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FROM THE EDITOR | Madelyn van der Hoogt

Right at the peak of editing this issue of *Handwoven*, a friend called and said, “Madelyn, quick! The Dog Whisperer is on Oprah!” I had heard of the Dog Whisperer—almost in whispers—miracle tales of the magician who takes the most incorrigible dogs and without appearing to say or do anything, turns them into docile, well-behaved, happy pets. These whispers have always interested me, especially since my training of Huck has hit some snags. I turned on the TV.

There was Oprah, explaining to The Dog Whisperer (someone named Cesar Millan, who turns out to look like a pretty normal person, not ghostly or supernatural or whispery) about her dog Sophie. When she takes Sophie for a walk, for example, sometimes passersby recognize Oprah and come up to greet her. “No, no!” she cries, “Stay back! Dangerous dog!” since Sophie attacks strangers, both dogs and people. This is damaging to Oprah’s self-esteem: What has she done wrong to have such a badly behaved dog?

The Dog Whisperer said to Oprah something like: “You have to change the way you see Sophie. Sophie is a Dog (a pack animal) first, a Breed (cocker spaniel) second, a Pet (of Oprah) third, and a Human Being not at all.” He told Oprah that Sophie didn’t recognize Oprah as the leader of her pack, that Oprah lacked leadership skills.

It’s my guess that The Dog Whisperer doesn’t subscribe to the treat method of training. He didn’t use a single treat when he had four handlers with huge dogs on leashes walk up to Sophie sitting all by herself on Oprah’s porch. He just approached Sophie calmly, put a looped leash around her neck, and stood there quietly. In a few minutes she was wandering around making friends with the huge dogs. (I did notice that all the huge dogs had wagging tails from the get-go.)

It is probably not a good idea to mix training methods like it’s not a good idea to mix warping methods. I’m sure Huck does not know I’m the leader of our pack. He does know I’m a good source of treats. Maybe realizing I’m pack leader would change his out-of-control behavior around other dogs (like eating the inside of my car when he’s alone in it and sees a dog go by outside). It is certain that treats did nothing for the frenzy he went into when, at a patio party on Labor Day, a man preceded by a pet chicken on a leash walked down the street not ten feet away from us. Let’s see: chicken first (herd animal), breed second (Rhode Island Red). . . . The chicken, actually, was a credit to its owner. Huck, again, was damaging to my self-esteem. It’s a comfort to know that someone like Oprah has the same problem. I wonder how Sophie is doing now?

Madelyn

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