

"Perfect" Dogs are Made, Not Born

by Tamara Znak

While genes certainly play an important role in every dog's makeup, they are far from the sole determining factors of character and disposition. Even when "starting from scratch" with a young puppy, what the new owner puts in will greatly affect what comes out in terms of behavior and habits.

An example of this is my dog, Tucker. When my husband and I adopted Tucker from DVGRR, he was just a year old. A cute, small golden, Tucker lived the first year of his life tied under a deck. The family that originally owned him "started from scratch" when they purchased him as a puppy. So why wasn't he the perfect dog for them? Tucker wasn't perfect because his original owners did not make the effort to train him, exercise him, or provide him with love and affection. As a result, he came to DVGRR with no obedience training, no socialization with other animals, and little to no experience inside a home. Through no fault of his own, Tucker was an unruly teenager with bad manners. He chased our cat, chewed our furniture, and ignored our commands. Oh, and did I mention that he had separation anxiety, making it impossible to crate train him? There were many days in the beginning when I thought we'd have to return Tucker to DVGRR, and I was terrified at the prospect of failing him.

However, with the support of many people at DVGRR, Michael and I dug in, committed to making it work. We read books, got creative in confining Tuck to an area where he could not destroy anything while we were at work, and established a daily routine that we rarely changed. As he began to trust us, Tucker began to thrive. It took time and effort, but today – at long last – Tucker is as close to a "perfect" dog as one can get.

I often hear adopters say they adopted the perfect dog from DVGRR...that the dog was wonderful from the moment he or she was brought home. Of course, it does happen! However, there are also times when the transition is not so easy. Sometimes dogs come with issues that take weeks or months to resolve. Sometimes adopters need time...time to get to know the dog, time to get over the loss of a previous dog, time to adjust to new responsibilities, time to figure out what routine works best for the dog and family.

While some who apply to adopt from DVGRR have a realistic view of what it will take to achieve a successful transition for their new dog, others do not. Sadly, that sometimes leads to a dog undeservedly taking the blame for problems that occur. I believe it is up to us as adopters to provide our new companion with every opportunity to successfully integrate into our family and lifestyle. At times, that may mean no longer comparing the new dog with our neighbor's dog, with a beloved pet from before, or with our original vision of how an adopted dog should behave.

I ask that we all take a moment to remember that rescue is not the place to get a bargain-basement, ready-made, potty-trained, full-bred Golden Retriever. Nor is it a dumping ground for rejects and misfits. Instead, rescue lies somewhere between those two extremes...and rescue IS a place to find the newest member of your family, if you have the time, heart, and patience to make the commitment. Please remember that sometimes the "perfect" dog is waiting for you at DVGRR, ready to

join your home with very little effort, and at other times the effort may seem great to make the adoption work and help the "perfect" dog emerge. But what could be more worthy of that effort than a loving, loyal, and life-long canine companion - one who sees you as the perfect owner!