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<http://theintermountain.com/page/content.detail/id/545986/Rottweilers-are-not-the-perfect-pet-for-everybody.html?nav=5324>

I live with a Crazy Rottweiler Named Jeb

By Ginny Zuboy, RCHS Board Member

We first met Jeb as a puppy when our son brought him home for a visit. That was more than eight and a half years ago, and he was quite the wild thing. I knew how to safeguard my home for children, both for their protection and the protection of my “stuff”, but no one could have prepared me for Jeb. Nothing was secure if it was not nailed down. Throw pillows, magazines, eyeglasses, hand towels, rugs, logs in the log bin... he was like a shiny, black whirligig, spinning through the house, stirring up dust and chaos as he moved from room to room. I still remember the look on my elderly wiener’s faces when he repeatedly grabbed the corner of their down coverlet and carried it out of the room. Responding to the “come” command (impressive, right?) he would tiptoe slowly towards me with an off-limits item of choice in his mouth (glove, dishtowel, hat, slipper, eyeglasses, checkbook, remote control...), and just as he appeared ready to release it, would turn his head and look back at me over his shoulder, his stump wagging from side to side. With a glint in his eye and a guttural growl he teased, “Try and get it... try that again-- I love this game!” We enjoyed having our son home, but when Jeb

jumped back in that car I sighed in relief that I had my house back. (On the way back to New York he destroyed the arm rests in the back seat—and that was on tranquilizers...)

Jeb came to live with us when he was about two. Our son was finished with graduate school and returned home with holes in his shirts (and underwear, and socks) where Jeb had grabbed and tugged at him while he worked at his computer. Those years were hard on both of them. Jacob had work to do and Jeb didn’t. A young Rottweiler without a job description is one very big problem! Our son first took a job out of state and then out of the country where he continues to live and work. And that is how I came to live with a crazy Rottweiler named Jeb. At two, he was bigger and more challenging than ever! We attached a cow bell to his collar and welcomed him into the fold.

This time I was prepared. First I invested in baby gates. For many years I have had small dogs in the house so to my delight I found gates designed to allow my wieners free entry, but would keep the “No-No Bad Dog” out. My bedroom was now a safe haven! The little dogs could rest in peace and Jeb could no longer raid my closet. These gates were installed at various entries throughout the house. The throw pillows were stowed away and anything I cared about was put away. I remember, with a shudder, the evening I learned I could no longer set a table with a table cloth...

Thank goodness my husband has loved this dog from first nip! He loves his keen intelligence, and the life force that pulsates

through Jeb's sleek, muscled physique is evident to anyone who meets him. Eye contact? Jeb is so tuned in to the people in his life, I still expect him to join in on our conversations – he certainly enjoys his own point of view! Jeb is one of those dogs who, in the wrong hands, could have ended up in a shelter because of his temperament, high energy, and hard-headedness. But Jeb, who thrives on attention and requires active engagement with the people in his world, was lucky. He landed in an ideal physical environment with an owner who loved him from the start, and who understood that exercise and training would be key to shaping his behavior so that he could become a 'Good Boy Carl' and win the hearts of the other members of his family.

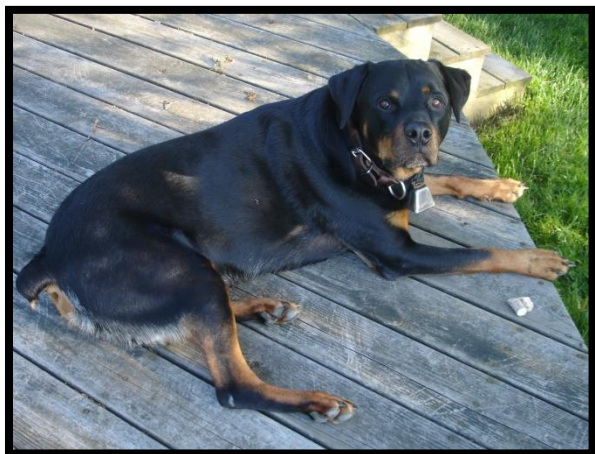
First, let me say that my son was a very responsible dog owner. What he didn't know, then, was that his timing was off. Living and working in foreign countries is incompatible with dog ownership. But his future was yet unmapped and, at the time, he thought he was ready for a dog and wanted a Rottweiler. He found a litter and met Jeb as a 5 week old puppy. Before taking him home, however, he called us and told us of his intentions. He wanted our approval, and in a way, permission, because he knew that his getting a puppy would impact our family. Having grown up in our household, he knew that our pets are family members, for life. We agreed to provide a safety net, though we weren't real keen on his breed choice.

He bought Rottweiler dog books (so did we) and began working with him on day one. One of the most important practices he

began immediately was to neutralize resource-guarding. The sweetest dogs in the world can become quite threatening if you mess with their food or treats, and it can be scary and even dangerous with a big powerful dog. Once established, resource-guarding is very difficult and sometimes impossible to correct. Jacob put his hands and even his face in Jeb's food bowl when he was a wee puppy and taught him the STAY position, requiring that he SIT before the food bowl was put down and WAIT until given the OK signal. Jeb is highly food motivated and always eats like there is no tomorrow, but anyone could mess with his food bowl without consequence. He will remain in the STAY position, drooling puddles on the floor, until he is released. This command is useful during dinner (he likes to steal napkins from people's laps) and when we need a break from his attention-seeking. We will sometimes forget him and find that he has held his STAY for up to 30 minutes and is waiting to be released. Jacob did that.

At about six or eight months old, Jeb was neutered and Jacob signed them up for obedience training. We laughed when he described the humiliation of almost being expelled from obedience school. He and Jeb had to be separated from the group and train in an adjoining room because Jeb just couldn't settle down. Even though Jeb was over-stimulated, as a team, they learned. Jeb HEELS beautifully. He knows the SIT, STAY, DOWN, DROP IT commands and when he goes running down our hill and hears the COME command, watching him turn and head back up the hill is a thing of

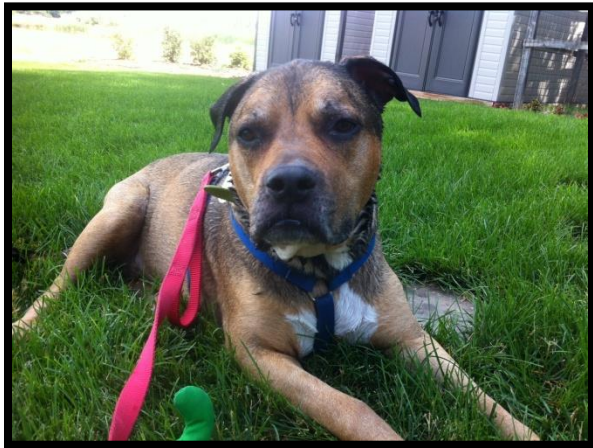
beauty. Another important command my husband has taught him is LEAVE IT. If something falls from the counter to the floor (where Jeb is usually parked because he knows good things happen there) and he hears the LEAVE IT command before he reaches it, he will LEAVE IT. I dropped my English muffin the other morning and he was inches from gobbling up my breakfast, but stopped, on command. Every time he obeys a command he receives praise and a treat. Jeb loves those treats! These command responses did not come signed, sealed and delivered, but Jacob had begun the process and my husband has since continued to work with him. He is like a proud father and the joy they share is palpable.



Rottweilers are not for the inexperienced dog owner. As I have said in a previous article, DNA should be taken seriously when choosing a canine companion. Rottweilers are large, powerful dogs and very strong-willed. They need owners who can lead them with a gentle but firm hand. In the wrong hands, they could be quite

formidable. They, along with Pitt Bull Terriers, have reputations as dangerous and aggressive dogs and are largely distrusted and feared by the general public. Those of us who are responsible owners of the breeds know them as loving family pets and serve as their goodwill ambassadors. We recognize their unusual strength and ability to do harm, and even when we are in control of our own animals, we cannot trust or control the behaviors of other dogs, their owners and passers- by. We must therefore be eternally vigilant in controlling our surrounding environment and avoid places and situations (like 'dog parks') that might increase the risk of liability. This added responsibility can be stressful and restrict activities that we could otherwise enjoy with a smaller and less intimidating breed. My daughter has a 9 year old 109 pound Pitt Bull she raised from puppyhood. He is a lumbering, shy and wonderful dog and he means the world to her. He is extremely well trained and Jillian is always in charge. When she takes him for walks in her neighborhood, she walks between him and other dogs and their owners as they pass by. When their approach nears, she signals that he SIT, provides a visual screen with her body and he stays in the SIT position until they pass by. She then releases him with praise and a treat. If she takes him for a hike, off leash, he wears a muzzle- not to protect others from him, but for his protection. He is not dog aggressive, but because of his dominant size and power advantage, an encounter with a smaller aggressor and his attempt to defend himself could end badly. By muzzling him she has wisely neutralized that threat. She

understands that owning such a powerful dog comes with liability and her first thought is to insure his and her protection. As much as we love our Rottweiler and her Pitt Bull, and as much as we admire the breeds and their many wonderful breed traits, the accompanying stigma, psychological stress and added responsibility of ownership can be burdensome. Obedience training, active engagement, and a strong owner-dog relationship are critical to being wise and responsible owners of these breeds.



We have come a long way! Now, instead of grabbing people’s hands or ours when we arrive home, Jeb knows to FIND A TOY to hold in his mouth when welcoming us or guests to the house. He adores visitors and is confident that anyone who comes to our house has come especially to see him- ask our UPS delivery men. He is a “working” dog and in lieu of police work (he is of German stock and was bred by a police officer) has been trained to do tricks for treats (BACK, DANCE, DOWN, UP, ROLL-OVER), never tires of playing hide the toy, loves to fetch the frisbee, and is walked

through our woods at least three times every day. He will obey the STAY, COME, DOWN, GO-TO-THE-HOUSE, and GO-NITE-NITE commands, but forget about trusting him for one second alone in the kitchen – we have found evidence many times that he can perfectly peel a whole banana. That loaf of Ciabatta bread left on the kitchen counter? Gone. He still likes to play keep away, just to aggravate me, and if the baby-gate to my bedroom is left open, even for 3 minutes, he will come slinking out the door with mischief in his eyes, a wag in his stump, and a pair of my clean socks (why are they always mine?) in his mouth. Several times a day he bumps the laundry room door, just in case it didn’t latch, because that is where his food is stored and he just might get lucky. If he is not monitored before the trash compactor is opened, his head is in it. My husband says he feels like a prison guard. He continues to steal napkins from people’s laps if he can get away with it, sticks his head in friends’ purses, jumps into delivery vehicles uninvited and always talks back to me when I banish him from the kitchen. Those baby gates? They are all still in service. His cow bell continues to telegraph his whereabouts. But my throw pillows stay put now and I can once again set a table.

When people ask me how old he is I say “Nine, going on two.” He is a funny, sweet and lovable dog and I adore him. But when he misbehaves and is driving me and my little dogs crazy, my husband likes to quote the emcee of an AKC dog show we saw on TV: With a wry smile and unabashed



admiration, he mimics, “Rottweilers are not for everybody.”

Please spay and neuter your pets. If you or someone you know is ready for pet ownership, consider adopting an adult or senior pet from the Randolph County Humane Society. We have many wonderful animals to chose from, all waiting to be rescued.

Post Script:

Our Jeb died of bone cancer at age 10, Dec. 2012. Iblis, my daughter’s Pit Bull, also died of bone cancer, at age 10, Sept, 2013.