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# GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

BY DELAWARE VALLEY GOLDEN RETRIEVER RESCUE



## THOUGHTS FROM A “REACTIVE” DOG

*As told to Sara Braverman, DVGRR Board Member*

I heard the man talking about me. He said I’m “reactive.” He said my family gave me up to rescue because I was rude and aggressive to other dogs. I guess they didn’t understand that I was just scared. I guess they didn’t know I was trying to protect them on our walks, but I didn’t get many walks.

There was a big fenced in yard and everyone was busy, so most of the time they put me in the yard. Sometimes we went for walks, and I got so excited I went a little crazy. When I saw another dog, I wanted so badly to say “hi” and play, chase and sniff. I pulled hard. Too hard, maybe.

Pretty soon, I started hearing them say, “I don’t want to walk the dog. He’s no fun to walk; he pulls too hard.” When they put my leash on, they seemed mad at me, jerked my collar and told me to “be good!” I still don’t know what that means. I tried to understand. I jumped up to show them I loved people. They yelled and pushed me down. I thought that meant they wanted to wrestle with me, so I jumped again. They yelled and bumped me with a knee.

When we walked and another dog came in our direction, they seemed so nervous. They pulled on my leash, jerked my neck, and yelled “NO.”

I’m smart, so I quickly realized that other dogs are dangerous. I don’t know why my people didn’t like other dogs, but it didn’t matter. Other dogs were apparently bad, so I decided I would be a good dog and protect my people. I started to bark and growl and lunge at all other dogs. I thought they would be proud of me. I made other dogs go away. I made myself bigger and tougher and protected my family. I thought that was what they wanted me to do.

Now I stand here, surrounded by strangers, watching my family’s car drive away. Why are they

leaving me? Who are these new people? They touch me with gentle hands and have kind eyes. Nobody has yelled at me yet. “Welcome to Gateway,” the man said kindly.

Maybe it’s not so bad here. I tried to jump on the man to say “hi.” He turned his body to the side. I stopped jumping for a minute, and he held out a treat for me to sniff. I had to back up to reach the treat and accidentally sat down. He smiled and said, “Good boy.” He gave me the treat. Hmmm....not sure what I did, but I got a treat. We played that game a few times, and I quickly figured out how to train the man. Each time I sat on the ground, he gave me a treat. He seems to be a fast learner.

The others are nice, too. I am training them to give me treats as well. Everyone smiles at me each time I sit and tells me I am such a good boy. Pretty smart people here. The man explained that my family said I jumped on people all the time, and they didn’t like that. I forgot all about the jumping up for attention. That never worked anyway. It’s much easier to sit and get those trained people to give me a yummy treat.

The man told me we were going to work on my manners. We went for a walk, and someone came toward us walking another dog. I wanted to show the man how smart and protective I am of my people, so I started to bark in my mean voice. But it was strange; the man didn’t pull on my leash or yell “NO!” He didn’t seem scared of the other dog at all. I started to wonder about the man. He seemed so easy to train when I did the sit thing. Maybe he wasn’t very intelligent. Did he not know that other dogs were bad and scary?

I barked some more, but the silly man kept talking quietly to me. He turned away from the other dog, and I followed. I kept looking at the dog and barking, but the man stayed calm. He said, “Okay, so that was too close. Let’s back up a bit. Sorry about that.” I stopped barking because the other dog wasn’t coming any closer. I am such a brave boy. Uh-oh, what’s that? Another dog coming our way again. I started to make myself bigger. I raised my tail and leaned forward. But then I smelled something utterly amazing.

“I’m not aggressive. I’m just doing what I think I should do. Why don’t they understand that?”

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## THOUGHTS FROM A “REACTIVE” DOG *(continued from pg. 1)*

The man stepped between me and the other dog and offered me a small bit of something. My nose was bouncing around, trying to absorb as much of that incredible smell as I could. The man laughed and said, “That’s a special turkey treat from FreshPet Select. Haven’t had it before? Turkey magically appears whenever other dogs come around.” Oh my goodness, I have never tasted something so yummy.

*But wait, there are those dogs over there to worry about... but maybe I’ll just have one more bite before I chase them away. Oh, that is so good... another one? Why, yes, thank you. Oh, wait, those dogs... but the turkey... I’ll just eat a few more pieces and then deal with them.*

“Good boy, what a good boy,” the man keeps saying. Wow, those other dogs aren’t doing anything bad to me, and the man doesn’t seem scared. Maybe I’ll just enjoy the treats and forget about the dogs. Just this once, I will take a break from protecting my people from other dogs.

These people are so strange. They don’t seem to know that other dogs are bad. When we go for walks, they always have treats and such happy voices. Every time we see another dog, I get nervous, but they talk to me and give me goodies. We never go too close to the other dogs, so I don’t have to worry much. Sometimes I lick peanut butter off a wooden spoon, sometimes it’s bits of hot dog or turkey, sometimes it’s a lick of my frozen Kong®. Everyone tells me that I am a good boy and a

fast learner. The man never pulls on my neck when we are around other dogs. Maybe this is a place where other dogs aren’t bad. Maybe, just maybe, I don’t have to protect the man. He doesn’t seem worried, so maybe I can stop being scared.

Today the man and I were walking along, and there were a few people walking other dogs. This game is getting boring. Yeah, yeah, another dog on a lead. Who cares? Where’s my turkey? We walked in a funny way up to another dog. We curved around in little circles, getting closer and closer. I puffed myself up a little bit, so he would know I was tough, just in case, but the other dog just turned his head away from me and sniffed the ground. He smelled interesting, so I slowly walked up to him and gave a sniff. The other dog did nothing. He ignored me and looked away. The man gave me a treat and said, “Good boy, good boy, let’s go.” And we walked away.

These people are odd ducks. I have trained them so quickly. I taught them to give me a treat each time I sit, and now I’ve taught them to give me amazing treats every time another dog appears. I’m starting to like seeing other dogs; it means something good will happen. Yummy treats, happy people, being told I’m a good boy. Maybe I’ll start looking for other dogs and saying “hi” to them. It sure seems to make the man happy. What a relief to not have to protect people from other dogs any longer. That was exhausting.

NOTE regarding reactive dogs: Many dogs that behave poorly towards other dogs while on lead do so because they are fearful. With patience and practice, most can learn to be calm while walking by another dog. Counterconditioning and desensitizing can do wonders to change a dog’s reaction to the presence of another dog. Although not all dogs are, nor will ever be, candidates for the dog park, and some may need to be the only dog in the house, almost all can learn that they can stay calm and walk on by another dog without barking and lunging.

If you currently live with a reactive dog, find a positive reinforcement trainer through the Association of Pet Dog Trainers who can help you and remember that your dog is always learning, even if you aren’t intentionally training. Life is a series of training opportunities, so be prepared. Keep treats with you on all walks, and let real life be your school. It will be worth the effort, for both of you.

If you are considering adopting a dog, please consider one of our reactive dogs. They are “diamonds in the rough.” No dog is perfect in all ways, but time, patience, consistency and love can do wonders. Many reactive dogs are simply fearful and are eager to learn a different way of feeling about other dogs. Many of these dogs are great with people, and just slightly challenged with dog-to-dog interactions. They can learn, and they can improve their manners with your help. Please give one of these special dogs a chance.



*With one glance at these “before” and “after” images, it’s easy to understand the importance of canine dental care. Even your dog wants (and needs) a nice white smile.*

## Dogs Need Dentals Too

*By Dr. John O’Neill, Adamstown Veterinary Hospital*

Did you know that 80% of dogs over two years old have periodontal disease? Dogs often do not show any clinical signs of disease even when there is underlying pain. Periodontal disease can cause local and systemic medical problems. So what can we do to prevent and treat periodontal disease in our furry friends?

Every veterinary physical exam should include a check of the oral cavity. The veterinarian will grade periodontal disease from a ‘1’ to ‘4’, with four being the most severe. Next, your vet may recommend pre-anesthetic blood work and dental cleaning (aka dental prophylaxis), renamed in the veterinary profession as oral ATP (assessment, treatment, and prevention).

Assessment of the oral cavity is done under general anesthesia. During the oral exam, the vet evaluates teeth problems, which then are probed for abnormalities. The teeth are cleaned with ultrasonic and hand scaling to remove tartar from above and below the gum line. Any abnormal findings are investigated further with a dental x-ray. Next, treatment of disease is performed. The teeth are then polished to help smooth enamel and to prevent the attachment of tartar. Finally, the patient is recovered.

Prevention is always best and can be achieved through daily brushing. Since your dog must adjust to this, slow training with positive reinforcement yields the best results. Brush with a soft bristled toothbrush and pet-safe toothpaste. Focus on the teeth with short strokes at a 45-degree angle. Trying to open the dog’s mouth to brush the inside surface of the teeth might cause resentment. Brushing not only keeps the teeth cleaner and healthier, but it also keeps you aware of any changes in your dog’s mouth. Other products are available for oral hygiene such as prescribed foods, chews, treats, and water additives. For more information, please contact your veterinarian.

