

It's coming up on my 2 year "Gotchya" anniversary but I still remember my first conversation with Ed at Shining Star GSP like it was yesterday: "I know that you don't usually sell your dogs to non-hunting families, but..."

I had chosen to contact Shining Star because I was looking for so much more than just a dog. I didn't hunt. I wasn't even remotely outdoorsy. But I needed a dog - a dog who was intelligent and versatile, a dog who was going to be willing to work hard. I needed a service dog and I wanted a GSP to fill that role. Shining Star GSP came with an amazing reputation so, even though it was quite specifically advertised that Ed would only sell to a hunting family, I figured it wouldn't hurt to ask if he might consider me and make an exception to that rule.

I'm not sure how, but I managed to pass Ed's interview and I was over the moon to know that I was going to get a little girl puppy from the Vicky/Jack litter. As luck would have it, when it came my turn to pick, a little girl with a spotted nose chose me. I was so excited... Layla came home to me on February 12th, 2015.

Life as a service dog is hard. You aren't really a dog, you are a medical device that needs constant training, programming and fine tuning. You are an extension of a person. Training is hard core and relentless. The behavior bar is set very high - and it is expected that, even though you are "just a puppy" or "just a dog", your behavior will be better than that of the humans around you. You are required to be constantly in tune with the human on the other end of the leash and respond when needed, frequently with no other command than body language. Layla had to learn not only manners and obedience but also her "tasks" from day 1. She took her first flight as a "Service Dog in Training" when she was 10 weeks old. She had to learn to cope with not checking out the goods at grocery stores, where her place was under the table and not to sniff or beg when we were at a restaurant, how to cope with crowds at things like farmers' markets, people & shopping carts in stores, TSA and other working dogs in airports. She had to learn not to react when people decided it was OK to walk up and pet her without asking, how to lay down when a small child approached and poked her in the nose, etc. The most amazing thing, though, was how she met each challenge head up, nose to the wind and then looked at me like she was saying "OK, let's go!!"... She has learned her tasks of balance and brace and knows to pick up the things I drop. All I have to do is say "uh-oh!" and point to what I dropped and she will retrieve it and place it gently in my hand. She has also learned to detect nerve pain in my back and legs and knows how to position herself and apply her body heat and pressure to relieve it. And without being taught or required, Layla took it upon herself to connect with my daughter who has Autism.

I am so very proud of my Layla. In addition to her service training, Layla has achieved her AKC CGC (Canine Good Citizen) and CGCU (Urban Canine Good Citizen) titles. We are also working toward her first AKC competition obedience title and still attend classes twice per week for continued precision training. Because of her even temperament, Layla also spends occasional time as a demo/socialization dog in canine manners classes at the dog club we train at.

This doesn't mean that she doesn't get to be a dog sometimes... Layla loves to swim and retrieve and we are pursuing swim/dock diving classes. We have done nosework seminars and found that she is a natural at that as well, so barn hunt and shed hunt have also been added to her repertoire of "enrichment" training. She is athletic, loves to run, is crazy for lure-

coursing and will be chasing that lure to (hopefully) several titles this year. She also likes to pull, so we have fitted her with harnesses so that she & I can go dog-scootering together.

For those who really know the German Shorthaired Pointer breed, the things that Layla is capable of are probably no surprise. It takes an exceptional dog, though, to do these things every day of their life without burning out. Ed at Shining Star was responsible for finding that exceptional dog for me. He knew exactly which litter my dog should come from - he knew which parents would produce the puppy that would grow up to meet my needs. He breeds with purpose and produces champions - both in the field and in life out in the community.

We have since added a second Shining Star, Lucy (Luna/Striker puppy), to our family. Lucy is spunky, sweet and sociable. Because of her sweet disposition, she has been put onto a manners/therapy dog track of training. She participates in the same enrichment sport training as Layla, as much as is age appropriate (she is currently only 8 1/2 months old) and shows every indication that she will turn into as equally an amazing dog as Layla.

Layla and Lucy are fun-loving, devoted family members. They can be silly clowns, love to play tug & fetch, go swimming & boating, ride in the car and, after a long day, come home and flop on your lap and cuddle in tight. They are always up for an adventure, but are also consummate cuddlers and velcro dogs.

Both of my dogs are true shining stars... They have changed my life, given me a life I didn't know I could have after a devastating accident. I would never hesitate to recommend Ed's Shining Star GSP program to anyone who is looking for an exceptional dog that is capable of transforming their life in so many ways and I really cannot thank him enough for taking that chance on me 2 years ago.

Anne De Roo