

Corgis in the Limelight

by Joan B. Guertin

"Hey, Mom," my daughter shouted from the next room. "There's a Corgi on Letterman tonight. Something about a Dog Challenge."

Whoop-dee-do, I thought. Me, who turns off the tube at 10:00 to lose myself in a good book or one of the three-year-backlog of unread AKC Gazettes, while soaking in a steamy hot tub of bubbles. Now I gotta think about staying up for Late Night with Letterman. But, I guess a Corgi wins out each time, so the book and bubbles go on hold. Just don't let it be "stupid pet tricks", I pray.

Fortunately the show, which aired the evening of June 28, was worth staying up for. The event was a plug for the Purina Dog Challenge and did, indeed, feature a corgi. Watching her sail over jumps, whip through the tunnel and turn almost inside out on the weave poles, was a real thrill. Overall, the competition was fun, fast and impressive and anyone watching who had never seen Agility previously, got a great taste for all the fun it affords dogs, handlers and spectators. It also effectively planted the seeds that dogs of any size can participate, whether for competition or just plain fun. The end result was a win by Fury the Afghan with a time of 21:94 seconds. Pip, the Corgi was hot on her heels with 22.80. Bringing up the rear was Schuyler the Australian Shepherd at 22.87.

Since my first Limelight column was soon due, this was manna from heaven. An e-mail to Letterman drew a blank. However, Marian Your supplied a contact that she'd picked up on Corgi-L. That one bore fruit and within 24 hours Jean Owen, Pip's owner, and I had connected. Several days later we had a delightful phone visit. Not only was Pip's performance on TV a delight, her story has proven to be full of incredible inspiration as well as some happy coincidences.

Pip (as she was dubbed by the Letterman team) is actually Pemintenn's Lots of Kisses, Piper to her friends and Jean. Piper, sired by Ch. Pinemeade War Party x Saddlelane Glamour O'Pemnten was purchased from Nancy Schaeffer on a referral from Andy Carter.

The fact that Piper was even around to run that agility course is a miracle. As Jean (the owner of a New York agency that represents Makeup Artists and Hairstylists for the Entertainment and Fashion Industries) tells it, she had recently lost her old corgi. Since she had shown horses most of her life, she was

eager to return to competition, but this time with a corgi. Nancy sent her a tape of the five bitches in the litter, indicating which ones were available. Deciding on one, Jean flew to Tennessee on December 23 to bring home her Christmas present, a 12 week corgi, quickly dubbed Piper.

Unfortunately, the transition from quiet Tennessee to the metropolis of Manhattan was tough on the puppy and, according to Jean, poor Piper was afraid of everything. As a result, she was one sick puppy for the first year of her life with stress related problems including a case of chronic cystitis. With lots of support from Nancy, the breeder, Jean weathered the storm, but it was painful. The puppy's health issues and her fears ruled out a career in the conformation ring early on.

By the end of Piper's first year it was obvious that traditional veterinary care wasn't solving the health problems and the prognosis was bleak. Her physical conditions were not helping the poor dog's temperament problems either. At this point, when it looked like Piper's problems were a lost cause and so severe that Jean was at the point of giving up, she opted to try holistic veterinary care. Since she and Piper, then just a year, were both exhausted from the health issues and Jean was beginning to feel that the only humane choice was to free Piper from more stress by putting her down, the vet suggested that they try one more option. Following his recommendation, she transitioned to a raw diet. This "last resort" worked. Piper became a different dog and her chronic problems disappeared. Today, at almost five years of age, Piper is healthy, happy, vigorous and highly competitive.

But, dealing with Piper's fears still presented major problems. Jean and Piper had entered puppy classes at five months and then moved into obedience, however, neither were helping her fearfulness. Once the health issues had turned around, Nancy, ever supportive, suggested that Jean enroll in an agility class to build confidence.

For the first five weeks Piper would do NONE of it! On week six, according to Jean, "she ventured into a small tunnel and came out the other side like the doggy devil was after her. We laughed, but it was a huge step for her. Slowly she started at least putting a foot on the other obstacles and over time, actually seemed to be having 'fun'."

It was evident, watching her performance on

Letterman that Piper did lick her fears and genuinely LOVES agility. She also boasts the following AKC titles: CD, AX, AXJ, CGC, and TDI. She has several NADAC titles as well. You don't accomplish all that unless the dog is truly enjoying the process!

The Purina event came their way when the judge for the event was asked to supply a list of dogs and handlers to Purina. They wanted titled dogs that were fast and showy and that would be crowd pleasers and they did not want all border collies or shelties! Since Piper is one of only five dogs from New York City to have earned an AX and AXJ, the Purina people loved the idea of the corgi in the challenge. And while she didn't win (she placed 4th in the regional trials), Piper won everyone's heart and she ended up with lots of additional exposure.

In addition to her Letterman shot, Piper and some canine buddies posed for a layout in Town & Country Magazine (August, 2001 issue). Her photo appeared prominently in the story CANINE JOCKS by Julia Szabo in the NYPOST.COM pages on July 8, 2001. In the POST story, Jean explained that most of Piper's training takes place on an obstacle course that she sets up in her apartment building, which brings a cheering audience of neighbors to watch Piper maneuver her way through plastic tunnels, hoops, a weave pole, teeter-totter and an A-frame. Jean also explained that the carpet is heavily padded in the hallway so Piper doesn't get hurt if she wipes out.

It should also come as no surprise to other corgi owners that Piper's major motivation is homemade goodies. In Jean's case, she cuts up a pack of hot dogs into super-thin slices, sprinkles them with garlic powder and sticks them under the broiler so they get nice and crunchy.

I asked Jean if all this attention and fame has affected Piper in any way. "Well," Jean replied, "she has been demanding bottled water on all of her shoots and has special organic salmon shipped from Alaska when ever possible. She will only play with the dogs that stayed up to watch her on the David Letterman show and that got up early enough to see her on Good Morning America! She asked for a new "larger" crate and that her sister, Girlie, not get fed first anymore!! I am presenting the agility segment for this years APDT (Association of Pet Dog Trainers) conference in September and Miss Thing wants her own room!!!!" (Somehow I doubt if she will get it. I have a feeling she'll have to share with Jean!)

And what is in store for Piper's future? "Oh," Jean quipped, tongue in cheek, "a book, movies, dog food

packaging, paw print in Hollywood (OK, maybe the new cement recently poured near our apartment). But, seriously, I plan on continuing with Piper's herding training and find time for us to do more therapy work. And, keep her happy and healthy!"

So, if you saw Piper in action on Letterman, know that you were watching a small dog with a very big heart! Life dealt her some lemons and she, with the help of a dedicated owner and a wise veterinarian, allowed it to become lemonade! Way to Go, Piper!

Note: I mentioned that my visit with Jean turned up some very interesting coincidence. When I asked about Piper's breeding and was told that her mother was a Saddlelane bitch, I was curious as to whether Ch. Cypress Astoria was in her pedigree. Tory is a full sister to my daughter's grand old corgi, Cypress Night Raider, HC (Bandit, now 12). Well, seems that not only is Tory Piper's grandmother, she was retired with a woman who lives in Jean's apartment building and they met shortly after Jean brought Piper home as a puppy! I guess we really do live in a very small world.

Author's note: It isn't unusual to begin a new project with some trepidation. Following in Marian Your's shoes with this column was daunting! She set an awesome standard for one to follow. Thanks, Kathy, for giving me the opportunity to try. I also appreciate all the notices of "corgi sightings" I've already received. Please keep them coming.

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