

THE Spirit OF A Dog

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Top: Taffe McFadden and Giant Schnauzer Ch. Galilee's Pure of Spirit in the spotlight. **Above:** Taffe, son Conor and Spirit's breeder Maryann Bisceglia proudly hold their Winkie® awards at the Purina ProPlan Showdogs of the Year. Photos ©Winter-Churchill.

“Great show dogs are born, not made,” is the sage wisdom of our elders in the dog world. While most of us nod our heads in agreement, any good judge will tell you that the best structure in the world can’t take a dog to the top unless its true beauty shines from within.

While sorting through litters, show breeders keep their eyes open for this world-winning attitude, but even the most promising pup’s character must be nurtured and developed over time. A good dog show handler is an expert trainer who can sort from his mental bag of tricks to find just the technique required to bring out the best in an individual.

Conditioning and positive reinforcement; building a bond of love and trust between a handler and dog are the standard tools of the trade. However, a growing number of serious-minded dog people are accessing the science of animal communication to better understand their show dogs. This is especially the case when difficulties arise and traditional methods fail to overcome an unwanted behavior standing in the way of what should be a brilliant show career.

Ch. Galilee’s Pure of Spirit was meant to be a good one. A seasoned, talented breeder, Maryann Bisceglia of Ingebar Giant Schnauzers in Pittsburgh, Pa., had carefully planned the litter that produced this stunning, hard-coated bitch. From the very beginning, Maryann knew this one was special.

To ensure the puppy developed a rock-solid temperament, Maryann sent Spirit to live with her trusted friends Mary and Pete Hayes who agreed to “bring her along,” giving her the dedicated love, attention and socialization required to grow the vivacious puppy into an outgoing, happy show dog.



An exuberant Spirit with Taffe showing at Westminster. Photo ©Winter-Churchill.

When Spirit was old enough, Maryann brought her back to the kennel to prepare her for the breed ring. Meticulously groomed and conditioned, the beautiful youngster finished her championship easily under Maryann's guidance and was then sent back to the Hayes' home where she could lounge as a beloved pet while her body matured for the Specials ring.

At 2, the promising puppy had grown into a glorious, eye-filling beauty and her team felt she was ready to be sent to California where she would finally meet her partner Taffe McFadden who, in an instant, fell madly in love with the deeply sensitive Spirit.

Ultimately Taffe would guide Spirit to the very top of dogdom, but she will tell you that "we didn't set out to be the No. 1 show dog in America. When we started, we just thought it would be great if we could get to the top 10 of the Working Dog list."

A lofty but believable goal for a talented handler and a dog oozing with breed type, there was every reason to believe Team Spirit could pull this off. Much to her surprise, however, Taffe quickly ran into a problem that she could not solve. "Something was bothering Spirit when we were in the ring. Halfway through a class, she would lose concentration and her enthusiasm faded," Taffe says.

Even worse, Spirit had developed a habit of looking up and slinking away when a judge was going over her. "She had started out like cement and was rock-solid," explains Taffe, "so I was really perplexed by this new behavior. Nothing bad had ever happened to her. I couldn't for the life of me figure out what was wrong."

Long known for her gifted way with dogs, Taffe tried everything she knew to bring the life back into Spirit's soul, but it was no use. "Nothing I tried made a difference. She seemed unhappy, unsure of herself, insecure and I just couldn't get through to her," Taffe says.

As often happens in the inner world of dog showing, Taffe shared this trouble with a trusted client. "My Bichon client and I speak the same language, I knew she'd understand when I told her that something was bothering Spirit, but I was still a little surprised when she suggested that I seek the help of her trusted animal communicator. I said, 'Oh, okay. But isn't that like hiring a doggy psychic?'"

With great patience borne of someone who has learned the lines by rote, the Bichon breeder told Taffe that although animal communication was often mistaken for a paranormal science, it was in fact a very natural form of communication linking all living things. In her own experience, the Bichon breeder had learned that this little-known science was a very effective way of pinpointing problems when nothing else seemed to work.

At the close of yet another disappointing weekend with the beautiful showgirl who would not dance on stage, Taffe felt she had nothing to lose. Late in the evening, Taffe pulled out the note her friend had scribbled. "My friend had given me Jess Westleigh's website which is called 'The Holistic Being.' I went online, found the site and sent an email to Jess," Taffe says.

"My email address doesn't have my name in it and all I said was that I was showing a 2-year-old dog that had some problems. I didn't sign my name. When Jess wrote back, she asked that I email her the age, sex and breed of the dog and told me to send a picture," Taffe recalls.

"The photo I sent back was nothing special. I just pinned back her hair, took out my cell phone, called her name and snapped a picture of Spirit's face as she looked up at me. It was just her eyes really, and I sent that with the other information back to Jess."

Several days later Taffe received a four-page email from Jess about Spirit that truly dumbfounded her. "Jess knew things about this dog that she would have no earthly way of knowing. It was uncanny," Taffe says.

According to Taffe, the report went from the basic to the intricate and was thoroughly accurate. Beginning with character illustrations, Jess interpreted Spirit's thoughts, learning that the dog loved to bow, run and smile. Taffe of course knew this was true about Spirit, but wondered how Jess (who had never met the dog) could possibly know these things.

Intriguing as the beginning paragraphs were, it was the next section, revealing a couple of Spirit's behavioral mysteries, that turned Taffe into a believer. "She told me that Spirit knew she was really beautiful, but she didn't like being judged by others who did not feel the same way. She had decided that anyone doubting her beauty was not allowed to touch her. They didn't deserve to put their hands on her. She was emphatic. If a judge didn't particularly like her, then that judge couldn't touch her," Taffe says.

"I was amazed when I read this, realizing that it was after a particular weekend when a judge let us 'walk,' that Spirit began sometimes slinking away from a judge's touch. She felt indignant and was unwilling to be evaluated by someone who didn't appreciate her in the first place," Taffe says.

Among other revelations, Taffe learned that Spirit had fallen deeply in love with her and wished above all else that she could be her life companion. She told Jess that she knew eventually she would have to leave California for her permanent home far away from Taffe and that made her very sad.

With tears welling in her eyes, Taffe explains how Spirit told Jess that "she wanted to show for me, but just when she was beginning to feel real happiness through the bond that we had created, she'd get an overwhelming feeling of sadness, knowing this

was only temporary and that one day she'd have to leave. That's when she'd fall apart in the ring."

Taffe was astonished by this information. In an instant, she understood that Spirit was confused by the love she was experiencing. Spirit asked Jess a couple of heartbreaking questions. "Who do I belong to? Why can't I stay with the person I love the best? Why would Taffe send me away? Doesn't she love me?" With tears flowing down her face, Taffe explained how these questions broke her heart and she suddenly realized what was causing Spirit to wilt in the ring.

As she continued to read the report, goose bumps rose on Taffe's arms. "It was as if I was reading my own thoughts. Spirit and I had developed an incredible bond and I had been feeling the pull too," Taffe says.

As a seasoned pro, Taffe was able to push the certain knowledge of their eventual parting away from her mind. But Spirit couldn't do that. Every day in the ring, the energy of their deep and growing bond would spring to life, causing the pair to dance on stage, waning again as Spirit's happiness turned again to sadness. For Taffe, everything suddenly fell into place.

From that reading Taffe began working with Westleigh on a regular basis. Tapping into Spirit's deepest thoughts and emotions, Westleigh developed a personal regimen for Taffe to use with Spirit that soothed misunderstandings and allowed Spirit to feel more secure. Working with "blind faith" and knowing that somehow these problems would all resolve themselves, Taffe learned to bathe Spirit in love and adoration, and the beautiful but troubled show girl began to relax, learning to live on the faith of love.

In the autumn of 2008 Team Spirit won the Giant Schnauzer Club of America National Specialty. Soon after taking on a neck-and-neck race with the legendary Pointer bitch Ch. Cookieland Seasyde Hollyberry for the No. 1 slot of America's top show dog, Spirit ultimately prevailed.

Exhilarated by their great campaign, Mary and Pete Hayes flew out to watch them in Long Beach, Calif., surprising Taffe with the gift of a lifetime. "They told me how proud we had made them and that after Spirit's retirement, she could stay with me," Taffe says.

With tears of joy Taffe hugged the Hayes and Spirit exploded into joyous rounds of barking and jumping. "She was so happy. She was over the top. She knew exactly what they had told me. We were overcome with joy," Taffe says. Just as Taffe somehow knew it would, faith had prevailed.

While there will always be people who believe that communicating with animals through telepathic radio waves is just for the movies, there have always been a handful of very special people who have tapped into this knowledge, using it as the specialized tool that it is.

Like any good tip that can help a troubled show dog, Westleigh's Holistic Being website (www.theholisticbeing.com) is passed around quite a bit. Successful all-breed handler and German Shorthaired Pointer breeder Valerie Nunes-Atkinson speaks volumes without going into detail by simply saying, "I have used her myself. Jess is absolutely the best."

Stacy Duncan, owner-handler of the breakthrough Irish Water Spaniel MBIS, MSBIS GCh. Poole's Ide Got Water RN began using Jess' talents when Keegan's sire was sent to her from England. "He was a wild child and so easily excited by everything. I couldn't get him to focus at all. I knew I needed to find a way to reach him," Duncan says.

Because Jess herself is a breeder and exhibitor of champion Australian Shepherds under the Katahdin prefix, she's not unknown in the hard-bitten dog world's inner circles. "She understands what we go through to get our dogs to perform," Duncan says. "She's one of us. After his sire's career here in the States, I had his son Keegan to bring along."



Jess Westleigh and her Australian Shepherd display a great rapport. Photo courtesy Snap Art Photography.

Having such a positive experience with his sire, Stacy was determined to begin working with Jess and Keegan from a very early age. "Jess has taught me how to use a bridge of communication between the dog and me. It's a two-way bridge. He sends me his thoughts and energy while I send him calming thoughts and keep him steady," Duncan says.

About bridges Jess explains, "There is a bridge that only I can mentally walk back and forth between Stacy and Keegan, and then there is the bridge that they walk back and forth between them." By sitting quietly and focusing her mind's eye, Jess is able to find a dog's thoughts, tap in, introduce herself to him and explain how she is there to help develop a better relationship between his person and himself.

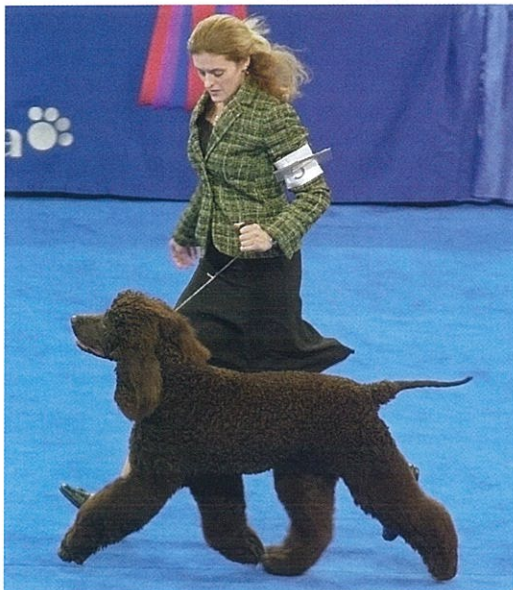
Although today's dog show enthusiasts are lucky to have Jess Westleigh to help them with behavioral issues, "Silent Language," as it used to be called, has been studied and used by a few practitioners for many years. Calling it First Language, Sigmund Freud (who was a lover of Chow Chows) believed in and worked with the principles of telepathic communication.

His protégé, Carl Jung went a step further believing that the natural ability to speak without the aid of words also connected one's soul to not just other living things, but to God himself. For Freud, this went too far and is the very reason he disassociated himself from Jung, just as the younger psychoanalyst was gaining a reputation for breakthrough thinking.

FERRY V. RAUFELSEN OF GIRALDA

In the 1920s a young writer and movie producer in Hollywood had the distinct pleasure of dog sitting Hollywood's first leading canine star — Strongheart. When Strongheart's trainer, Larry Trimble, went on sabbatical, the late author, J. Allen Boone, who had never before been in the presence of the dog, suddenly found himself sharing house and hearth with the 120-pound German Shepherd Dog who had formerly been a police-trained attack dog in his native Germany during World War I.

Learning from Trimble to treat Strongheart as an equal rather than as a dog, Boone became a lifelong devotee to Strongheart and to the discipline of Silent Language. Just as it is today, the dog



Irish Water Spaniel owner-handler Stacy Duncan.
Photo ©Winter-Churchill.



Professional handler Valerie Nunes-Atkinson is another believer. Photo ©Winter-Churchill.



Jess Westleigh showing her Aussie. Photo courtesy Snap Art Photography.

world is a very small place and through his associations with Strongheart Boone found himself in the company of none other than Geraldine Rockefeller Dodge.

An unusually perceptive woman with a world of cares on her shoulders, Boone found Dodge to be deeply sensitive with a distinct ability to “talk to the animals.” Before he died, the great Doberman Pinscher historian Frank Grover told the story of how Mrs. Dodge broke down in tears as she confided to him how she had let down her great Westminster Best in Show-winning Doberman, the immortal Ferry, Ch. Ferry V. Raufelsen of Giralda.

A German import, Ferry was reported to have a sharp temperament and was often called “The Very Devil Himself” by judges as well as most of his handlers. Mrs. Dodge, however, was able to “talk to him” and he was always as gentle as a lamb with her.

But everyone makes mistakes, even someone like Mrs. Dodge. Against her better judgment, she sold him to a Doberman fancier out West who promised to make him into a huge show success in California as well. Lucky for all contemporary Doberman lovers, Ferry went on to lasting fame, not just as a Westminster and West Coast winner but as a great sire of lasting influence today.

But Mrs. Dodge's sadness had little to do with Ferry's success as a show dog. When she sent him out West, she felt she had betrayed him. “I was the only one he truly loved and I abandoned him to people who could never understand him,” Dodge said. Later, Ferry was beaten to death by a couple of drunken handlers who took their vengeance out on the fierce dog with a bottle of whiskey and two billy clubs. “Mrs. Dodge never forgave herself,” says Grover.

Happily, the fate of Spirit was not so tragic. On the night of

February 11, 2009, anyone sitting ringside for the 133rd Westminster Kennel Club's Best in Show might recall the tears that sprang from their own eyes when, from the dark and silent shadows, a glistening black dog came dancing under the spotlight, gracefully guided by her partner's knowing hand.

That night, in the midst of the single light that kept time with this synergist team, great sparks of energy seemed to fly high into the velvety abyss of Madison Square Garden, landing on the shoulders of a thousand in-the-house dog lovers instantly igniting a collective, rushing roar of joy.

“If I live to be 150, I'll never forget them,” said an excited, young fan named Robert Himmel who grabbed my shoulder as my camera

and I tried to keep up with the four-beat timing of the pair under the lights. “They are the most magnificent team I have ever seen. What kind of dog did they say she was again?” Himmel asked.

While my camera downloaded the shots I had just fired, I rested the lens on my shoulder and smiled at the excited fan. “She's a Giant Schnauzer,” I said proudly, adding, “I know them. We call them Team Spirit.” Mr. Himmel replied by jumping up and down shouting “Woooo Hoooo ... Go Team Spirit!”

As if in answer to Himmel's war whoop, more cheers burst through the stadium and I realized the profound truth that I was living a moment that would indeed last forever. Here was a top-flight show dog with her equal in human flesh, dashing along the green carpet together at the grand finale of dogdom's greatest event. Their hand-in-glove performance was due to something much deeper than any handling class or ringside practice could ever affect.

How often do we “know” in our hearts what is right for our dogs, only to push aside that deeper knowledge, allowing our intellectual logic to rule the day instead? “Communicating with animals in the silent way is a heart-to-heart form of communication,” explains Westleigh. “You have to keep your mind out of it and let the knowledge flow through you to your heart.”

This takes time and quiet study — something many dog show handlers and trainers do not have. Luckily for them, there is Jess Westleigh, who like J. Allen Boone, her predecessor and author of the breakthrough 1950s book *Kinship with All Life*, is able to slow down and connect with animals whether or not they are actually in the room with her. “It is very much like tuning a radio,” says Westleigh. “All life sends out waves of energy. We just have to focus and tune into the frequency.” DR