

More than Books

In praise of new tricks

Sam is an old dog. Sam will be ten-years old later this year.

I first met Sam when he was a puppy. It was in the summer of 2005, I had moved to Freeport the previous fall, and Sam was being fostered by then-Humane Society Board Member and ace volunteer Judy Petta. Judy knew I was a standard poodle devotee who frequented the Humane Society's off-leash dog park with my dog, Charley. She wondered if I was interested in adopting another standard poodle, a beautiful, black puppy in her care.

I was tempted, but Charley was a handful. Add to the mix that I was busy with a demanding, new job and still finding my way around in a new town. I never forgot Sam though, and neither did Judy.

Sam went to a wonderful home. He lived for many years in that home with another standard poodle, Buddy. It was this February that Judy called me and told me Sam's dad was in hospice care. Sadly, Sam would soon need a new home.

Sam's caretaker arranged a meet and greet. I knew that Sam had grown into a large dog. I was told he weighed over 70 pounds, but I was in for one big surprise. He wasn't black! His coat was salt and pepper.

Standard poodles, as you may know, have hair, not fur. That's why they don't shed and have to be groomed regularly. That's also why most black standard poodles turn grey as they age. I should have known, but I've always had cream-colored standards, and grey hair isn't as obvious on a blonde like my pooch, Frances.

Sam and I got along like a house afire, and I passed inspection, thanks in large part to a reference from Judy. Sam came to live with me and Frances on March 16. I'm still figuring out whether Sam is a big brother or a little brother for Frances. In any case, they're getting along just fine, thank you very much.

Sam is getting along fine himself. He's had a lot of adjusting to do. He is living, not only in a new home, with a new person, with another dog for the first time in years, but with a c-a-t. He is learning not to pull – much – on a leash so he can enjoy walks in the neighborhood.

Like most dogs, Sam is an extrovert. He has met lots of new people and dogs. He acts as though he's been going to doggy daycare at Carlson Canine Camp for his whole life, and last Saturday he passed Beginning Obedience.

I enrolled Sam in a Beginning Obedience class at Carlson's because I was pretty sure that, as an old dog, he could still learn some new tricks. Sam already knew how to sit for treats, but he has learned "down" and "stay" and "come." I predict a great future for Sam as a certified therapy dog who can join Frances in the library's Paws for Reading program and FHN's new Beyond Words Therapy Dog Program.

I am a great believer in continuing education for everyone, dogs and people alike. No wonder I am proud to work at a public library whose mission is to be the community's center for lifelong learning, and no wonder I am proud of Sam, whose therapy dog class starts June 18.

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