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# TWO

## THE INFLUENTIAL DOG

How have dogs changed the world?

*"If dogs talked, one of them would be president by now. Everybody likes dogs."* – Dean Koontz

An interesting analysis of world leaders and power brokers shows that dog ownership is an incredibly common binding trait. Leaders, it would appear, love dogs. And when it comes to leaders, the greatest of them all, it could be argued, was Alexander the Great.

Alexander was only 32 years old when he died, but, during his short time on earth, he conquered most of the known world, and is exalted as one of history's most notable leaders. Alexander's conquests laid the foundations for modern civilisation, and brought together the continents of Europe and Asia. It says a deal about him that the revered Roman leader Julius Caesar – at the age of 32 – is said to have fallen to his knees and wept at a statue of Alexander, bemoaning his own lack of achievement in comparison (something he was to rectify in the coming years.)

However, without his beloved canine sidekick, Peritas, Alexander the Great might have been Alexander the Average. When the formidable leader was overwhelmed by the army of Persia's Darius III, Alexander's faithful companion is said to have attacked an elephant leading a charge against his master. Alexander subsequently survived the onslaught and lived to carry out his now immortal conquests. Western civilisation as we know it could have been immeasurably different, thought, had not the dog risked his own life to save that of his illustrious master. So enamoured with his beloved companion was he that Alexander named a city after Peritas. As you can see, dogs have been making quite an impression on the human landscape for some considerable time, now.

Peritas was a Molossian – an ancient breed from which today's modern Mastiffs descend. The faithful dog followed Alexander in all his epic conquests, and risking his life in battle with his master was not a one-off occurrence.

When Alexander was trapped alone on the wrong side of the Mallians fortification, his men were blocked from reaching their leader. Leonnatus, one of Alexander's loyal officers who was fighting fiercely for his own survival during the battle, heard Peritas howl and bark from behind him, and, without looking over his shoulder, shouted "Go, Peritas! Run to Alexander!" The fearless hound ran through a great gathering of fighting men, and leapt into a huddle of Mallians who had just inflicted a serious javelin wound on Alexander. Peritas took down several of them, giving Alexander's troops the time they needed to reach their leader and prevent him from being killed.

Peritas, however, had not been as lucky; in saving his great master, he had been mortally wounded. With the last of his strength, he laid his head on the wounded king's lap and passed away, gazing into the eyes of his master.



# FOUR

## HOW DOGS BENEFIT HUMAN HEALTH

Man's best friend, Man's best doctor

*"To sit with a dog on a hillside on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden, where doing nothing was not boring – it was peace." – Milan Kundera*

It's ironic. So keen was he to prove that dogs were a common cause of allergies in children, he insisted that any child growing up with a dog was likely to spend more time off school, and sniff and sneeze their way to adulthood. Egg truly landed on face when, in fact, it was proven that the exact opposite is actually the case.

I refer to a robust exchange I once had with an adamant young man who was preparing a radio phone-in on the dangers of dogs and children. He'd decided/assumed that not only did dogs represent a safety hazard to youngsters, they were also (probably) the cause of all manner of allergies and skin complaints, and all but totally responsible for just about every possible ailment a child could suffer in their formative years.

Whoops.

He couldn't have been more spectacularly wrong.

If you are the parent of a young child with asthma, you will be well aware of the differing views about whether or not it's a good idea to have a pet in the house. As it turns out, at the time of the phone-in, I was already aware of the six-year study of 9000 children that had been carried out in Germany, which actually found that children have less chance of suffering from allergies if they share their home with a canine member of the family.

Professor Guy Marks, head of the epidemiology group at the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research in Sydney, conducted the research, and couldn't have been clearer in his interpretation of the findings when he told ABC News Australia:

"This research is another piece of evidence which fits with previous research to suggest that there's something about having pets which seems to be associated with protection against development of allergic disease. There have now been a number of these studies. Most of them have related to cats, but some, like this one, relate to dogs.

"I suspect there's nothing specific about pets, about cats and dogs, it's probably a general phenomenon about having household pets.

"What it is about having the pets that's protective still remains unclear."

When asked whether the study findings gave credence to the theory that children in non-dog households were simply unable to build up immunity as a result of an all but complete lack of 'access to bacteria,' he responded:

## PROBLEM-SOLVING: THE CANINE WAY

- 62 Dandie Dinmont Terrier/Petit Basset Griffon Vendeen/Tibetan Terrier/Japanese Chin/Lakeland Terrier
- 63 Old English Sheepdog
- 64 Great Pyrenees
- 65 Scottish Terrier/Saint Bernard
- 66 Bull Terrier
- 67 Chihuahua
- 68 Lhasa Apso
- 69 Bullmastiff

Lowest degree of working/obedience intelligence  
*Understanding of new commands: 80 to 100 repetitions or more*  
*Obey first command: 25 per cent of the time or worse*

- 70 Shih Tzu
- 71 Basset Hound
- 72 Mastiff
- 73 Beagle
- 74 Pekingese
- 75 Bloodhound
- 76 Borzoi
- 77 Chow Chow
- 78 Bulldog/Basenji/Afghan Hound

### **The drawbacks**

It might seem logical to assume that dogs with the best working and obedience abilities are the most intelligent breeds; however, it does not necessarily follow that they are the breeds which are best at problem-solving. Many dogs with very high adaptive intelligence seem to be relatively unresponsive to attempts at teaching them obedience exercises; the simplest obedience commands may leave them completely at a loss. On the other hand, some dogs with only moderate levels of adaptive intelligence can, with the right form of training, execute obedience work quite well, and even perform apparently quite complex tricks and exercises.

There are similar problems with other ways of trying to measure canine intelligence. Individual breeds possess very different inherited behaviours, which can affect their reaction when trying to measure intelligence. Dogs are pack animals, of course, and, as such, they generally have the ability to work together to hunt prey, displaying group problem-solving skills. However, some dogs have exhibited these skills when acting alone.

Take, for example, the Lakeland Terrier, number 62 on Coren's list. This breed originated in the Lake District of England, and, in common with many terriers, his main objective was to hunt vermin. For generations, the dog has been used in the Lake District for the purpose of exterminating the fell foxes which raided the farmer's sheep fold during the lambing season. Whereas most terrier breeds have only to bolt their quarry, or to mark it by baying, the Lakeland must be able to kill the foxes in their lair.

Terriers are renowned for being friendly, bold, and confident. They are intelligent and independent-minded, especially when going after prey. They are rated highly for problem-solving, as they often have to do their job alone. A terrier going to ground after a fox, badger or rat has to decide which tunnel to take, when to pursue, and when to back up, all without benefit of human instruction or support.

Most terriers exhibit 'selective deafness' on occasion when their attention is elsewhere, and are not as easy to train as some breeds, such as Collies and Labradors. These dogs are not unintelligent, they just demonstrate their brightness in ways that are not easily measurable.

# EIGHT



## THE SECRET TO A HAPPY, HEALTHY, WELL-BEHAVED DOG

Gentle, effective dog care

*"Properly trained, a man can be dog's best friend."* – Corey Ford

We can't discuss the ever-evolving relationship between man and canine without taking the time to examine role reversal in this respect.

In this book we have looked at the dog from the point of view of what we can learn from him. Of course, it is our responsibility to guide and teach our four-legged friends how to show desirable, acceptable behaviour in our modern, human society. Sadly, in this endeavour, too many dogs are let down through naivety or simple plain ignorance.

Dogs come to us, in the main, hardwired to learn and please us. Centuries of domestication, selective breeding, and what should be expanding knowledge of canine learning have resulted in an animal that is pliable, biddable, and extremely intelligent. In this chapter, we take a break from the notion of how we can learn from dogs, and focus instead on the crucially important aspects of how we can best serve them in terms of being their teacher and carer.

"He was the consummate protector. My most feared enemies dared not come around so long as this white-faced, fearless guardian was about. His persistence was unmatched, and his only satisfaction was to know that I was safe. A wise old boy, well travelled and experienced, he had instinctively come to sense the dangers long before I ever recognized them. His methods were fierce and swift; like a fire burning out of control, he consumed the prowlers at once, leaving no trace of the treacherous beings that crept up in the night.

"He joined my family in November of 1999, bringing smiles to our faces and joy to our hearts. Not unlike a firstborn child, he depended on me for all of his needs, and I would not come to appreciate how our roles would switch until much later in our lives. As we entered adulthood together, we experienced the trials of change. At first it was a new family member, our daughter, whom he took under his care from the moment he met her. A larger family now to protect and to care for, he carried out this role admirably for many years. In time, my wife and I – his 'parents,' as we affectionately called ourselves – decided to go our separate ways. I could see his heart breaking over this decision, one that he had no part in, one that would ultimately divulge the true purpose of his life's work.

"He was middle-aged when we moved to Florida. Although this stop on the journey through life was filled with morning and evening walks on the beach, one of his favourite places to play, he became very attentive to my need of him, staying closer to me and becoming acutely aware of my hidden enemies – feelings of regret, hopelessness and despair – the demons that would torment