

Day-One Dog Training

Observations on being Observant

By Howard Weinstein

Our Welsh Corgi Mickey was pretty sure she could fly. When it came to the last three steps on our living room stairs, Mickey's approach was, "Why step when you can leap?" So she'd typically soar from the third step to the floor, as she did one evening some years ago. The next morning, however, we noticed Mickey's right ear was limp and floppy, her right lip drooped, and her right eyelid wasn't blinking along with the left. Otherwise, Mick seemed fine.

There's a human condition called Bell's palsy, which partially paralyzes one side of the face. Since dogs have pretty much the same facial nerves as we do, we figured they might get Bell's palsy too. Though there's no real treatment, it's usually temporary, lasting a few weeks to several months. And there are a number of possible causes, including ear infection and trauma.

Trauma? Like leaping off the third step and making a harder than usual landing? Maybe.

We did some research to learn what we could about Bell's palsy and other possible causes. Of course, one risk of research is finding out scary stuff you'd rather not know. With facial paralysis, some potential causes may be quite serious. And I learned a new term: *idiopathic*, which means "cause unknown." I also learned something else new: Corgis are among a handful of breeds more prone to this disorder than most. That actually made us feel a bit better, since it increased the likelihood of Mickey's situation being less serious rather than more.

While examining Mickey, our vet mentioned that not all owners are as observant as we were. Some literally bring their dogs in for a routine annual checkup without having noticed that half



their pet's face is droopy and unresponsive. How can someone not notice that their dog has begun to resemble a Picasso painting?! Well, the truth is, some people *look* at their dogs every day without really *seeing* them. (Of course, some people do the same thing with their spouses!) It's not intentional cruelty, just an oversight.

We should all make a habit of giving our dogs a once-over once a day. Do it while you're petting or playing with your pooch, or when you put her leash on for a walk. You may notice fleas and ticks, sores, cuts, bumps and lumps. You might even notice something really serious – you could save your pal's life! Isn't that worth a few minutes a day?

Meanwhile, Mickey's mystery condition remained just that. We tried a couple of acupuncture treatments. We have no way to know if the acupuncture helped, but we eventually saw gradual improvement. First her ear started swiveling more normally, then she regained much of her blink reflex and the right side of her mouth came back into line with the left. Her smile was still a little lopsided, and even if it stayed that way, she'd always be adorable to us. Fortunately, that partial paralysis disappeared on its own as unpredictably as it appeared.

Our internet research led us to a very useful resource: the *Merck Veterinary Manual*, where you can find all sorts of useful animal-health information. The Merck Veterinary Manual is free online at: www.merckvetmanual.com.

Even if your dog doesn't present you with a mystery illness one morning, check out this website. It's full of useful medical info on both common and uncommon ailments. Bookmark it so you can find it quickly, should you ever need it.

Howard Weinstein is the author of *Puppy Kisses are Good for the Soul & Other Important Lessons You & Your Dog Can Teach Each Other* (available from Amazon.com, or direct from Day-One Dog Training).

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