

28. THE AUSTRIAN AND HIS DOG

Austrians love their dogs, and they look after them well and train them thoroughly. That was certainly true of the Shreibock chows. Austrians know that without good training a dog cannot be lovable, and theirs, most of them dachshunds, are lovable indeed. It is unheard of to bar them from restaurants. Austria does not have the sharp discrimination between a person and his pet as we have in America. After all both have to eat.

Beatrice reports that while taking a glass of wine in a cafe one afternoon she saw a man come in and sit down at a table near her. His dog, that had been following him, jumped on the chair opposite the man, and put its front paws decorously on the table. It watched attentively as its owner ordered for both man and dog. When the order, wine and a sausage, came with two glasses of water the dog held down the sausage up with its forepaws and daintily ate it, then had a drink of water.

History of our dogs: a timeline

1947: We were given a dog by a subordinate of mine in the DBS, Jack McClelland, who used to raise prize dachshunds in his spare time. He had a considerable number of them in his house at any one time, and the house looked it and smelt it. They couldn't be allowed loose, mating with any trash they met up with, and Jack could not afford separate premises for them, so they all lived together, he and the dogs.

The name we gave to this one was Ingrid, or in full, Devonshire Ingrid of Bristol (Our address was 5 Bristol Avenue), but she was always called Iggie. Iggie was intended as a playmate for Barbara, three years old at the time, who was pleased enough to begin with, but after a few weeks friction developed between them. Barbie hit on the idea of pulling up a fold of the dog's skin and biting it. Dachshunds have very short fur and this must have hurt badly, so Iggie would bite back. After this scrapping between the two of them had gone on for a few weeks and Barby's forearm was covered with "dawg baits" we had had enough; we bundled Barby and Iggie into the baby carriage and returned Iggie to Jack McClelland. It was a shame to do that: Iggie was a truly perfect specimen, and we later saw her at a dog show where she had won a blue ribbon. At the same time I was relieved to have turned back what could be construed as a bribe from a subordinate.

1959: Arrival of Penny, a dog of mixed ancestry--Beatrice who came to love her resents my calling her a mongrel. Penny was a gift from Jim Giffen, a colleague at the University of Toronto. She was a typical pet store product, frail and in poor health but of a truly loving and dependent nature. She would not have lived long anyway, but she wandered out on the road, despite our training, and was struck by a car. The driver was distressed; he had tried to miss her,

but she just ran under a wheel. She limped back to the house where she died, probably of heart failure. I remember Barby, then a student at Forest Hill Village School, tenderly picking her up and placing her on a cushion. She lived only a day or two after her accident. We took her to a veterinarian, who couldn't do much but bury her. But her short life was enough to show us the companionship that a dog offers, something the aristocratic Lady Ingrid of Bristol had not taught us. We just had to get another.

1959: Our third, Bonnie, was a beagle, a noble, courageous dog, bought not from a pet store but from a kennel. (She had papers, but we never registered them, not intending to put her into a competition.) Beagles at their origin were working dogs--they hunted rabbits. I remember the day she was brought home, Barby put a string on her and was following her across the lawn, while tiny Bonnie, a few weeks old, ran up and down with her nose to the ground, presumably trying to pick up the spoor of a rabbit.

Their hereditary prey was hardly formidable, but Bonnie was formidable; she would stand up to a dog several times her size, and the other would slink away. She never had to fight: she was protected not by physical but by moral force. On one occasion Beatrice was walking with Bonnie on a leash in a park in front of the Belmont High School. Along came two Dobermans running unleashed, and Bonnie stood in their path, simply stopping them with her gaze. The owner of the Dobermans came up and cried "Call off your dog!" "Call off yours," Beatrice replied; "my dog is leashed, yours are not." The man and his dogs slunk off.

Bonnie was also the most intelligent of the four we had. And she was also the one that most enjoyed eating. On one occasion Beatrice had a cake in a box on the kitchen table, and in a hurry before going out she just left it without thinking. Sure enough Bonnie, probably after jumping several times, got it down, and enjoyed a feast. Then she stuffed the box under the refrigerator. An almost perfect crime. Unfortunately she was disturbed during the work of concealing the box by Beatrice's return, and she left an identifiable part of the paper hanging out in plain sight. Beatrice gave her a severe talking to--that was the most severe chastisement Bonnie--or any other dog or child--ever had from this mistress of the house.

1970: Wally was our fourth and last dog. He was a dachshund, with a long body suspended on short legs that kept him close to the ground. His ancestors were hunters of badgers, and with that shape he could comfortably pursue one down a badger hole. Our Wally never had an opportunity to exercise the hereditary occupation. Nor did he ever find out about sex. In fact none of our dogs ever found out about sex. Whether because Wally came after Bonnie, or because of the latter's moral force referred to above, he always stayed close to her. Once when Wally was lost in the woods of New Hampshire we sent Bonnie out to look for him and she returned with Wally trailing her. .

He lived a long life, some sixteen years, much of which was in Austria during our ten-year sojourn there. We would naturally have lived in Vienna but apartments available there seemed all to be on upper stories, without elevators, so we stayed in the suburbs, in turn Baden, Perchtoldsdorf, and Moedling.

We were in Moedling where he had his final illness; Beatrice took him to the vet, and seeing the illness was incurable (his kidney was gone) he pushed a needle with poison into his thigh and Wally died peacefully, looking into Beatrice's eyes. She couldn't think of that afterwards without tears.

He was our last; our memories of these will have to do us for the rest of our lives. Of our four dogs Bonnie had by far the best mind, and the strongest moral force. Penny was the most lovable, Wally the most light-hearted.

There were also several dogs that we knew casually. Beatrice took a special interest in guide dogs. She tells me that not all dogs are capable of becoming satisfactory guide dogs. They are just not intelligent enough. Nor they are capable of being trained before a certain age--perhaps a year. And their training takes time, and they have to retire when they become too old to do the work. Further, they need a certain boldness of character. One dog we knew was just a baby--it would cry when you were eating a cookie if you didn't give him part. So the working seeing-eye dog is a select individual, and then it has a short working life. All this explains why guide dogs are so expensive.