

Advice on dogs, life and love



ask dog lady

Dear Dog Lady,

I have a three-year-old Pembroke Welsh corgi, and she has a problem with a TV commercial. I have the TV on most of the day and she has no problem with commercials in general, but when the man's voice begins on the Empire Carpet ad, she immediately goes to the TV and stands transfixed. At the end of the spot, when they sing the jingle with the 800 number, she cries. I feel so bad for her. I wonder if it is hurting her ears in some way so I now run to the TV to change the station before they start to sing.

I have asked several vets if they know what this is about and they have no clue. Any ideas? I know some people find this commercial annoying, but do any other dogs out there have this problem?

—Candy

Candy, the Empire Carpet commercial is no ear candy for Dog Lady either. Even now, the blasted 800-number theme music plays in her head along with the announcer's unctuous voice, a mouthful of butter.

Dogs have awesome ears. They hear frequencies and sounds that elude human sensors. Perhaps there's some note in the Empire Carpet jingle that gets under your corgi's skin. Or maybe she's learned that whenever the commercial comes on, you respond in a way that pushes her buttons. You jump up, run to the TV and provide some comfort to her in a ritual she's come to expect.

Dog Lady has gotten no similar complaints about the Empire ad, but she certainly has heard about other doggy fixations—from rubber balls, to Frisbees, key fobs, flashing lights, their own tails, and anything else you can think of. Dogs obsess. It's what they do to amuse themselves.

You could ignore her cries when the Empire ad comes on and then reward her with a tidbit when she is quiet. Or you could hope that one day you arrive home and find your corgi has installed a sumptuous Berber carpet.

Dear Dog Lady,

We own a West Highland white terrier, Toby, who

is becoming increasingly anxious and jumpy around other dogs. We take two walks a day with him and whenever we run into other dogs, he gets very nervous and starts running in circles. We try to let him "meet" the other dog, but more often than not, it makes him more uptight. He recently started acting the same way around children—running around them in circles.

We're getting worried because the behavior is worsening as he's getting older (he's two) and dog obedience class last year didn't help with socialization (although now he can follow commands).

What can we do? He's such a lovable little guy around us. Could it be related to the fact that when we bought him he was four months old and the last of the litter? I fear he was neglected at the house where we bought him.

—Nicole

Nicole, don't ponder this too deeply. Dog Lady assures you Toby's behavior is very natural for a two-year-old Westie. If adorable Toby was biting dogs or children, you would have great cause to worry, but he is just doing what teenage Westies do. They run in circles when they're happy. They run in circles when they want something or somebody to chase them. They run in circles as a celebratory exercise.

As long as he's following commands, he's doing great with training. You read nervousness and anxiety into his behavior because you probably feel your own tension when your dog meets other dogs or children. Loosen up. Toby is being a natural Westie. Let him perform his figure 8s freely and enjoy the show.

Dear Dog Lady,

Since reading a newspaper story about emotional therapy dogs, I'm jealous because many other dogs provide much more psychological support than Chester, my Cairn terrier. Chester has always been aloof. He never kisses me. He only gets emotional around Beggin' Strips, squirrels, and other dogs that perk his interest, such as Coletta, the greyhound who chases him on the beach. How can I get Chester to be more cuddly and expressive?

—Barbara

Barbara, people who need people are the luckiest people in the world, but people who need dogs for emotional therapy are sad sacks. Adults who use their companion animals like baby binkies seem somehow woeful and disconnected. Dogs should provide comfort, joy, and a compelling reason to get out in the world instead of a flimsy rationale to hide behind furry behinds.

So, treasure this fine romance, with no kisses. Chester seems well-balanced. Wise Chester, distinctly his own dog, has already provided you with a lot of healthy psychological support, but you're too stuck to see it.

Visit www.askdoglady.com to ask a question.