

Can You Remember?



Susan Casey
Editor

Some time ago friends of mine were at a dog show that I could not attend. Mid-afternoon the phone calls came, reporting the results, who showed well and who didn't, all the typical post-show analysis. But one call mentioned something else, how new members of our club were so excited when their puppy

took first in her class and then went on to Best Puppy. According to my friend, they were going to take the ribbons home and frame them, their puppy's first awards. Apparently it warmed the hearts of those around them just to see their joy.

Do you remember the first time one of your dogs won a ribbon? If you're as old as I am, the classes were bigger and the competition stiff, and even a fourth place ribbon made your heart beat a little faster. Whether your memories go back one decade or four, reach back there and try to remember how it felt to be new to this game. It seemed as though all the people around you knew so much more than you, that you didn't know enough to even have a German Shepherd Dog, much less show one.

Maybe you showed your dog yourself; many of us did in the good old days. I did once in a while, even took dogs in a for a friend or two. One time I will never forget. A friend asked me to take this puppy in for her, assuring me that the youngster had at least some manners. Right. No sooner was it our turn for the individual exam than the puppy decided to exercise his right to be a wild child, wrapping himself around the judge's ankles at least twice, nearly bringing her to her knees. I think that may have been when I vowed only to show my own dogs from that day on.

Some of our newer members do show their own dogs, especially the puppies. They enjoy the interaction with their dogs and it makes them proud to be a part of their dog's career. Eventually many of them turn the lead over to a handler, but the owners have the satisfaction of knowing they helped get the puppy started. And it gives them a better appreciation of just what it takes to present a dog.

Unfortunately not everyone welcomes new people. Some of us seem to think that offering a few words of encouragement to a novice owner or handler might somehow threaten our own success. Others seem to take pleasure in telling newcomers all the worst things about showing dogs.

I'm not sure just what is to be gained by "sharing" such information with novices. If the

new person is also a close personal friend, they've already heard the best and the worst from you as you related your dog show stories. But why do some find it necessary to stand at ringside and inform a relative stranger that the judge is a crook, or wouldn't know a good dog if it bit him.

Recently a bystander overheard someone tell an excited newcomer that a certain handler was a mean and nasty person. Just what purpose did that serve? The newcomer in question didn't even know most of the people around the ring and was nowhere near being ready to employ the services of a top handler, so the information was not being shared to "protect" the person from becoming involved with said handler. The only purpose that comment served was to plant a negative impression of some of the people associated with our sport.

Maybe some people are just negative by nature. You know the type, the glass is always half empty, if someone did something nice there must have been an ulterior motive, that dog only won because: the owner is a judge, the judge just bred/is going to breed to that dog, that judge always puts that handler up, etc. In their minds nothing good is just what it seems to be, there must be something nefarious going on behind the scenes.

OK there are many negative people, and it is no crime to have a negative outlook. Personally I think you miss some of the best things in life if you are always expecting the worst, but that's just me. Sure we all have had bad, sad, or unfortunate experiences, but that doesn't mean that everyone is bad. Look for the best in people and you just might find it.

It does not serve us well to present many negatives to relatively new people. I wonder sometimes what prompts more experienced exhibitors to do that. I can only surmise that behavior reflects their own dissatisfaction with the sport, that they are tired and frustrated by things that have happened to them and they no longer see anything positive in our sport. That's a real shame, but spreading unhappiness does not decrease our own. If we have any hope at all of carrying on our legacy in dogs, we need new blood, new enthusiasm, new ideas. We need to encourage others to join with us, to become involved in all facets of the dog world. Introduce them to all the great opportunities there are to interact with our dogs, for dogs and owners alike to learn new things and demonstrate their skills.

As it is with anything we encounter in our lives, the world of show dogs has its plusses and minuses. My biggest minus is getting up at 4:00 a.m. to get to a local show. Others will have their own minuses. But the plusses must outweigh the minuses or no one would keep doing this. It seems to me that there is plenty of time for folks to learn what the minuses are for them. Our job is to help them learn and enjoy the plusses! ■



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