

## **The Story of Deaf Dog Adoption** **Was It For Me?**

By Lila Arnold-Proud Deaf Dog Owner

I wanted to have a dog with which I could build a relationship, not just a backyard dog. Now that my daughter is grown and I am getting close to retirement, I wanted to get back to my roots: camping, hiking, kayaking...anything outdoors. I also wanted to adopt a shelter dog. I found Matilda on Petfinder.com. She was listed as a special needs dog. Hmm...Deaf dog? Special needs? Was I ready for this? I *had* done an amazing job raising my profoundly deaf daughter so I *must* be well suited for this endeavor. However, I was not sure how to teach a deaf dog American Sign Language. Maybe I wasn't such an expert after all. Would a deaf dog be the right choice for me? I had read so many negative comments on the internet about deaf dogs.

I soon learned those comments were just myths perpetuated by breeders to justify the euthanasia of deaf puppies. My concerns were unfounded. **One myth, A startled deaf dog will act aggressively and bite,** is the most prevalent myth on the internet. I learned to gently wake up Matilda by holding a treat under her nose. I also spent time socializing her by getting out in new places and around strangers. Startling has not been an issue and she certainly has never shown any aggression. **Another myth, Deaf dogs are an incredible challenge to train,** has also proven to be untrue. In fact, Matilda has compensated for her hearing loss by having a greater sense of smell and sight. Matilda can find all the treats hidden under tennis balls in a muffin tin in 5 seconds. You can't get anything past her nose. I soon learned that food is her GREAT MOTIVATOR! **Another popular myth, Deaf dogs are more likely to be hit by a car.** Experience has shown that ANY dog wandering off leash, in close proximity to cars, is at risk. Through training, Matilda is learning to come when called by using cues such as a flashlight and hand signals. I also had Matilda micro-chipped and she has a collar which identifies she is a deaf dog. Most importantly, I signed up with a local obedience club and begin training. The truth is ANY dog benefits from a good training program not just a deaf dog. Now that I had Matilda's training well on the way, I wanted to get involved with her. I discovered, because she is deaf, not all canine groups are open to her. The American Kennel Club does not allow deaf dogs in competition such as rally and agility which I found very disappointing. I got on the internet and started to look for other groups which would welcome Matilda.



I found the Dog Scouts of America. I learned DSA welcomes deaf dogs, 3 legged dogs, blind dogs, and dogs with other disabilities. The photos on the DSA's website showed happy people interacting with happy dogs in the same activities I had wanted to rediscover, camping, hiking, and kayaking. The DSA website offered training tips, problem solving, videos, and an abundance of fun activities for owners and dogs. Positive, reward based training is the cornerstone of DSA and the same technique I had learned in my local obedience class. I knew this was the group for me. The Mission Statement of DSA backs everything I believe about responsible dog ownership: building the human/animal bond, humane education, community involvement, and a non-punishment based training method. Most importantly, DSA doesn't discriminate against any dog. I ESPECIALLY LIKED THAT! Deaf dog ownership requires a dedicated commitment; but then owning any dog requires commitment. If you think about it, most of us use hand signals with our dogs: a pat on the leg for come, a raised hand for sit, a downward motion with the hand for down, and a thumbs up for yes. I love my deaf dog. She is my constant companion, always by my side. Deaf dog owners preach the deaf dog mantra:

- 1-it's a dog,
  - 2 -breed (traits & behavior),
  - 3-own personality,
- And way last deaf- ears that are ornaments.

All around the world deaf dogs are competing in rally, agility or going out to schools and hospitals as therapy dogs. Some deaf dogs like my Matilda are just great pets and life partners. Whether Matilda will ever compete in agility trials, rally, or chase a disc in competition has yet to be discovered. I just know I have an awesome dog which happens to be deaf.

**“Deaf dogs hear with their heart not with their ears!”**

*Lila Arnold lives 2 hours Northwest of the nearest DSA troop. She hopes to get involved with that troop this fall or start a DSA troop in her community. Matilda is currently in intermediate obedience and beginner's agility.*

Links about Deaf Dogs:

Deaf Dog Education Fund <http://www.deafdogs.org>

Deaf Agility <http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/deafagility>

Deaf Dogs <http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/deafdogs>

Living with a Deaf Dog by Susan Cope Becker