

The New Jersey Dog Whisperer

BY VERA LAWLOR

When will we be able to trust our dog again? That's often the question posed to canine behaviorist Janice Wolfe of Wyckoff when she arrives at a client's home.

"Last night I visited a family with two children – a 12-year-old and a 14-year-old – and a 1-year-old, 100-pound giant schnauzer. The dog had bitten the housekeeper and that's why the family called for help," says Wolfe, who has worked with thousands of problem dogs.

If this particular dog was returned to the breeder, the family was told, he would be euthanized because of his bite history. And, as with so many of the cases she works on, Wolfe was on a rescue mission for the schnauzer and for the family who loves him.

According to the Humane Society of the United States, there are nearly



Wolfe walking her pack of Rhodesian ridgebacks.

75 million dogs in the U.S., with 39 percent of households owning at least one dog. Each year, shelters euthanize anywhere from three-

four-million dogs, many of which are deemed aggressive.

Wolfe, who is also known as "New Jersey's Dog Whisperer," breeds and shows champion Rhodesian ridgebacks. She strives to teach people how to be pack leaders to their dogs.

"A pack leader protects, provides for and teaches his pack," says Wolfe, who is co-author of *There's Hope! The Four Essentials to a Stable Dog*, with Mark German, known as America's Dog Whisperer. "The first sign of an unstable leader is a dog with behavioral issues."

Wolfe says that she and German have worked together to "successfully rehabilitate thousands of aggressive, shy and fearful dogs, and to help their owners learn how to correct other unwanted problem behaviors, as well as to change their own lives for their dogs' sake."

The first order of business at the home of the family with the schnau-

zer was to discuss the steps that may have led to the current aggressive behavior.

"There's usually a progression. The dog does something and because the family doesn't know how to correct it, at that moment it becomes something more," says Wolfe. "Just like, if you caught your kid stealing a pack of gum. You are going to take care of it then and there. If you don't it could progress into something more."

The schnauzer's family said that their dog had never shown any signs of aggression before and the biting had just happened out of the blue.

"I told them that I found that hard to believe. Dogs don't just get a chemical imbalance one day and start biting people," says Wolfe.

As the family gave it more thought, they recalled that the schnauzer used to jump and mouth a lot as a puppy. Before long, they were naming a whole litany of early signs of aggressive behavior. And, as is the case in so many families, these behaviors went uncorrected and escalated.

"The family was doing the best that they knew how and, unwittingly, they caused the problems they were dealing with," says Wolfe.

Wolfe believes that the reason this schnauzer bit the housekeeper was because he was left alone downstairs at night while the other members of his "pack" slept upstairs. In his mind, the behaviorist says, he was protecting the rest of the "pack." From his open crate he could monitor all of the entrances and exits and it was when the housekeeper entered the home that he went into attack mode.

"People need to understand that dogs are very honest. They will gen-

Tips

Dog Behaviorist Janice Wolfe offers the following guidelines for how to live a happy healthy life with the family dog:

- 1) Dogs need rules just like children do.
- 2) Dogs live in the moment – so should we!
- 3) Dogs need four things: Leadership, the Proper Walk (with the pack leader – the human – in front), Rules and Good Nutrition.
- 4) Dogs do not need squeaky toys or dog parks, but if you have a stable dog, you can do anything you want to.
- 5) Families need to choose the right match in a dog for their families and lifestyle. Don't choose a dog by the "cute factor" but rather by the same criteria used in purchasing a new vehicle. Don't buy a Corvette if you need to transport kids; and don't buy a high-energy dog for a young family!
- 6) Never get angry at your dog – you need to teach your dog, like you teach your children, but never get angry or frustrated. Dogs see frustration and anger as a sign of instability and dogs won't follow an unstable leader. If you become unstable, your dog will become the leader and that's when behavior issues develop.

THE PET PLACE



COURTESY OF JOE FRAZZ
Janice Wolfe of Wyckoff with her Rhodesian ridgeback, Dakota.

erally do things out of honesty. They think they are doing the right thing," says Wolfe. "This family put the schnauzer in the position of guard dog by leaving him alone downstairs. In the wild it's not normal for pack members to sleep outside the den. They sleep inside the den where the pack leader can protect them."

When it comes to dogs with issues, it's extremely important, says Wolfe, that the dog is very clear about who the pack leader is. In the schnauzer's case, she told the family that he didn't have to sleep in a family member's bed, but that he

should be in one of their rooms so that he had the protection of one of the "pack leaders."

The goal of the dog whisperer duo is to give dog owners the basic essentials for reclaiming their role as leader of the pack, while using their own calm energy to bring peace and harmony to both the dogs and humans in their lives.

"There is no dog that we won't work with as long as the owners are willing to change," says Wolfe who travels around the country helping dogs, including shelter and rescue dogs.

When it comes to families, according to Wolfe, everyone has to be on board to help the dog get back on track. In the case of the schnauzer's family, one of the sons wasn't happy about the new approach to working with the dog.

"I told them I knew that they loved the dog and that either we were all on board together to fix the problem or we were going to let him die," Wolfe says. "I'm very up front in my approach. Families tell me that I am like *Nanny 911* for dogs."

Vera Lawlor is The Parent Paper's pet columnist. You can contact Vera at parentpaper@northjersey.com.



The Essentials

There's Hope! The Four Essentials to a Stable Dog is available for \$21.95 (plus shipping and handling) at www.americadogwhispererinc.com or by calling 866-964-DOGS (3647). All proceeds from the book benefit Merlin's Kids, a non-profit organization founded by Janice Wolfe, with the mission to provide service dogs to children with autism and to rescue and rehabilitate strays and shelter dogs. Each book comes with a loop leash, enabling owners to begin training their dogs using walking techniques described in the book. For more information, visit www.njdogwhisperer.com.



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