

Sheepdog Training

“This is going to be a great day!” I had thought that morning.

How wrong I was.

The sun had just started to venture over the horizon, making the dew sparkle on the grass in the paddocks surrounding our farmhouse. I watched as the lambs frolicked about, without a care in the world.

Our old sheepdog, Dusty, was trustworthy but was growing old. Soon he would be too stiff to be out in the paddocks, and I would have to train our new puppy into a sheepdog.

I had finally convinced Dad that I was responsible enough. He had left in the early hours of dawn to go and pick our new puppy up.

“Tilly!” shouted Dad, the excitement rising up in his voice. And that's when I heard the yipping.

I rushed down the staircase, the worn carpet under my feet. I could barely contain myself. I was anxious, because I really wanted to train the new puppy well.

It had been my dream for as long as I could remember.

It had been a few months, since we had gone to look at a litter of pure-bred border collie pups. The moment we laid eyes on them, Dad and I knew that they were perfect. We had to have one.

Dad went to talk to the lady who was selling the puppies, but as their conversation went on, my heart sank. Dad trudged back over to me, and you could see the despair in his eyes.

The puppies were being sold for a price that was ridiculously high.

We left, and sadly drove back home, for we could never afford one.

But then, our lucky day arrived. One of the pups, the runt, hadn't been sold. The lady was keen to get rid of him, so, she was kind enough to sell him to us for less than half of the original price.

As I bustled into the living room, my eyes lit up as I saw the large cardboard box stationed beside our sagging sofa. I sat down in front of the box, fingering the small breathing holes. The sofa sighed as Dad sat down, and watched as my nimble but shaking hands opened the box...

My eyes adjusted to the dim light, and rested upon the puppy's four white socks. He had a soft white muzzle and satiny black ears. His big, brown eyes darted from me to Dad, while his shaggy tail wagged continuously. I reached over the edge of the box, and stroked his neck. Dad pulled a shiny red collar out of his trouser pocket, and carefully fastened it around the puppy's neck.

As first the puppy didn't seem to like the collar, and scratched at it disdainfully.

“Don't worry. I'm sure he'll get used to it.” smiled Dad. Suddenly, a scraping sound came from the depths of the box. I peered over, and realised the puppy had started to play, with some shredded cardboard that he had ripped off the sides of the box.

“I think I'm going to have to keep him busy,” I laughed, “on something that isn't destroying the

house!”

Dad grinned, and pulled a brown leather leash out from inside his slightly muddy back pocket. “Keep this on him at all times when you're outside,” warned Dad. “And if you need any help,” He continued in a less serious tone “I’ll be over in the paddocks.” He gestured to the lambs, prancing about in the lush green grass.

With that, Dad pulled on his gumboots, walked out the door and was soon hard at work in the paddocks. Meanwhile, I was hard at work on our front lawn, beginning the first steps of sheepdog training. It is important not to be too forceful, because some sheepdogs make a slow start to their training. But I was determined to succeed.

“OK,” I said to the Puppy, who was still unsure about his new collar. “Let's start with fetch.” I brought the Puppy over to the garden shed, and hauled the old sports bag out. It was full of sheepdog training equipment. I lugged the bag into the centre of the lawn, all the while keeping a firm hold of the puppy's leash. I tied him to a tree, and unzipped the bag. But it hadn't been opened since Dad was training Dusty, and just my luck, the zip wouldn't budge for more than a few centimetres. After a lot of tugging, I managed to get it halfway open. I reached inside, and found a yellow rubber ball. I turned around to where the puppy was tied. Except he wasn't. The only things left, were the leash and the shiny red collar. “Well.” I thought. “He really didn't like wearing it.”

He can't have gone far. That's what I told myself, as I hunted around the house, in any places where a little puppy could be hiding. I was listening out for a sound, that might tell me where he is.

Of course, I could go and ask Dad for help. Dad would be able to find him. Unlike me. But, if I told Dad that I lost the puppy, he would think that I'm not responsible enough to look after him on my own. The truth is, I'm probably not. But Dad doesn't know that. Suddenly, I hear scratching. Followed by the sound of dirt being thrown onto the ground. I spin around and spot my puppy finish digging under the fence. Then, I see his shaggy black tail disappear. Under my neighbour's fence.

I sprint over to the fence, and climb over. Luckily there is no barbed wire, and the electricity on this part of the fence is hardly ever turned on. On the other side of the fence, all I can see are a bunch of sycamore trees, and a large goldfish pond. Everything is so still. There is no wind rustling through the leaves, and not a single ripple on the surface of the pond. I move slowly past the sycamore trees, and over to a large weathered barn. Beside the barn is a large paddock. Many sheep are flocking through the gate, and others are being driven in by a man and his two sheep dogs.

The man is yelling at his dogs, who don't seem to be concentrating very well. They are barking at something, and have stopped driving the sheep into the paddock. Then I realise that my puppy is running around, startling the sheep and distracting the other sheepdogs. I jump over the fence, but my puppy is nowhere to be seen. I push through the crowd of sheep, to where I last saw him. There he is! Standing beside the taller of the sheepdogs. The man sees him too, and rushes over to grab him. He trips and falls over a stray piece of wood, right onto his face. I scoop my puppy into my arms, and stand there, in the middle of the castastrophe.

Dad would tell me to carry on, and keep trying. But honestly, how am I going to get out of this one?!

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