

Queenie

Queenie was born in 1963 to parents King and Lady. She was a purebred German Shepherd whose parents were registered with the Canadian Kennel Club.

My friend Ralph who worked at the Paul Cornoyer's minkranch and stayed at our house as a border, decided he wanted to raise some dogs. For what reason I don't know, but he bought the female, Lady, from a guy in Onoway. I recall going to this guy's house with Ralph and picking the dog up. She was very, very timid, like she had been beaten. She was afraid of us, the car, noise, all kinds of things. Ralph built a kennel at the minkranch for her and kept her there on a daily basis.

Later we went to Edmonton to buy King, the male, from some guy who had advertised him for sale in the newspaper. The guy was moving into an apartment or down East and he couldn't keep the dog anymore. King was the opposite of Lady, very aggressive and not timid at all. I wasn't afraid of him, but I didn't exactly take chances either. Ralph put the two dogs together and shortly after, Lady had 13 pups, her first litter. I remember when I first saw the two together. As we approached the kennel, they both stuck their heads out of the dog house and looked out as if they were saying, "Yeah, we're a couple, so what?"

Ralph's intention was to sell the pups and make some money. One pup went to Robert Daignault, a pup to O'neil Chevalier, Ralph took one, named Chico, the others I don't know about. I was supposed to get the runt of the litter, the last one born, and according to my mother this one died and she gave me HERS. Now why SHE would have a dog other than Ralph's Chico, and in addition to the one I was going to get, I don't quite understand, so I think she was mistaken about this part of the story.

Queenie came home as a little puppy and we had to feed it milk with a doll's milk bottle. She soon was able to drink on her own out of a saucer (she would step in the saucer as she drank), then solid food. She was MY dog.

King was sold to O'neil Chevalier for the garage that he owned, to serve as a guard dog. Some creeps who wanted to break into the garage poisoned him a few months later. Lady was given to Father Pratt who operated the Mission at Alexander Indian Reserve. Whether he wanted her or not, he ended up with her. Not sure how he managed to get money to feed her, or when she died.

Chico was a dumb dog that couldn't be taught anything. Daignault's dog spent months in a dog training facility and was not trainable either. Queenie on the other hand was extremely smart. People, including the RCMP, who wanted her for breeding, were amazed at the tricks she learned and how quick she learned them. I taught her all the usual tricks, like roll-over, beg, shake-a-paw, speak, stop, heel, sit, and play-dead. For the latter, I would almost torture her (I called it training), by making her stay still as I poured cold water on her, or walked around her telling her not to move her head. I couldn't get her to close her eyes, but she passed the other tests. Once I gave her her supper and told her to "Stay", "Don't touch". She looked at her food as I went into the house to test her. Well, I forgot about her and an hour or so later, someone told me she was whimpering outside. Oh my god! I ran out and told her she could eat. My brother reminded me of this story in a movie that I made for my mother's 80th birthday, in 2000.

When we moved to Edmonton, I taught Queenie all her tricks in French and also in hand-signals. Like I said, she was smart.

My brother would wrestle with me in front of Queenie and she would "feign" an attack on him, barking and yelping, and lunging at him. She didn't bare her teeth. My brother thought this was amusing, and I guess I did too, but just a little while ago (as I write this in 2006), an old guy did this with his wife's dog and the dog tore his throat out, killing him!!

Queenie had her mother and father's genes for sure. The intelligence of her father and the gentleness of her mother. One day when I took her for a walk, a little Chihuahua came running and barking at her. Queenie put her tail between her legs and cowered in fear. I was so embarrassed, especially when the owner of that rat-dog laughed at the situation. I taught her how to "sic 'em" and the next time this occurred,

she went on the aggressive and chased anything I told her to, including the rat-dog. I would say "sic 'em" to her when I saw mice and she would chase them until she got them and killed them.

I buried her ball, her favourite toy, in the garden one time and made her dig for it. She was digging in the potatoes, and I was harvesting them as she shot them out between her back legs, looking for her ball. When Ralph and I would play catch with a baseball, Queenie would go nuts and I had to untie her, knowing that if she got the ball, it would soon be covered with slobber. This happened whenever one of us dropped the ball. Queenie was right there and would grab it and run back to her house where she put the ball in her water-pail. She would run back and forth relentlessly between the two of us, trying to get this ball. There were times we had to stop because I thought she would have a heart-attack. As I approached her at the water pail, she would pick the ball up, rather than give it back or take the drink she really wanted and needed. She loved to fetch and would fetch anything, but the ball was always the best.

I took her with me when I was working night shift at Dow Chemical in Fort Saskatchewan. I worked alone in the Water Treatment Plant, well away from everyone else, and I had to get samples from near the North Saskatchewan River. The Town was famous for its penitentiary, and prisoners who escaped would follow the river.

Once, on the way to work in my Mustang with Queenie sitting of the front seat, I hit a snowdrift on Highway 28, and it spun me around and I hit the ditch, going in backwards on the other side of the highway. Queenie got bounced around but she was okay.

I didn't ask for permission to take Queenie into the plant because I was sure I would be turned down, but one evening, the boss of the electricians came in and Queenie barked and was very aggressive towards him. His face was flush...he might have even pissed his pants. My boss asked me about the next time we met. Fortunately for all, Queenie was tied to a post in the control room where the encounter happened. She wouldn't have bit the guy. My boss didn't disallow me to take the dog because he understood the situation, but that I should be aware of these types of consequences.

Queenie would ride with me in the truck and sometimes we would walk on the road in river valley where I had to take my readings. She would chase rabbits in the snow, a funny sight for sure, and barked at big rocks more than once.

To get her into the plant, I would make her lay down on the front seat as I went through the security gate..

She liked the water and would fetch there too, but there wasn't any water in Morinville except in spring time. When we lived in Fort Saskatchewan in the mid-70s I would take her down to the river and throw sticks for her to retrieve. We didn't do that much either because I had to put her in the back seat of my little Vauxhall Viva and she would really get it wet and stinky after swimming.

Whenever we had meals outside in the back yard at Fort Saskatchewan, I would let her out of her pen so she could join us and get the scraps off the table, usually steak bones with lots of meat on it. Her pen was on the side of the house where I could fence off a small section for her to walk around in. I built her a dog house with a food and water dish holder in front of it, accessible from the basement window. This is how she was fed daily.

When I went to school in Edmonton, I had her with us at the house and would play with her after school or on the weekends. I taught her the basic commands in French and also hand-signals, like "come, stop, lay down". She was a tri-lingual dog!! I would steal her a block of Kraft cream cheese every once in awhile for a treat because I had no money to buy her anything.

The next year when mom moved back to Morinville, I had to stay with the people she sold this house too and I also stayed at neighbors next door. I could not keep her with me at this time so my brother Don took her and he did a good job. He would take her to work and let her ride in the back of the truck, another thing she really enjoyed. When I came back to Morinville and bought a house for the wife and new child, that's when I took her back. She stayed in the garage where I had a gas furnace and she had a doggy door to go

out in the back. Often she would go out there and go sit on my brother's door step, at home or at work. She was confused I guess about the ownership and her temporary "care-givers" were probably too nice to her, like grandparents being so nice to grandchildren. Whenever I scolded her for something she could always be found at my brother's.

I have had a tremendous amount of guilt since she died because of the way she lived, not when she was young and we lived in Morinville or Edmonton, but in Fort Saskatchewan. Before the Fort, I could devote all my attention to her because she was all I had. In the Fort, with the wife, two kids, shiftwork and the many hobbies and other work I was doing, I neglected her. I didn't take her out much and she got fat. When I did take her out for a walk or a run, I expected her to be like she was still a puppy, not realizing she was in her old age. And she had arthritis in her hips, a common ailment for this breed. I medicated her myself in most cases. My wife Lynn gave her shots of cortisone in the hips, every once in awhile, I treated her for ringworm, a skin disease. I never took her to the vet when I should have.

I put a light bulb in her house and turned it on when it was really cold outside. Her house was insulated with 2" Styrofoam and just her own body heat was enough to keep her warm. Rather than measure the temperature of the internals, I just put the light in and deflected it so she would get the heat and not the bright light itself. Well, that didn't work worth a shit. It was TOO hot, even when it was -30 deg out. I noticed she was leaving her house panting, in cold weather!! I stopped that right away but I feel so guilty about torturing her like that, making her so uncomfortable.

There were times we forgot to feed her. I would sometimes phone Lynn and ask her if the dog was fed, but sometimes I forgot, and even with a reminder, Lynn sometimes forgot. So when we did feed her, she was so starved she wolfed it down and then got sick.

I was once criticized for not putting her in the house, but she was not a house dog. She was a 100 pound, hairy, working animal and in those days, the 70's animals stayed outside. She was supposed to be outside but in retrospect, I should have given her more room, played with and exercised her more.

The day finally came when Lynn told me that the best thing for Queenie was to put her to sleep. I reluctantly agreed and when Lynn took her to the vet to have the deed done, I cried my eyes out for my lovely dog. I probably never loved anything more in my life, a statement that most dog or cat owners would identify with.

I buried her on the farm I had bought near Lamont, in a big box I made out of Styrofoam. I put my housecoat on top of her and put a couple pictures inside the box. I took her choke chain off which I still have, hanging up in my home shop, near a picture of her sitting in front of my mother's house.

I made a movie in her honor and attached it to the movie I made for my mother's 80th birthday. The Queenie movie was made with Super8 film, not video. I converted it later to video at the risk of losing some detail. I used the music Homecoming by Hagood Hardy and showed mostly stills, but some video of her last days. I bought the farm too late and had trucks too late for her to enjoy them. After Fort Saskatchewan we moved to an acreage near Bon Accord and I know that's a place she would have loved. The dog we did have there, Guy, Rob's dog was a free spirit on the acreage.