

Dixie



An AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB Program

Almost four years ago a good friend of mine told me that he was going to adopt a Jack Russell Terrier named Benny. My first thought was that I would *never* want to own a Jack Russell Terrier myself. I thought that Jack Russell Terriers were too high energy and too high maintenance. Caring for such a dog sounded like an awful lot of work to me.

Over the next two years I spent a lot of time with Benny. My friend would drop off Benny to stay with me when he had to work late or when he was going out of town on business. I began to understand and appreciate Benny's energy level and personality.

My friend moved out of the Portland area and I missed having Benny around. I thought about adopting a dog of my own, but this was a really big step for me. I had never owned a dog before. I understood that this would be a big responsibility and a serious commitment. I didn't want to rush into anything. I did know one thing for sure: I wanted to adopt a Jack Russell Terrier.

Over the next year I periodically checked the websites of the various shelters in the area looking for a Jack Russell Terrier to adopt. I wanted to find a happy dog that didn't have any socialization issues. In June of last year I saw a listing that caught my eye: a dog named Casey was up for adoption at the Animal Welfare Society in Kennebunk. Casey looked like a fun, happy dog. I drove down there and he had already been adopted. Casey was the kind of dog that gets adopted very quickly.

When I arrived home, I decided to check the other shelter websites to see if there were any other Jack Russell Terriers available for adoption. I saw a listing for a dog named Gwen at the Animal Refuge League. Here is the beginning of the listing:

Dainty little Gwen is a 2-1/2 year old Jack Russell Terrier surrendered to the shelter when her family lost their home. In her previous life Gwen was kept at home and bred several times, and as a result she is now finding the world at large to be a mystifying and often frightening place. She has made a lot of progress during her relatively short time with us, however, and is now overjoyed to see staff members and volunteers she recognizes. Gwen loves a friendly lap to cuddle in while she absorbs all the new and strange sights, scents, and sounds. When she is frightened her first impulse is to growl and run away, and new owners will need to build her confidence, not by babying her, but by providing positive experiences at her own pace and at comfortable distances.



I found Gwen's story quite touching. Her story was a significant contrast to Casey's. It sounded to me like she would need a lot of care and patience. I wasn't sure that I was up for this challenge, but I decided that I would drive over to meet her.

When I met her I found her completely adorable, but she was also completely terrified of me. An ARL staff member gave me a hot dog to feed to her. When offered a piece, she would look back and forth at the hot dog (desperately wanting to eat it) and at me (desperately afraid). She would finally muster up

enough courage to dart over, grab the piece of hot dog, and run away to eat it. After going through a couple of hot dogs she still didn't show any signs of trusting me whatsoever. I didn't know how I could possibly adopt a dog that was terrified of me.

When I read the information in her file, it said that in addition to being very fearful of strangers, she also didn't get along well with other dogs. This concerned me a lot. I decided to think about it some more and come back another day to see if I could get Gwen to trust me a little bit.

I ended up visiting Gwen a few times and didn't feel like I was making any progress. An ARL staff member suggested that I take her for a walk on the trails behind the shelter. Even though Gwen didn't know me or trust me at all, she was willing to go for a walk with me. What dog could pass up a walk? We walked around the trails a few times and then I sat down on a bench. I had brought a hot dog with me. I broke it up into pieces and was able to get Gwen to come closer and closer to get each piece. She ate the final pieces with her front paws on my lap. This was real progress.

I was feeling much better about the whole situation, but needed one more night to sleep on it. I spoke to my sister that evening and she thought it was ridiculous that I was agonizing so much over this decision. She told me to just adopt the dog and not to worry so much about it.

I adopted Gwen the next day and decided to change her name to Dixie. I thought that she should have a new name to go along with her new life.

The ARL staff loaned me a crate to bring her home in. They told me that she needed a crate for security and that I should buy one for her as soon as possible.

I have a fenced in backyard. I decided to let Dixie out of her crate in the backyard in case she had to pee or poop. When I opened the crate, she immediately ran to the gate and tried to squeeze under it. Yikes! I might lose her after only having her less than an hour. This was not going well.

I took her inside and she immediately started acting like a trapped animal: quickly pacing around the house looking for an escape. She finally realized that there was no escape, so she took refuge in her crate. She sat there in the corner of her crate looking at me not knowing what else to do. I was beginning to think that I made a big mistake and I didn't know what to do next. I was exhausted so I decided to lie down on the floor near her crate and take a nap. I figured that she might get used to having me around if I weren't actively engaging her. When I woke up she was still in the corner of her crate. I decided to watch some TV until dinnertime.

I read the instructions that I received when I adopted Dixie. The instructions suggested that I feed her out of my hand which would help her get used to me. I measured out some kibble and fed it to her a little bit at a time. She behaved just like she did at the shelter: she darted over to get a couple of bits of food and then ran away to eat them. It took a long time to go through her dinner portion of kibble and I wasn't sure that she was any more comfortable with me than when we started.

When it was bedtime I brought her crate up into my bedroom. I left the door open and let her decide to sleep in the crate or to sleep on my bed. She decided to sleep on my bed. When we woke up the next morning, she rolled over and exposed her tummy as if to say "I don't know who you are, but would you please rub my tummy?" Things were going much better. By lunch time she felt comfortable enough with me to jump into my lap and things have been great ever since.

Dixie's file said that she didn't like other dogs, it turns out that she loves to meet other dogs. There are very few dogs that she hasn't gotten along with. When we go for walks, she always wants to meet any dog that we pass.



Dixie sleeping with Benny.



Dixie and her best friend Dillon after they've been running around.

Even though I had some experience training a dog from my time with Benny, I knew that I had a lot more to learn. I was relieved to find out that the ARL had a manners class starting shortly after I adopted Dixie. The manners class was very informative and we both had fun and learned a lot.

One of my neighbors works at fetchdog.com. Last September she called me up and asked me if Dixie would model for their Christmas catalog. I thought it would be fun, so I brought her right over. Our Sit, Down, and Stay training came in very handy when it was time to pose for the camera.



I've been trying to teach Dixie new things, like catching a ball or a Frisbee. The day goes by pretty quickly and it's easy to forget about her training. I was happy to learn that the ARL was holding an advanced manners class. The class provided some structure that we both needed. The instructor showed me some things that Dixie and I should work on. For example, I should be able to tell her to sit and stay, and then walk behind her without her getting up. That's something I never thought of teaching her, but it's something good for her to learn.

In this picture I have told her to lie down and stay. I put a treat down in front of her and she won't touch it until I say it's OK.

Now that I've had Dixie for almost a year, I can't imagine life without her. I really enjoy simply seeing her walk around the house wagging her tail, happy to have a safe and warm home to live in. She's a great dog and I love her a lot.