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Deaf Dogs Rock!

By Sarah Bous-Leslie

There was a time in the not so distant past when deaf dogs were considered damaged goods.

They were routinely put down in shelters and by breeders. They were hard, if not impossible, to adopt out. Thankfully, a new more open minded view of deaf dogs is sweeping the nation! Thanks in part to a fantastic new group: Deaf Dogs Rock. This group was started by Christina Lee and her husband Chris, and focuses on networking adoptable deaf dogs for rescues across the nation.



Christina & Nitro (photo by Kristin Guffey)

The first experience Christina had with a deaf dog was when she rescued Nitro from death row. Nitro was very distant when he first came to live with her. No one had spent the time to develop a way of communicating with him. He had never formed a bond!

She spent a lot of time working with Nitro using a variation of clicker training used an open flash of her hand in place of the clicker noise. They worked together to formulate a language of different hand signs, and Nitro became her "white shadow". Once she had formed a bond with her deaf dog she realized that the bond was even stronger than with a lot of hearing dogs. Nitro needed to see her to communicate with her, so he followed her everywhere!

Word spread in Christina's area of her success training Nitro. She started getting calls from shelters and other rescues. They had deaf dogs that needed homes, could she help? Christina had found her passion. These dogs were amazing! They deserved homes, and people needed to be educated about deaf dogs. She and her husband formed Deaf Dogs Rock, and designed their website themselves. Within the first year they had won an award for best new site!

Cynthia Murray, owner of 4Legz Dog Treats in Chehalis, WA is also deaf. When she saw Dozer was up for adoption through Deaf Dogs Rock, she fell in love. Cynthia did not let it bother

her that Dozer was being fostered on the other side of the country, in Virginia, she knew it was meant to be! Once her adoption application was approved the harrowing experience of arranging for Dozer's trip to Washington began! Cynthia was finally able to book a flight for him on Alaska Air. It was very stressful right down to the last moment, because the temperature had to be no higher than 75 degrees at the departing and arrival airports for Dozer to be allowed on board. That's rare in the summer! Everything worked out perfectly, and Dozer flew from Washington D.C. to Seattle. Once he arrived the stress of the logistics were quickly forgotten!

I got to meet Dozer a week after he arrived. I hadn't even said "hi" to him yet, when I experienced firsthand one of the challenging things about having a deaf dog. I was saying hello to Cynthia at the front door, and Dozer squeezed right past me! He raced away around the house, and I panicked! He can't hear me, there was no way to call him back! Cynthia acted quickly and said, "Don't chase him!" which had been my initial reaction. She followed him slowly dropping to her knees where he could see her, and in moments Dozer got the message and ran right to her. Whew!

"The scariest thing about owning a deaf dog is the fear of them getting out", she shared with me as we caught our breath. "You have no recall, and they can't hear cars or other dangers coming, you have to be very careful!". Dozer was already settling in with his new sisters, Auburn and Goldie.



Cynthia & Dozer

It was easy to see that he had already deeply bonded with Cynthia, as he kept his eyes on her. "He's getting accustomed to his new home very fast," Cynthia told me. "He is frightened of shadows, but that will just take time to work with him." Cynthia told me that she and Dozer are working out their own sign language that works for them. Traditional human sign language



Photo by Christina Lee

doesn't always work because the signs need to be very visual from even across the room.

I recently met Dianne Marlow at a dog event in Tacoma. She adopted her deaf dog Keller as a puppy. She described to me how she developed a "I'm-serious-now" pointing finger, as opposed to a "first-time-I've asked" pointing finger. She told me that she and Keller did agility together for a while. She ended up getting a lot of exercise running along with him so he could see her commands!

The truth is, deaf dogs are great pets! They may have a different way of communication, but they can do anything a hearing dog can do. If you check out the "Wall of Fame" on DeafDogsRock.com you will see alumni that are therapy dogs, canine good citizens, and even service dogs.

Deaf Dogs Rock is such an amazing resource for owners, fosters, and rescuers of deaf dogs! They are there to help with a supportive community, advice with training, or help networking a dog in need. Check out their website for deaf adoptable dogs in your area!



www.DeafDogsRock.com