

Tuff Break

Take advantage of training, and you and your GSD will both be better for it. **BY ROGER SIPE**

During my childhood in the 1970s and '80s, dogs didn't need to be trained. At least, that's what my family thought. We had two great Collies, who both lived long lives and seemed to be very happy and loving. And we didn't train them a lick.

Today, I know better. True, I did have the greatest dogs of all time (what child didn't?), but how much happier could those wonderful childhood Collies have been if I had the knowledge that I do now? Plus, how much happier could I have been, if only I had been trained? That's right, the one who needed training was me.

I first realized that dog training isn't really about dogs but, about their owners when a high-school friend got a German Shepherd Dog. Tuffy, as he was called, was a really cute GSD puppy, full of wonderment and curiosity. However, instead of filling his mind with the good stuff (obeying cues like sit, down, stay, come), his owner, my friend, thought it was funny to "mess" with him by acting upset and hurt when I would come over. It was entertaining to her to see the puppy growl at her friends.

In time, Tuffy grew into a powerful adult, and because he hadn't been properly trained, he eventually became a liability as well as a neighborhood nuisance. Many times I had to sit in my car while my friend got Tuffy under control. If I got out, I knew I would have been toast. Inevitably, the time came when I drove up and was not greeted by the menacing GSD, so I hopped out of my car without a thought. Luckily it was winter and I was wearing a big, thick coat, because within seconds I was playing schutzhund



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with Tuffy — only he wasn't playing. Nothing is more terrifying than having a powerful dog locked on your forearm. Fortunately, my friend heard the commotion (did I really have such a high-pitch scream?!) and ordered Tuffy to stop.

That event was followed by several other bites by Tuffy in the neighborhood, and my friend knew what she had to do: Train him. Unfortunately for Tuffy, the training methods and timing were all wrong. Out came the shock collar for an adult dog. When I saw Tuffy "go down" from his first shock, rendered as he was running toward me (I was the bait to test the new device), I didn't feel like it was payback for him biting me. I felt sad. Tuffy was at heart

a really good dog, and there was no questioning his intelligence. His owner just had not had the proper training, and therefore, didn't pass along the correct information to him. Needless to say, the shock collar didn't teach Tuffy anything except that the little box on his neck would cause him pain. His life potential was never reached, not because of what he did but because of what his owner did not do.

The best thing about training is that basically, it isn't difficult. OK, maybe getting your dog to become an agility champion or act in a Hollywood movie does take a lot of work, but for the most part, getting a well-mannered, happy dog just takes patience, consistency and a little knowledge. The patience and consistency we'll leave to you. The basic knowledge is right here inside this issue. Don't let your dog end up like Tuffy. Start training your GSD right now, the correct way. ♦