a good sit with Dave*

We took our wee 20 pound Aladdin to his first class when he was a little over three months old. As four months was the minimum age, we audited the first two classes. For Aladdin, this was live theatre. Aladdin sat between us and watched the big dogs, absolutely captivated. At the third class, Bruce motioned us to get up and into the ring. Aladdin took to it like he had always done a good heel. He found he was most comfortable in the ring when he was near two female bulldogs – then about his size. Within minutes, he would make both bulldogs blush scarlet and snort. Now he towers over these two dogs but they still blush and snort when they see my Aladdin.



*Aladdin does the Long Down*

The first course we attended, Beginner Dog Obedience, had very little to do with the dog and more to do with the handler. There were about 25 dogs attending this class and most were owners like ourselves with no formal obedience training. In this ten week class Aladdin and I learned the heel, sit, down, and stay commands. It was a great partnership. And the entire class realized very quickly that my Anatolian Shepherd was different.

This facility has doors that open automatically, so Aladdin would arrive to the big double glass doors and they would part as he approached them. This was just terrific for him. His tail would

curl up and he would prance in as if he owned the entire building. He would announce himself with a loud yodel bark. And then he would meet and greet each dog as if he were the town mayor. However, as the weeks continued, it was as if Aladdin was wearing an I-pod and was tuned in to his own music. Generally he would do really, really well, but periodically it was as if a really good song had come on that only he could hear and he wasn't paying a bit of attention to any instruction I might give him. The instructor, who had never seen an ASD before, told me as the handler to be "more enthusiastic!" and Aladdin would generally respond much better. I would tell Bruce that I was already in the "red line" for enthusiasm but I would try harder. Bruce said to pretend that my dog was my spouse who had just done something really bad and really raise my voice. Indeed, at the end of the Beginner course, I received the "Most Improved Handler" award, largely due to my new ability to tap dance, cajole, bark commands, sing, and praise at the top of my lungs while circling the ring with my dog.

Aladdin's obedience training continued on to Beginner I, Novice and Intermediate courses. The instructor determined that Aladdin was a "low energy dog" requiring a lot more direction and encouragement from any handler. We worked hard to achieve consistent heel, sit, down, stay and finish your dog commands. The long down is Aladdin's favorite command. Every once in awhile, Bruce would look at my apparently comatose dog and ask me if Aladdin ever shows any energy, as if my Anatolian Shepherd spent all his waking hours sleeping. One night there was some traffic disturbance that could be heard outside the classroom while the

dogs were lined up for the long down. In the blink of an eye, my dog was up, on his feet, sprinting between me and the open window area, with the huge Anatolian Shepherd bark, hair up on his back and teeth clearly visible. People in the room gasped to see my happy, laid back dog take on the role he was born for. There were no more comments about low energy after that night and a lot more respect for what comprises the role of herd guardian.



*Leyla follows commands*

Aladdin's littermate, "Caatskill's Leydi Be Good," came to class when she was nine months old. Leyla had had only conformation training and when she came to Dog Obedience, she had mastered the stand command. In those first classes, any voice command translated to "stand" to her, which she did admirably. Leyla has been in Dog Obedience for a year and is now able to heel off lead, sit pretty, do figure eights, and recalls. We believe she has surpassed her brother. However, true to her breed, she will have off nights – very OFF nights – where she makes it very clear that she'd much rather be somewhere else. We also found that she

can separate obedience and conformation commands. If we are given a command to stand for examination, I synch the collar up by her ears and under her chin – just like it might be in the conformation ring – and she stands straight as an arrow and does not sit until the collar is moved down.

Aladdin and Leyla certainly know the obedience commands. And when they are in form, they are poetry in motion as they heel, change direction, corner, and do figure eights. Instructor Bruce has looked at them and said he wished he'd had a dog that could move like that when he was showing. Aladdin has some issues with the recall and can make a straight line recall to me resemble a conga line instead. But when we say, "It's school night tonight," we have two dogs waiting at the door to go! And at the end of the night, I swear these dogs are grinning from ear to ear because they are so proud of themselves.

Overall, obedience training offers a bridge of communication between handler / owner and dog. I can say a command and have an expectation that the dog will do what I ask. The dog, in turn, will sit or down in front of me and know they have my full attention. Aladdin and Leyla are controllable in public areas. They are socialized with other dogs. We have a few hours a week where all our energy is focused on our dogs and the payoff is enormous! Ann Collins was right – as she is for so many things – take your ASD to obedience class! Your ASD will not be the most compliant dog but you'll find your dog will soon be the star of the class!

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