

That Magic Touch

To owners of unruly dogs, hunters who need their pointers to really point and to anyone observing her work, Sondra Rolison has a magic touch

by Betty Orlemann



Paul Wesley

Right, Blitz, a short-haired German pointer, is Sondra Rolison's dog, and she named her business, Blitz Pet Professionals. Opposite, Sondra posing with her dogs (from left) Inka (German Shepherd), Blitz (German short-haired pointer) and Twister (American bulldog).



Sondra Rolison, sole proprietor and head trainer of Blitz Pet Professionals in Kintnersville, has a magic touch with unruly dogs. Just ask Mari Plowman who still visits Sondra after leaving Bucks County and moving to Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. Her dog Oscar, a giant schnauzer, became a major problem. He was four-months-old when they got him, and for the first few days, she said, he was reasonably quiet. He also had an intestinal parasite that caused uncontrollable diarrhea. Once that was taken care of it never happened again, she said. At that time she and her husband lived on a fenced-in four-acre property on Lake Nockamixon.

"Oscar was in paradise," Mari said. "He didn't walk or run, he leapt and flew! A typical exercise period, would consist of opening the door before he went through it, watching him race at top speed, dive into the shallow end of the pool and return to the house soaking wet, jump over the back of the sofa, grabbing your head in his growing jaws on the way to landing on your lap. He seemed to know how to walk on a leash until he felt it was time for a sprint. At age five-and-one-half months he pulled my husband off his feet while walking on a hillside."



Oscar's antics included grabbing her husband Jon's wallet off his desk, eating the American Express Card and chewing up his driver's license. Even bringing Oscar to an obedience school didn't work. "We enrolled in a dog training class for puppies at a nearby school. At recess all of the puppies were let off their leashes and a basket of tennis balls was scattered on the floor. Oscar proceeded to round up all the balls, preventing the others from playing. When another dog got too close to the balls, Oscar simply mauled it and pinned it to the floor." He was expelled.

A friend referred Mari to Sondra Rolison. Mari remembers, "The change was gradual overall, but improvement was immediate. After his graduation from basic obedience, we brought home a dog who now understood what was acceptable and what was not." After a while Oscar got off-leash training. "Watching him heel with his gaze fixed only on the person with whom he is walking is a stunning sight to people who have never seen a dog heel correctly."

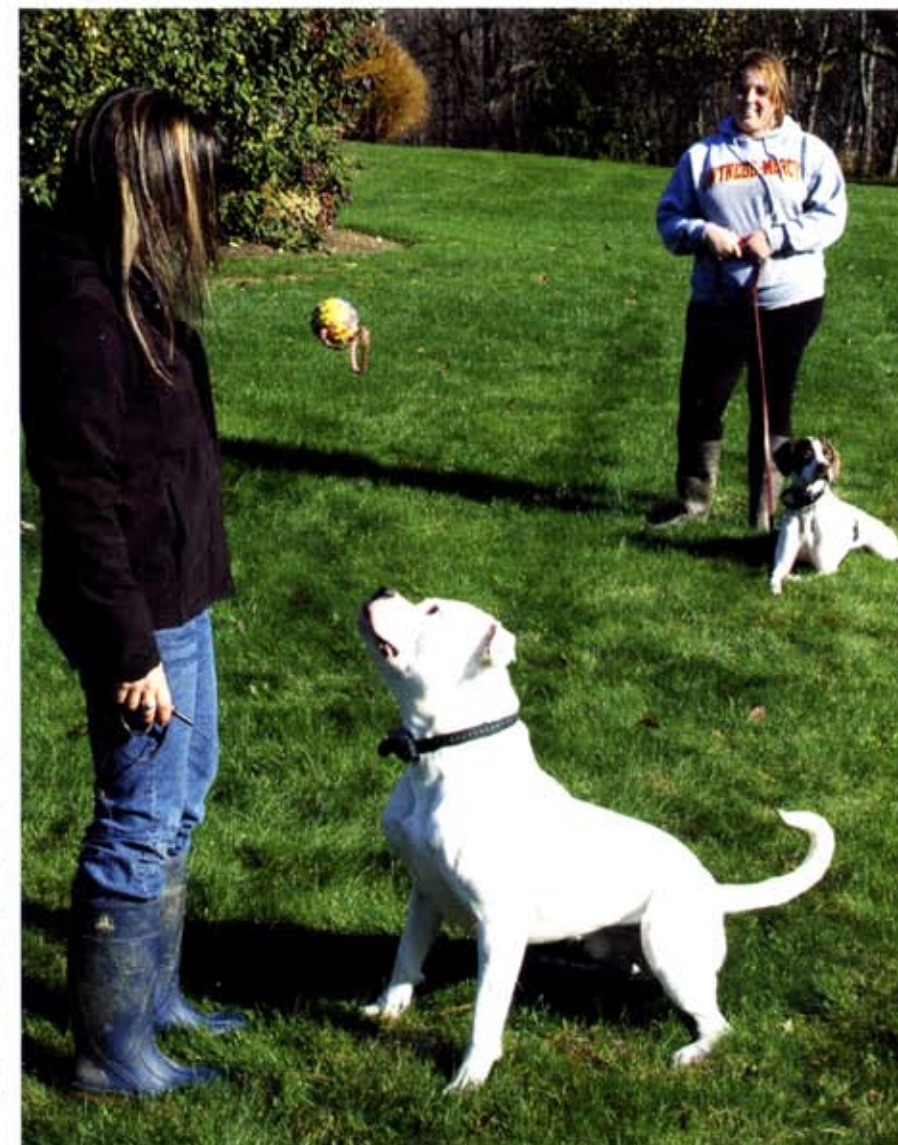
Sondra's client's pass on stories about her training, and her word-of-mouth reputation of being a super dog trainer keep her on an incredibly busy schedule. Sondra has been working with dogs her entire life. Her father, Richard Rolison is a General Contractor. He also helped with the dogs whenever he was free. A while ago he found a Poloroid picture of Sondra when she was about five-years-old. "I was coaching several of the dogs to jump over a course that I had set up from broken tree limbs and toys. I was wearing a little dress and running around instructing the dogs. I even had some of them sitting and lying down. I was programmed for life with animals. It was natural for me."

Her business, Blitz Pet Professionals, is named after her dog, Blitz. Blitz is a German shorthaired pointer whom she got nine years ago. She refers to him as her training dog because he is so well trained that he actually helps her when she is training a difficult dog. She states that her entire family owned, bred and trained German shorthaired pointers starting with her grandfather. "That explains," she said, "why I am partial to that breed. But I want to make it clear that I love all dogs." She said, "One time we had more than twenty dogs in our family."

Sondra lived in Bucks County all of her life, most of it in Tinicum Township. She attended Palisades High School where she was team captain and a star player in the sport of Soccer. Unfortunately she was badly injured during a game and had to give up playing the sport for the rest of her time in High School. However, she did help with the coaching. After graduating she joined a Hungarian soccer team. She considered going to college to study art. She is a talented artist who works in all mediums and often paints pet portraits. However, she realized that dogs meant more to her than art, and she decided to be a groomer. She protégéd with a woman who taught her that there is much more to grooming than a person might think.



Opposite top, Sondra with Prince, a German shepherd, working on the motivational call. Opposite bottom, Sondra with her shepherd, Inka Vom Wällerborst, practicing dumbbell retrieve as part of Inka's obedience training. Top right, Sondra is with her American bulldog, Twister, who is being rewarded it a ball. In the distance is J. Benton with her English pointer, Sadie. Bottom right, Sondra directing client with dog's ball drive.



Following several years study in grooming, she matriculated at the Professional Canine Center in Frenchtown, New Jersey, where she studied for a total of five years (three years until she graduated and then two more years post-graduate work). There she learned dog training including competitions and narcotics detection, and she became very proficient in a high-level three-day German sport event called Schutzhund. As she described it, "It's like a thousand hours of training." Schutzhund includes tracking, obedience and protection. At the Canine Center she studied and worked with renowned Master Trainer Andres Aportela and graduated with top performance ratings.

Sondra is tiny—only five-feet-two inches tall and very slender. But for such a petite young woman she has the strength, athletic ability and skill to handle any size dog. Some prospective customers are surprised when they meet her because she looks like a young girl. However, she soon puts their doubts to rest when she begins the training program.

"It's important to state," Sondra says, "that I offer every level of training including rehab dogs sport dogs and all

Below, Sondra and her shepherd conditioning for the tracking phase in Schutzhund.

Opposite top, Sondra Rolison with her brother Nick Rolison and his German shorthaired pointer, working in field training the dog to hunt and point. Opposite bottom, Sondra is also an artist. This is an acrylic painting she did of Riley, a friend's dog.



levels of competition, imported European Shepherds, puppy selection and breeder referrals, home security systems and also programs ... board 'n' train, home visits, and private lessons." She sums up what she does with the slogan, "Creating irreplaceable human and canine connection." She accomplishes this through European training methods, meaning one-on-one training of dog and owner.

Sondra is experienced with and qualified to handle all breeds. She trains dogs for competition and for companionship. She teaches basic and advanced obedience including off-leash obedience, tracking and search and rescue for law enforcement applications. In addition she trains hunting dogs. She, herself, is a big game bow and gun hunter. She prepares, cooks and eats what she shoots. She says that hunting is her hobby. Her primary interest with hunting dogs is bird hunting, in which she uses pointing dog training at a private preserve.

She trains sporting dogs including pointers, setters and retrievers. They come in an assortment of breeds bred for the task that they are to perform. Some work on land, some in water. Some do both. Pointers "point" to a bird in



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the field often raising one foreleg while extending their tails straight out from their bodies. Setters "set" and stare in the direction of a hiding bird, and retrievers "fetch" birds on land or in the water as do some spaniel breeds ... for example Irish and American water spaniels.

Pointer breeds include German shorthaired pointers and English pointers. There are Irish setters, English setters and Gordon setters, Labrador and golden retrievers and a host of spaniels that specialize in working in the water. There are also some all around sporting/hunting dogs like Brittany and Springers and clumbers. However, not all spaniel breeds are hunting dogs. There are also small "lapdog" spaniels such as Cavalier King Charles spaniels. There are other dogs that may not necessarily be classified as "sporting or hunting" but in a sense are. These can include dachunds and basset hounds both of which "go to ground" to find borrowing animals such as groundhogs. The American beagle must also be acknowledged, the quintessential "rabbit dog."

Dogs trained by Sondra have earned many titles in obedience competition. Blitz, her German short hair pointer is the only German Short-hair Pointer to have earned the Schutzhund I title. Short hair Pointers are hunting dogs not normally trained in the rigors of Schutzhund.

Sondra works from six in the morning until eleven at night. She evaluates each dog before accepting it for training. It is important to know what the dog is thinking and why it thinks what it does in order to develop rapport and succeed in the desired training goals. If you've watched Dog Whisperer on TV, you have seen Caesar, the Dog Whisperer, apply this philosophy. Sondra and Caesar in fact belong to the same society of canine educators, The International Association of Canine Professionals.

Sondra says, "I train the dogs with instinct (sight, sound and smell) and drive. "Drive is the dog's preference



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for a particular activity such as eating or playing. I can condition the drive. With those accomplishments mastered she trains their tracking skills. She trains feral dogs and rescued dogs and rehabilitates them, and she has saved many from euthanasia. She keeps the dogs she is training at her own kennels until they are ready to go to an owner.

"I can't forget the dogs I evaluate in specific kill shelters," Sondra states, "Particularly saving the 'bully' type breeds that are literally nearing the last days of their death sentence. With the help of a few angels on the inside, I'm allowed to evaluate and intervene,

*"And blue with cold—
that's why we call him
Smokey. Of course
she took the dog and
is still working
with him successfully."*

thus fostering and fully training a dog whose demise was imminent, and re-home it successfully. I do a lot of Belgian Malinois rescue, German shorthaired pointers rescues and other breeds in many more kill shelters. If I can change many lives with one dog that was wrongly evaluated, then I've made a difference. I receive personal requests with specific criteria from clients waiting for me to find the perfect rescue dog for their family."

Several years ago her dog Blitz was pressed into service when Bunny, a Belgian Malinois, taken just hours before by new owners, was spooked and slipped out of her collar and ran away in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia. Sondra had rehabilitated her and found her a home with the couple at which time, she warned them not to take the dog out, but they did anyway. The couple called Sondra in desperation, and she with Blitz went to the huge inner city park. With tracking skills of sight, sound and smell, Blitz

went off on the hunt near the spot where Bunny had vanished. Sondra and others posted pictures of Bunny on trees and posts and took off following Blitz all the time calling Bunny's name. Two and one-half days later Blitz found Bunny near Lincoln Avenue. Blitz was exhausted and Bunny had a broken leg, but they both recovered fully. Subsequently Sondra has rehabilitated Bunny again and found her a home.

Sondra usually teaches at the Palisades Middle School field. In inclement weather she uses an indoor arena in Haycock Township. Among her ardent supporters is Mike Pastor of Upper Black Eddy. His dog, Smokey, was found in a park on a cold winter day in North Jersey. "He was shaved down to the skin", Pastor said, "And blue with cold—that's why we call him Smokey. He almost died." He said that he and his wife had heard of Sondra and called her right away. "Of course she took the dog and is still working with him successfully."

Sondra is teaching puppy instincts to a puppy named, Hurley, who was adopted from a breeder by a Doylestown couple named Jeff and Michele, and brought to Sondra.

Avery Allen of Upper Black Eddy has brought his seven-month-old Johnson Bull Dog to her. "He's getting better," he said with a smile and added, "Sondra's busy because she's good." Ruthie Rosenfield of Geigle Hill Road, Tinicum Township, got Lola from Last Chance Ranch when she was ten-weeks old. Sondra kept her for training, and she's doing very well.

If you own a dog that is hard to train, maybe an older rescued dog who has been abused, perhaps a biter, or just a pet, which has been spoiled and does not obey very well, or even a frisky puppy determined to have his own way, there is a dog trainer in Kintnersville who has a magic touch with all dogs. Sondra Rolison can be contacted at Blitz Pet Professionals by calling 610-842-4970. ♦

Betty Orlemann is a freelance writer who lives in Tinicum Township. She is also the award-winning author of "Mission Murder," which won a silver medal from the 2009 Independent Publisher Book Awards for Best Regional Fiction.

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