

Last year a dear friend introduced me to Deborah Lee Riley-Miller after several unsuccessful attempts to earn our Apprentice Water Dog title. From the comfort of my office chair via emails, Deborah Lee provided me with sage and loving advice for my training efforts with my then 4 year old intact boy Morgan. And while the failures were tremendous learning opportunities, I still felt that I was missing several puzzle pieces that would create an AWD.

When I learned the Portuguese Water Dog Club of Greater Chicagoland invited Deborah Lee to give 2 day workshop for junior and apprentice level water teams, I jumped at the chance to meet her and work with her in person.

The workshop was held at beautiful Sterling Lake just about an hour and a half north of Chicago. The park itself is absolutely gorgeous and is a calm and soothing place in which to have a group of eager humans and exuberant PWDs learn and play. The seminar was held on a lush grassy field adjacent to the pond and the water temperature was just right! The weather was perfect, even when we had a strong breeze on Sunday.

The seminar covered the basics of how canines learn and Deborah Lee provided essential and thorough information as to how to layer and sequence behaviors in order to create the desired results for becoming successful water working teams. She showed by example of how to simplify even the most challenging of tasks such as the take-hold-give. Where I had always molded or controlled Morgan's actions, Deborah Lee suggested waiting for the desired behavior and mark that desirable behavior/action when it was offered. While it may sound simple and obvious to many, I have a tendency to complicate matters. Deborah Lee was able to show us that the best results are generated when we are patient enough to wait for our PWDs to show us their thinking abilities, intelligence and sure enough they get creative and ultimately they problem-solve and demonstrate the desired behavior.

One of the characteristics I admire most about Deborah Lee is her focus on safety and consideration for our dogs. She is a creative teacher who has magnificent ideas as to how to successfully train our dogs. For example, she placed a grooming table out in the water at waist height and by doing so it was much easier for the dogs to place their heads underwater to "dive" for food and then ultimately that transitioned to the underwater retrieve. From there it was a simple matter to teach "jump" in a very safe yet fun manner. All the dogs learned at such a rapid rate since she had eliminated the obstacles that could create a fearful dog.

Deborah Lee stated that her goal as a judge was to "witness excellence" and she provided information, advise and support so that most all of the teams were able to accomplish their goals they set for this weekend.

I'm proud, oh, very proud to announce that CH Sunnyhill Morgan By The Lee, RE is now an Apprentice Working Dog. If it were not for Deborah Lee being a benevolent and calm teacher and judge, I don't think we would have passed. Morgan felt safe and secure even though his Mom exhibited all sorts of nervous energy, and in spite of me, he worked beautifully. Needless to say, I'm very proud of my boy!

I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to Deb Zorn for she encouraged us to come join the rest of your club for what turned out to be a magnificent weekend. Also a special thank-you to the officers and members of the Portuguese Water Dog Club of Greater Chicagoland, your hospitality, cheering and support enabled us to earn our Apprentice Water Dog title! Thank you so very, very much!

Sincerely,
Margo Fournier, aka Morgan's Mom
Arvada, CO