

Our Mission as Deaf Dog Advocates, Inspirers & Trainers

By Eric Melvin, Handler & Trainer
Angelyne the Amazing DEAF Cattle Dog

Angelyne the Amazing DEAF Cattle Dog and I are in the eighth year of our mission and our work together. It still astonishes me all the places we've spoken and performed, the recognition we've garnered and all the incredible people we've met on our journey. Despite all that we've done, there's still one simple, yet essential reason why we're here. We believe in deaf dogs and the destiny that brought Angelyne and I together to advocate for them.

The following is an excerpt from my deaf dogs inspirational guide that I provide to people to help train and inspire deaf dog fosters, rescuers and owners. It is a profound document from my heart and soul.

“Having a deaf dog is a lot of work. There are no training shortcuts and you can't be lazy with a deaf dog. You may work harder to train your deaf dog than you would with a hearing dog but don't be surprised if it's easier. The connection you'll make with your deaf dog has the potential to be stronger than any you've ever had with a dog. You may talk to your deaf dog at first and forever because you're conditioned to think a dog should look at you or pay attention when you speak. That's okay because most deaf dogs can read lips and facial expressions! Even after the communication between you and your deaf dog is strong, you may continue to talk to him because you can and because you love him even more.

Life with a deaf dog may bring you doubts and stress and failures along the way, but committing your life to your deaf dog may prove to be the most rewarding and meaningful situation you may experience in your life. Knowing and accepting that your dog is not perfect should help you realize that he IS perfect just the way he is. One day you'll understand what I mean. If you can see the big picture of your lives together then will you be able to commit from your heart to your deaf dog. It's your job to help your dog reach his potential and create the life and bond that you want for you both.

Most deaf dogs I've seen and worked with hold a very intense bond with their owners. You alone are his only one, a bond to the world, to food, water and to protection and love and understanding. Deaf dogs don't know they're deaf. They think, act and behave like all other dogs, but you have to think ahead for them for their safety, socialization and to protect and train them to be great pets. I never had any experience with deaf dogs before Angelyne. Our bond, success and recognition happened through dedication, patience, consistency, lots of practice and love. These are all the same things you will need for your deaf dog. Who knew I had a superstar in Angelyne? Who knew I could handle this? Certainly not me in the beginning, hence the reason for this guide.

For the record, I did not teach Angelyne with American Sign Language (ASL). I created most of our commands (hand, facial, body language and touches). I teach deaf and hearing dogs alike with Angelyne's methods. Our training system was created by thinking outside the box, by trial and error, and by being a naturally creative person. The hardest thing about training a deaf dog is getting and keeping their attention. I have found our system to be easy and simple to learn and repeat. Most importantly, it especially makes sense for dogs because of the focus on bonding, positive reinforcement and treats.”

In the beginning of my life with Angelyne, I felt the same way and had many of the same questions that many deaf dog owners have: Can I do this? Do I have time for this? Do I really want to struggle with another daily challenge? Should I give up and surrender my dog to a rescue? As time went on, my bond with Angelyne grew and the questions soon became the foundation of our purpose.

Although our signals are not based on American Sign Language, we have helped many people and their deaf dogs successfully learn our methods of communication. The following are just a few deaf dog owners that have called upon us for advice, training and inspiration. These testimonials offer some insight into what we offer:

Talking with Tia by Karen Boush

When I adopted Tia, a one-year-old Blue Heeler, in 2009, I knew she was congenitally deaf but didn't fully understand the ramifications of living with and caring for a deaf dog. I quickly learned! Tia followed me from room to room, overreacted to sudden movements and flashes of light, and became distressed whenever I left her alone... Still, she was a happy dog and greeted everyone she met with a wagging tail and enthusiastic barks.

Tia knew a few hand commands when I adopted her, but I wanted to teach her more so that we could communicate more effectively and deeply. I assumed that some other owners of deaf dogs...would have perhaps documented their training methods and hand signals. So I embarked on an extensive, web-based search looking for an established, tested approach. I didn't get far. Contrary to my assumption, no one who had trained a deaf dog, professional or otherwise, had produced a comprehensive guide. If there was a “right” way to train a deaf dog, I certainly couldn't find it.

I worked with Tia using the scant information I found online plus bits and pieces of personal advice offered by other owners of deaf dogs, but it wasn't until I met Eric and Angelyne that my training with Tia took off. About a year after I adopted Tia, a friend called my attention to a newspaper article featuring Eric and Angelyne. I went to see them perform and immediately realized Eric offered

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Photos by DelaFoto



Eric Melvin created his own sign language which he uses to communicate with Angelyne. Together, they have spent years traveling throughout Colorado sharing their personal stories about visible and invisible disabilities. They have given more than 400 motivational presentations to schools, youth groups, churches, summer camps, corporations and others.

the multi-dimensional approach I diligently sought. Viewing the world from Angelyne's perspective and working through a process of trial and error, he had developed his own methods and created his own path to successful communication. Also, Eric clearly loved and respected Angelyne; everything he taught her stemmed from the caring bond he had developed with her.

Eric subsequently worked one-on-one with Tia and me, offering specific tips and tactics learned from his years of experience of living and working with Angelyne. We especially benefited from Eric's suggestion to employ a hand signal indicating "focus," which helps to ground both Tia and me in the moment of communication and promotes understanding. We've also benefited from numerous other pieces of advice offered to us directly by Eric and indirectly by watching his interactions with Angelyne and other dogs.

Most of all, however, Eric gave me something much more important than tips and tactics. He helped me understand that even though Tia is deaf, she is perfect just the way she is, and that the "right" approach to working with her is one based on mutual love and respect. Though some methods work better than others, I cannot take a cookie-cutter approach to talking with Tia. Instead, as every human and dog team must do, Tia and I must patiently build our own rapport, based on our unique personalities, goals and circumstances. Since meeting Eric and Angelyne, Tia and I have gone on to take the insights generously shared by Eric to continuously develop our communication skills. Tia still follows me from room to room, gets upset when I leave her alone and overreacts to visual stimuli, but I love her for it and our relationship continues to blossom.

In addition to our work with deaf dogs, people of all ages who are deaf and/or hard of hearing (DHH) have found inspiration and joy in our work. We have made many appearances at educational facilities and community organizations that serve the DHH population and in many cases need an interpreter. Kelly Baldwin, a teacher at Rocky Mountain Deaf School had this to say about us:

Eric Melvin and his lovely dog, Angelyne, have visited Rocky Mountain Deaf School to do assemblies on several occasions. Not only does he impress us with Angelyne's tricks and ability to understand sign language, but he also delivers and showcases an important message about love and friendship. Eric and Angelyne connect with our students and make a positive impression on everyone. After meeting them, you will come away with a reminder of what life is really about.

One group which focuses on the sign language communication that Angelyne and I have presented are the Gifted & Talented Enrichment students at Windsor Middle School in Windsor, Colorado. We speak and perform for these students to not only showcase our skills and experience, but to explain other important and unique aspects to sign language. The students are taught American Sign Language in their class and Angelyne and I reinforce and supplement their lessons with examples of non-verbal communication. We teach them about body language, the importance of facial expressions, handshakes and posturing, and how they can use those tools to better understand people and build better relationships.

In conclusion, I'll offer one last quote from our deaf dogs inspirational guide:

"In a very short amount of time my life was transformed completely. It was my destiny to find and connect with Angelyne. My life and work with her is a calling, a mission, and it will be my legacy above and beyond any of my other achievements. I'm the finest version of myself for making the commitment to Angelyne. She taught me the way life should be lived and shared: with resilience and an open and compassionate mind and heart. I hope your deaf dog will do the same for you."

For information about our deaf dog training program or inspiring speeches and presentations, please call 970-222-4924, e-mail amazingangelyne@gmail.com or visit www.amazingangelyne.com.

Great Smile.
Gorgeous Figure.
Perfect Skin.

Mojo wasn't always the stunning bulldog beauty you see here. In fact, when he arrived at VRCC, his coat and health were under attack from microscopic mites. VRCC's Dermatology and Allergy Specialists quickly diagnosed Mojo with demodectic mange. With their skillful treatment and a little best-friend pampering, Mojo quickly returned to his natural good looks and healthy, shiny coat.

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