

Grey Muzzles and Puppy Dog Tales



I sit here on the porch and watch my dogs play in the yard. I have quite a range of ages. Mac, who just turned one, Nuala and Cathal who are going to be three soon. Mitzy, who is five and Andy, the patriarch. He just turned 10. I am amazed at the respect he garnered from the "pack". They all seem in awe of his presence. Andy, the "prince", is always the last to go outside. He prefers not to run out the door whenever it is yard time. Instead he prefers to lounge out, either in bed or on the sofa. He waits until all the others have raced around the yard, exercised and sniffed till their hearts content. Only then does he demand to go outside. That is when the ritual takes place. As soon as Andy steps onto the porch, all activity focuses on him. The others run up and lick his face. They bow before him waiting for some sign of recognition from him. It is almost comical to see all the other dogs grovel before him. Andy, totally aloof, taking it all in.

Andy is my veteran. The old guy, the boss. He is the very essence of my soul. He has earned the respect of not only our pack, but that of other dogs he hangs out with. He is a dogs, dog. Accepting of young puppies, pushy "pup teens" and dogs of all ages. Andy emit's a calming quality that all dogs seem to respect. I have seen aggressive dogs

behave neutrally to Andy, which is why he makes a terrific neutral dog for the AKC's Canine Good Citizen testing.

Age has been very kind to Andy. He is still as playful as he was as a pup. Of course, I don't treat him as an old dog. Maybe a little of that is because I don't want to admit to myself that he is getting old. His muzzle is not very grey, but I do see the signs of aging. He is not as muscled as he was a few years ago. He takes a little longer to jump up on the sofa. He has very selective hearing. More of that is because he is, of course, the "prince" and should only be entitled to answer only what he wants to answer. He has no problem hearing the crinkle of cellophane wrappers no matter how far away he is standing. He has a few of those little "old dog" growths that they all seem to get and he is just a little slower racing around the yard.

Does aging mean we have to stop doing things with our dogs? No way! You CAN teach old dogs new tricks. Andy earned his Tracking Dog title at the age of 7 and his Rally Novice Title at age 8. He has been a Delta Society Pet Partner therapy dog since his one year birthday and was just re-evaluated for the 4th time this year. I hope he will be able to remain a therapy dog for many years to come. He still works in tracking and I still hope to work on his TDX title. We are lucky to have events geared towards our seniors. In Conformation you can enter the Veteran Classes. Agility has classes that are easier for dogs that are a little greyer in the muzzle. Rally and obedience are still easily

attainable goals for seniors. Tracking is another event that older dogs can still compete at and excel.

Most of all our senior dogs can't be topped for being our constant companions. They have spent their lifetime learning our ways, never judging, never abandoning us. Teaching us patience and tolerance, love and joy. Burrowing their little paw prints further into our hearts, never letting go. They take us humans for what we are. Never complaining, well... almost never complaining. That is why we love them so much and grieve so terribly when we do lose them. Living with dogs, I fully understand the following quote by Sir Walter Scott:

I have sometimes thought of the final cause of dogs having such short lives and I am quite satisfied it is in compassion to the human race; for if we suffer so much in losing a dog after an acquaintance of ten or twelve years, what would it be if they were to live double that time?

With that, cherish your senior dogs. Love them and honor them. Have patience with them when they do grow feeble. They are like a fine aged cheese. Mellow, smooth and thoroughly enjoyable. They have a tendency towards getting a little moldy with age, and will dry out without care. So pull out that good bottle of "Staffy whine", put a couple of doggie biscuits on a plate and share it with that wonderful little package we call our aged Staffords and enjoy!

Cindy Bundy
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