

(This is a reprint of my earlier articles from 2004. R.H.)

### The Training of

### Seizure-Alert Dogs

The training of dogs to give warnings of seizures is being pioneered in Britain by a small charity in Seffield, called Support Dogs. The trainer does not think dogs can be trained to recognize the signs of a seizure.

“They seem to do that naturally when one has a close bond with the owner,” she says. But they can be trained to signal more demonstratively so their owner recognizes their warnings.

The first successful training of this kind was with Molly, a Collie-German Shepherd cross. Molly was being taught simply to help her epileptic owner, Lise Margaret. First she was trained to a good level of general obedience. She then learned tasks such as fetching Lise a blanket after a seizure to prevent her from getting too cold and bringing her the telephone. “It can be difficult to talk, so now I just press a programmed number and Molly will bark into the phone and friends will know that I need assistance.”

About 30 minutes before a seizure, Molly begins staring at Lise, “We just needed to encourage her to be more demonstrative. She’s very dramatic now — she barks and licks.”

Support Dogs has trained other dogs to alert their owners to oncoming seizures.

In the U.S., the training of seizure-alert dogs is being coordinated by the National Service Dog Center of the Delta Society. They also are helping to raise awareness among the public of service dogs in general.

## Very smart animals

Written by Nancy Spencer

Saturday, May 18, 2013 12:43 AM -

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Forebodings of

Sudden Death

The reactions of pets before the onset of illness are easily misunderstood, and their meaning became clear only in retrospect. The same is true of unusual behavior prior to sudden death.

In 1995 Christine Vickery was living in Sacramento with her husband, whom she describes as a "fitness fanatic, 52 years old and very fit." He started each day with vitamin pills, ate a low-fat diet, worked out and walked part of the way to work.

On the evening of Dec. 1, he arrived home at 6:30 as usual. Instead of running to greet him, my dogs, Smokie and Popsie, stayed in their baskets in another room. He called them and they refused to move. At 9 p.m., the dogs came to the living room and sat at my husband's feet, staring up at him. My husband was upset and wondered what (as he said) they knew that he did not. They kept up this odd ritual for the next five days. On the night of Dec. 6, the older dog, Smokie, caressed my husband's leg with his nose. Popsie offered him a paw. At 1:30 a.m. on December 7, my husband died in his sleep. I envied my dogs. They had known somehow and said their good-byes.

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Intelligent Animals

In the 1870s

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Our narrator knows of a terrier who will not only ring the bell for the servant when told to do so, but, what is more remarkable, declines to obey the order when the servant is in the room, and therefore does not need to be called. Another person is acquainted with a kitten, when shut out of the house, jumps up and gives a single rap at the knocker in order to obtain admittance. If the rap is not successful the kitten knocks twice, and if a third trial is required, plays a regular volley upon the knocker. But even that feat is outdone by another cat of remarkable intelligence. Being a cat of extraordinary powers of observation he has found out an excellent way of getting the door opened. The cat has noticed that the summons most promptly attended to is that given by the postman, and accordingly when he wants the door opened, he climbs up to the knocker and performs a solo just like that of the letter-carrier. If I owned a cat like this I should certainly indulge him with a latch-key.

Still another instance given, is that of a donkey which at the proper time in the evening, always opened the gate to allow the cows to pass through, on their way to be milked, and carefully put down the latch when the procession had passed through.

Delphos Herald,

Aug. 28, 1879

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### B.J. The Smart Dog

When Louise Gavit, of Morrow, Georgia, sets off to come home, the family dog, B.J. goes to the door. Mrs. Gavits' husband has seen B.J. do this over and over again, and by keeping note of the time, he has found that B.J. usually begins to react when Louise first decides to come home, even when she is many miles from home. "My method of travel is irregular: I may use my own car, my husband's car, a truck, or cars driven by strangers, or I might walk. Somehow B.J. responds to my thought-action just the same."

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In another case, a Labrador reacted to the return of his owner, an officer in the Royal Air Force. "He watched his master fly away in a plane, then settled down to wait," J. Greany reports. "When the same plane returned, the dog didn't even get up. The men all thought the dog had failed the test. They were wrong and the dog was right. His master was not inside. Later on, a different plane approached from the opposite direction. The dog jumped up, excitedly wagging his tail. His master was returning."

From, "Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home," by Rupert Sheldrake.

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### Sequence of Behavior

The following sequence of behavior is described by one dog's owner. Her dog (a springer spaniel named Rowdy) begins by going to their hall closet. The closet has a sliding door, which the dog paws open. Next Rowdy grabs hold of the leash, which is hanging on a hook. Since the hand loop is over the top of the hook, the dog has to jump up and snap its head to the side to dislodge it. The leash in his mouth, he then walks into the living room where his master is sitting. If Rowdy's master does not appear to notice the dog sitting there, the spaniel drops the leash and barks. As his master looks up, he picks up the leash and drops it in his master's lap, prances a few steps towards the door and barks again. If Rowdy's master still doesn't move, the spaniel repeats the last sequence. The simplest description of his behavior is obvious: the dog wants to go for a walk and knows how to communicate his desires to his master.

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First Surface-to-

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### Surface Missiles?

The ancient Egyptians, Romans, Gauls and Celts favored mastiffs as war dogs. One mastiff who weighed about 220 pounds, plays with 25-pound rocks the way other dogs play with balls.

An earlier version of the mastiff, known as the Molossian dog, weighed in at around 280 pounds and was known for its aggressive tendencies. These great beasts were fitted out in spiked armor to tear at horses or infantry that came too near. Some trained to run at horses or men, carried lances hooked on their backs. Others trained to run under horses while carrying pots of burning resin on their backs. In other words these dogs were the ancient equivalent of our modern surface-to-surface missiles.

From, "The Intelligence of Dogs" by Stanley Coren.

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### A Smart Parrot

Captain James Etchberger vouches for the following story: About 30 years when in Honduras in command of the bark, Eldorado, he was presented with a parrot, a spirited bird fluid in the Spanish language.

The bird was brought to the city, where after being domiciled in the house of the captain's family, it soon acquired a knowledge of the English tongue. The next door neighbor of the captain was an incessant scold - forever quarreling with something or someone.

Polly, being allowed full liberty, was pleased to take an airing on the garden fence and in a short time had learned to mimic the scolding neighbor to perfection and finally became aggressive. Polly, not infrequently, was being knocked off the fence with a broomstick. This brought forth a torrent of abuse from her injured feelings upon the head of her assailant. Finally, the bird's

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language became so abusive that the captain was obliged to send it away and Polly was transferred to a good Christian family in the country, where in the course of time, she reformed and became to some extent a bird of edifying piety.

Some time ago, while she was sunning herself in the garden, a large hawk suddenly swooped down and bore the distressed parrot off as a prize. Her recent religious training came to her assistance, as at the top of her voice, she shrieked, "Oh, Lord, save me!"

The hawk became so terrified at the unexpected cry that he dropped his intended dinner and soared away.

Polly still survives her attempted abduction.

Delphos Herald,

July 24, 1879

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Ferocious Dog Breed

Devotes Itself to Flock

There are only a few hundred Sharplaninec (pronounced shar-pla-nee-natz) dogs in North America, but this ancient breed of guard dog is renowned for its extraordinary bravery, strength, intelligence and large teeth.

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They are native to the mountains of Macedonia but have been bred in the U.S. since the mid '70s. Historians believe this breed may have served as Alexander the Great's palace dogs more than 2,000 years ago.

They are slightly smaller than other livestock guarding breeds but easily makes up for that in their devotion, fearlessness and quickness to react to danger.

According to the Sharplaninec Club International, two dogs can protect a flock of 15,000 sheep and can fight several wolves and emerge victorious. Bears are another common predator in the mountains and these dogs are known for their heroics.

Sharplaninecs are calm, steady and loyal to family members but wary of strangers. They are a guarding dog and not a herding dog.

There currently are about 2,000 of them worldwide.

Farm Show magazine

Read more in next Saturday's Herald.