

A World of Accordions Museum

September, 2007

Newsletter for Members

A Cookie Newsletter

A new dog in my life is big news around here! After all, we can't use just any dog.

The dog in my world is a pet-companion but must remain a non-anthropomorphized working animal: 1) accept me as final authority (it's called "pack-leader" now-a-days); 2) remain, or become, psychologically and behaviorally reliable; 3) learn basic, and then advanced, obedience commands; 4) discriminate between friends or non-threatening strangers, and situations in which I expect her protection. She must also accept into the family, any other member I choose—like cats.



Welcome to "Cookie," our new German Shepherd dog—in training! She's happily learning everything! I found her picture on the web, among the thousands of dogs looking for a chance at a "forever home." I liked something about her expression and phoned *Raccoon Valley Animal Sanctuary and Rescue* (Des Moines area) to inquire about her situation and traits. Only a few days later a lovely voice named Linda called me in response, and after a chat, both Cookie and I passed first muster. Then came conversations with another friendly voice named Julie, the adoption application, check of my references, and a couple of weeks of waiting. This agency gets my highest praises for caring matches and solicitous cooperative efforts.

Before contact with *Raccoon Valley Animal Sanctuary and Rescue*, I thought I was in charge of the choosing process! I thought myself well-qualified to adopt: I've been friends with my local German Shepherd Rescue people since I adopted three from them 11 years ago and helped in the placements of several other GSs among my friends (the Petersons retired last year); I've never had a problem getting a new pet from local shelters (I mean, a new cat now and then); and my veterinarians know me and the animals well. I was pretty naïve. I thought any agency would jump at the chance to get one of those thousands of GS dogs into my home. Well Hello real world!

My first step was to contact local GS rescues and humane societies. OK, so it takes a while for volunteers to screen email applications and phone calls. OK, some people might be easier to home-visit and otherwise check out. OK, that the whole adoption process is stringent. OK, that there might be thousands of people out there ready and qualified to receive the thousands of needy dogs. But for me, who received no call or response whatsoever from Minneapolis-St. Paul shelters, and none from as far away as Chicago (even after repeated phone calls), the months preceding "Cookie" were frustrating and eye-opening. My confidence shaken, I think maybe I committed some nebulous disqualifier in application, am considered too old or female to be Alpha by young eyes, or maybe other families appear

more ideal. I might next time just go out and buy a dog. That shouldn't be against my desire to "rescue," but it should be against the principles of adoption agencies. Adoption is the operative word, isn't it?

Now I'm not new to German Shepherds. I've trained each of the seven or so that accompanied various stages of my life. Each passed levels of obedience training, two came to Schutzhund status, and a couple were rehabilitated from aggressiveness. Each evolved into a trusted, emotionally stable companion—part pet and part working dog. Each lived a full and interesting life, was well-loved, and was respected by hundreds who visit my world.

Cookie's story is not unlike many others. She was seized from her Texas owner for neglect and abuse. She likely would have been euthanized for heartworms, malnutrition and other physical ailments. Fortunately she got a second chance through ***Raccoon Valley Animal Sanctuary and Rescue*** (www.raccoonvalley.com). There she underwent emergency surgery, was spayed, vaccinated, and placed into foster care. Now I come into the picture to continue her emotional and physical recovery. Cookie was delivered to me—yes, driven up to my door—by volunteer Joe, who then stayed a while to assure himself about Cookie's new home. He very kindly showed me new training techniques (by Cesar Millan) to which Cookie had been introduced at the shelter.

Cookie is absolutely willing to cooperate and learn—she's at a perfect point for training. Only a few days have passed since she arrived, yet I'm sure her temperament is faultless. We are attached to each other already. The cats have begun to trust her too. She's met many of my students and has begun to understand her role. In return, she's been promised the things a dog needs: nutritious food, proper veterinary care, indoor status, great yards in which to run and play, protection of a new collar with all the important tags, and me, a caring human with whom to develop mutually meaningful life. Forever!

Maybe it all means that Cookie was meant to come to me and all possible competitors were eliminated beforehand. Later, maybe, I'll add another GS to the family. But for now, despite her sweet name, Cookie shows potential fulfillment of every requirement.

If you are a dog-lover, visiting the Museum just to meet "Cooks" could be a primary incentive. It'll be all right that our unique accordion attraction be secondary for a while.