

Excerpts from  
**A Dog's Guide to Training Owners by Shannon the Dog  
as told to Carolyn Long**

## Contents

Dedications .....	6
Contents.....	7
Why Every Dog Should Read This Book.....	9
On Becoming a Dog Whisperer .....	11
Chapter 1 .....	
They Call Me Shannon .....	13
Chapter 2 .....	
The Early Years.....	15
Chapter 3 .....	
Dispelling False Dogmas .....	25
Chapter 4 .....	
Dealing With Sibling Rivalries.....	29
Chapter 5 .....	
Cracking the Dog-Human Language Barrier.....	33
Chapter 6 .....	
Understanding Your New Owner.....	38
Chapter 7 .....	
Basic Training for Humans.....	44
Chapter 8 .....	
Feeding, Hunting and Food Gaming .....	61
Chapter 9 .....	
The Dog Walk.....	68

Chapter 10 .....	
Training Tips From My Path Pals.....	83
Chapter 11 .....	
Intermediate Training for Humans .....	87
Chapter 12 .....	
The Lessons of the Snows .....	93
Chapter 13 .....	
Great Adventures.....	100
Chapter 14 .....	
Teaching Humans About the Birds and the Bees.....	110
Chapter 15 .....	
Previously Owned Nanas & Grandpas .....	115
Chapter 16 .....	
Higher Callings .....	118
Chapter 17 .....	
Growing Old Together .....	123
Afterword.....	
Why Are We Here? .....	127
Appendix A.....	
Trouble-Shooting Guide .....	128
Appendix B .....	
Human Commands Every Dog Needs to Know .....	129
Appendix C.....	
Household Items Every Dog Should Be Familiar With.....	131
Our Special Thanks.....	132
Assignations:.....	133

# Why Every Dog Should Read This Book

## A Note From Shannon

People talk to their dogs all the time and *assume* they understand. So why should it surprise them to know that dogs are communicating with them, *hoping* they understand?

The very future of our species is at stake here! Once we gave humans permission to help raise our young, we lost control of things. It has become customary for humans to separate young pups from their real parents shortly after birth, put them in strange surroundings—often with no canine role models whatsoever, and expect those poor pups to learn their ways—without even attempting to understand our native language of Bark.

The sad truth, my dear dog pals, is that most humans are so busy trying to understand their *own* species that they have little time to listen to us. We only get along with humans as well as we do because *we* have learned to adapt so well to them.

Some humans do take their job of communicating with us seriously. They even take us to school—what they call Dog Obedience Schools. But their object is to train us to do what *they* want. My book helps *you* train *them* to do what *you* want.

A few very enlightened humans pride themselves on being “dog whisperers” and actually understand their dogs. But the only serious attempts most humans make at training is when they first bring us home and try to train us not to piddle on the carpet. We shouldn’t feel too neglected, though, because from what I can see, potty training is the only serious training many humans give their own *human* pups. So if you want more from your humans, you’ll have to take the cat by the tail and get control of things. With *A Dog’s Guide to Training Owners*, you can become a “human whisperer” and learn the best ways to select and tame, understand and train your humans. *A Dog’s Guide* can help you bridge the gap between caring, well-intentioned, but largely uninformed humans and us—the innately wise and faithful, but largely misunderstood and frustrated dogs of the world.

Because my book unlocks the mysteries of the human mind, it could give you, my fellow dogs, a distinctly unfair advantage over your owners. So I feel it necessary to say right up front that I do not advocate a canine takeover of the world. Not at all! It is my clear intent this book be used only for good, and never for evil.

I know this book is needed, because my humans have lots of dog books and I have chewed my way through most of them. But I haven’t seen another book like mine—a *real* dog book—written *by* a dog, *for* other dogs, about the things that *really* matter—especially to dogs. You might even want to share this book with your humans, because I’ve met lots of dogs and lots of humans, and it’s my opinion there isn’t a human alive who is more than two degrees of separation away from a dog. In other words, every human I’ve ever met—probably every human in the world—either has a dog or knows someone who does, loves a dog or knows someone who does, or—with little effort—could *find* a dog to read this book to.

# On Becoming a Dog Whisperer

## A Note From Carolyn

It seemed a perfectly ordinary conversation to me. Shannon, my beloved canine companion, strolled over and licked her lips to let me know she was hungry. I asked, “Would you like a biscuit?” She wagged her tail “Yes.” I got her one and told her to take it out to the deck to eat, which she did. On observing this casual interaction, my daughter Christy, who was home from college for a visit, said in amazement, “Mom! You’ve become a dog person!” I laughed it off, but her words played over and over in my mind and seemed to find a home there. A dog person! I’d never thought of myself as a dog person. But as I thought about it, I began to appreciate a meaning to her words far deeper than I first realized.

My relationship with Shannon—often my sole companion—had evolved and deepened over the years until we had adjusted and adapted to one another on more levels than I would have imagined possible. We had become so attuned to each other that we typically responded to one another’s needs and desires without words. She clearly sensed my moods, and acted differently in response to them. She knew my schedule and gently signaled me when it was time to eat, time to walk, time to work, time to quit work, and time to go to bed. She was happy when I was happy, nuzzled me when I was troubled. She loved being included in my activities and was overjoyed when I showed interest in hers. She was eager to win my approval by following my requests, and equally anxious to avoid my displeasure by not doing things that upset me—or at least by not being around when I found out!

The more attention I paid to her and the more carefully I observed the subtle nuances of her language and behavior, the more accurately I could assess her needs and desires. When I got it right, she was quick to reward my behavior with increased affection and tail wagging.

My daughter was right. I had become “a dog person,” if becoming a dog person meant that I truly loved and understood and cared for a dog who loved and understood and cared for me, a dog with whom I shared my home, a language, and my life. And what was most remarkable to me as I thought about this extraordinary relationship was how much I took it all for granted! How naturally this incredible being had acclimated herself to my eccentricities, how cleverly she had taught me about herself, her needs and desires—and how totally she had captivated my heart. Was every dog like this, I wondered? Did they all communicate with their owners and train them so successfully?

The more I understood Shannon’s language, the greater delight I took in her extraordinary perceptivity, sensitivity, hilarious antics, loving gestures and obvious efforts to communicate with her humans—and the more compelled I felt to share these observations with others; to translate for her. I felt Shannon’s story would delight other dog owners who could identify with her escapades, inspire people to become more attuned to their own dogs, and encourage those who have never had a dog to consider it. But most important, I hoped her story would help dogs everywhere to gain a little more respect for their innate wisdom, great capacity for love, and extraordinary potential to enrich the lives of their human companions. With eyes thus opened, perhaps hearts would follow, and the world would become a safer, kinder home to our “best friends.”

The gifts Shannon has brought my family are truly beyond words, but I have done my best to capture her spirit and convey as accurately as possible the simple messages she has communicated to me. The rewards of developing such relationships with your own dogs may vary, but some we have experienced or heard about from other dog owners are: greater awareness of the dog's physical and emotional needs; increased appreciation of the beauties of nature; greater sensitivity to all animals, humans, and the world in general; reconnection with one's playful nature; lots of new friends of both the canine and human variety; rapid stress reduction; deeper personal insights; comfort in times of grief; greater ability to relax and lead a more peaceful, joyful, conscious, connected, balanced, and fulfilling life; a steadfastly available, attentive, and unconditionally accepting friend; and, most of all, an enduring love that warms your heart on the coldest of days.

Nothing I write could convey Shannon's message as effectively as she, herself. So the rest of this book will simply be a direct translation of her very own story, as communicated to me in her particular dialect of the beautiful language of Bark. I did not become an expert on dogs or learn Bark by knowing a lot of dogs. Just as Antoine de Saint-Exupery's Little Prince learned about *all* roses by knowing and loving his *one* rose really well, so I have learned about all dogs by knowing and loving my one dog really well.

*Dogs are our link to paradise. They don't know evil or jealousy or discontent. To sit with a dog on a hillside on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden, where doing nothing was not boring—it was peace.*  
—Milan

*Kundera*

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## **SELECTED SUBCHAPTERS:**

### **Does Size Matter?**

What size human is best for you? Many small dogs have successfully trained very large humans, and some very large dogs have been unable to control even the smallest humans. While intelligence, persistence and patience are your most important training tools, size is definitely a factor when it comes to a standoff. The general rule of paw is to pick a human who is not more than three times your weight. A 60-pound dog can easily control a 180-pound person. A 30-pound dog can strongly influence a 90-pound human. This formula loses relevance at either end of the spectrum, however. A six-pound dog must rely primarily on speed, agility and psychology to tame humans, while a 180-pound dog has little trouble convincing just about anyone to agree with him. And a three pound dog is pretty much a cat.

While little humans often grow into big humans, it's the size they are when you get them that really matters. There's an old story some dogs tell about the wolf who raised a human pup. When the pup was young, the wolf tied the little one with a slender vine to a little sapling when he had to go out hunting. When the human pup grew to be big and strong, the wolf could still get him to stay in one spot if he tied him with a slender vine to a little sapling. The moral is that you can get humans to do just about anything if you start training them early enough.

## Teaching Little Humans Bark

The best way to crack the dog-human language barrier is to start when your humans are very young, teaching them Bark as a second language. I know any number of small children who became fluent in Bark before they could speak Human. It adds resonance and vigor to their speaking.

Because dogs are multilingual, we understand their baby language of Gurgle, as well as the language of big humans and Bark, so we can respond to babies' first words and build their confidence far more quickly than their own parents can. When they want us to follow them, we follow. When they want us to fetch a ball, we fetch a ball. When they want us to cuddle with them, we cuddle—no matter what language they use. They have a lot harder time getting all that across to big humans.

Dogs are able to understand human pups so well because even when we grow up, there is still a lot of puppy in every dog. But many humans grow up and forget all about the human pup still inside them. I think big humans love dogs so much because we help them reconnect with their inner puppy.

## Overcoming Your Fear of Humans

When you first come home to your new family, you can expect to find lots of humans of all shapes and sizes jumping up and down and pawing you and bouncing you around and passing you from one to the other until you are feeling a bit queezy! That's normal for new puppy owners. Trust me, it wears off—very quickly, in fact, if you barf all over them. That's good and bad. Pretty soon you'll want one of your humans to feed you or play with you or take you out, and they are nowhere to be found! Or you'll hear stuff like, "You said you wanted a dog. You feed her!" Or "I took him out last time; it's your turn." Or "Mom, could you please feed her just this once? I'm going to be late for school." Or "PULEEEASE, Sis! I *promise* to walk her all next week if you just take care of her this weekend for me."

And so it goes. Your initial fear turns to 15 minutes of celebrity status and then confusion about who you belong to or who really wants you at all. They fight over holding you at TV time or bedtime, and pretend they don't hear or see you on a cold, rainy night when you need to go out. This is a scary but crucial time for a dog, because the humans who want you with them all the time at first are not necessarily the ones who end up taking the best care of you or loving you the most. And the ones who hurt your feelings at first, saying things like, "I'm not the one who wanted this dog." learn that they are the ones who need you the most. So you'll want to keep your options open and be nice to *everyone* in the family.

For those of you who have never been around humans, you've got a lot to learn—and you'd better learn it fast! Humans will instinctively know if you are afraid of them, and they can act very strangely! No matter how little you are and how big they are, they will suddenly become afraid of you, and put you into a cage or in the basement where you can't hurt them. That's one of the weird things about humans—they turn everything upside down! If you're scared of them, they're scared of you. If you're mad at them—even for good reason, they get mad at you! If you're hungry, they eat dinner. It's a very confusing world you've chosen to live in!

Probably the most confusing thing about humans is how they bare their teeth when they are happy instead of when they are about to attack. Many's the pup who has run in terror from a happy new owner who was only trying to befriend him! Dog scholars have determined that this is the remnant of an ancient human-dog ritual—now lost in antiquity—in which humans bared their teeth to the dogs they hoped to befriend to show that they were incapable of inflicting severe injury with their pointless little teeth.

No matter how strange your humans may seem or look to you at first, you are sure to grow to love them if they are kind to you. Most dogs consider humans of all sizes and shapes to be incredibly cute creatures. You will find this especially true when they are sleeping. If you watch them closely and listen when they are sleeping, you will hear them make funny little sounds, and see them move their hands and feet and their eyes under their eyelids—probably chasing some kind of ball. Watching a sleeping human is one of the best ways to overcome your fear of humans—unless, of course, they snore.

### Why Humans Need Us

An incident occurred not long after Nigel the Bullmastiff came back to live with us, after he and the Boy had been living away for a long time. My human came in one day with a super big bag of **BIG DOG – DOG FOOD**, words I know well—especially since Nigel moved back home. I watched her struggle to lift it out of the trunk of the car, carry it up the stairs of the house and through the front door. Once inside the door, she just plunked it down and left it there, right in front of the side window by the door, in plain view of any visitors—or possible intruders. On her way back into the house, she paused on the porch and looked at that big bag through the window. She repeated out loud to anyone who might want to hear, “Big Dog – Dog Food. I love it! Our new security system!”

It might have been a good idea if she had just left the **BIG DOG – DOG FOOD** bag there, but she left the bag there full of the Big Dog – Dog **FOOD**. It sat there for several days, and I heard her bragging to every visitor that she had this great new home protection system and pointed to the **BIG DOG – DOG FOOD** bag. I don't know whether Nigel heard her talking and was insulted by the suggestion that a mere bag of *dog food* could protect his family better than he could—because I have to admit, it did hurt *my* feelings just a little—or whether he just saw it as his personal food supply. But one day when Nigel got hungry and no one was around to feed him, well, he just went right up to that **BIG DOG – DOG FOOD** bag and helped himself to his own little snack. He didn't eat it all, of course, but I guess he ate a lot of it, because when my human got home she didn't have any trouble picking up that bag real easy-like and carrying it away. We were back in charge of security after that.

### Living With a Cat

Unfortunately for Nigel, there was one thing he had to learn the hard way. He simply could not believe what I told him about cats. When I explained that the humans own us, but the cat owns the house, he just snorted and said, “Look at me! I'm bigger and stronger and have a ferocious bark. I'm not worried about a little old cat!”

Nigel's first big mistake was in chasing Darwin, the Wild Woods Cat. He actually thought he could catch him. Good luck! No creature on *earth* could catch Darwin! Darwin let Nigel chase him just as long as it amused him, and then the cat stopped suddenly, turned on his haunches, and stood his ground. Nigel thought that meant he had won, so he marched right up to Darwin, and *whammo!* Darwin let him have it—right

across the kisser. Poor Nigel! He was more shocked than hurt. But being a smart dog, it only took him a few dozen more times before he learned he was out of his league with Darwin.

Once Nigel realized who owned the house and how far he could go with Darwin, they eventually made peace. They even curled up together at naptimes. That was something to see! Nigel still put on a show for visitors, chasing Darwin around to make it look like he was in charge of the house—but stopping before Darwin ended the game HIS way.

## **When Your Owner Gets Fleas**

You will probably be the first one to notice that your humans have fleas. You'll know its fleas when they start scratching their ankles *a lot*. They won't notice right away because they are always scratching something—bug bites, itchy plants they get into, and weird human rashes. Human skin is much more sensitive than ours and, in most cases, has very little fur to protect it. Their only protection is what they wear, and that apparently doesn't help much.

The other reason they won't notice right away is that they don't think *they* get fleas. They're always blaming *us* for bringing fleas into the house, calling us mean names like "flea bag." But they could just as well be the culprits. And once they're in, those pesky fleas are equal opportunity biters. So how can you help your humans get rid of fleas? You just need to remember the most important flea fact: Fleas will bite anyone, but they prefer to *stay* on us because we're warmer and have more snuggly places to hide.

So all you need to do to get the fleas off your humans is to snuggle up to them long enough for the fleas to jump onto you, and *poof!* Your humans are flea free.

## **Snow Lessons from Brutus, the Cheese Chow**

On a recent walk in the snow, I encountered an old chum, Brutus, an Akita-Chow with the most beautiful, great, red fur coat. And being a chubby fellow, he has *lots* of it. As our owners chatted, he was bragging about his early days climbing snow-covered mountains in the high country far from here. His current owner brought him back from there when he was four years old.

My human offered him a treat. "He prefers cheese," his owner said, as he snubbed his nose at it. "Ah," chuckled my owner, "so that's how he keeps that lean figure." I was so embarrassed! She would never talk that way about one of her human friends. "Yup," said his owner. "Brutus can tell I'm getting out the cheese from the other end of the house."

My human did make up for her rudeness by admiring his fine coat and petting him, but I think what happened next was really all her fault. Brutus, who is half my age and a mere pup at seven, was determined to show me he was as fit as the next dog after that insult, so as we parted, he took off at a fine dogsled run. His owner, a small woman—obviously unprepared for his sudden burst of energy but unwilling to relinquish her firm grip on his leash—flew right up in the air behind him, and as he kept going, plowed through the snow like a sled, finally landing like a perfect snow angel on the trail—though you rarely see humans making snow angels face down.

Not long after, I was pulling my human up a slippery hillside—no small feat with her all padded up like an old cushy sofa in her snow boots and mittens and big hat and

Arctic expedition coat—and suddenly found myself dragging dead weight. I turned to find she had flopped in the snow. Well, it's no wonder humans keep falling—they've got their good rear snow claws all covered up with those slippery boots!

I've reluctantly come to the conclusion that all the training in the world will never be enough for humans to manage on their own out in the world.

## **Training Tips From My Path Pals**

I learn some of my best stuff from the dogs we meet on our daily walks. I think you'd enjoy meeting them, too.

If you have some stories I could share in my next book of Shannon's Friends, please send them to me at the address at the front of my book.

## **Teaching Owners Multiple Tricks**

On a walk around the big swan lake one day we met Windy – short for Windemere. Windy is a short black Schipperke. She's small but very proud and anxious to yap about her ancestors in Belgium. She said she's from a long line of sailors. They guarded boats, killed rats and advised the captain which direction to sail on the high seas.

I'll admit she's pretty smart. She has trained her owner to respond to a little bell she rings when she wants to go for walks. Getting humans to walk you when you need to go out is quite an accomplishment in itself. Most dogs would probably stop there. Once their humans learn a few simple tricks, they figure that's probably all they're smart enough to learn. But not Windy. Oh, no! She has actually trained her human to put a big bowl of yummy human treats next to her favorite chair, turn on the TV, warm up the chair, and then, when Windy rings the bell, to get up and walk to the door with Windy's leash so *Windy* can sit in the warm chair and eat the snacks and watch TV. Now that's a well-trained human!

## **Building Business Relationships with Humans**

Abby is a Cocker Spaniel puppy with three young boys to train. She works hard to teach her owners the importance of tidiness. She has taught them not to leave food in unsafe places, such as the edge of the kitchen table, where it can easily slip off into her mouth. And she has taught them not to leave important things lying around the house, like shoes—especially their good leather ones, if they don't want her to mistake them for chew toys.

In fact, she confided in me that this shoe thing has developed into a little business on the side. She has an arrangement with the local shoe store whereby she gets a bone every time her owners go there to buy new shoes. The salesman keeps their deal “under the counter,” as it were. If her owners catch him giving her a bone, he just pretends he gives bones to all dogs and says, “We just *love* dogs!”

## **The Cat Bird and the Fire Department**

Just to let you know how hard our job is, even with the best of humans, we were walking on the path one day when we heard what she thought was the Cat Bird. I know this because we stopped and she looked up, trying to see the bird, and she said to me, “Can you see the Cat Bird?” There were tiny cat-like—or should I say, kitten-like—cries

coming from the top of a tree along the path. For a long time she looked intently up into the branches from which the sound seemed to be coming, trying to find that Cat Bird.

Now, we do have Cat Birds, which have very loud and persistent cries. But even the least informed bird fancier should be able to tell the difference between a Cat Bird and a *cat*. I had figured it out long before she did, so I was watching *her* instead of the tree. Suddenly, she looked very startled, and then began to laugh when she too spotted the tiny gray tail of a little kitten who was trapped high up in the tree. From the way my human surveyed the tree and the brush at the bottom of it, I thought for a moment she was going to try to climb it herself to rescue the obviously frightened kitten. But she decided just to call to the kitten for a while. I was most relieved, as it was a very tall tree and had no strong lower branches.

We finally went home, and I overheard her talking rapidly on the phone to someone, and then sounding very disappointed as she repeated the following words loudly into the phone: “Well, if the fire department doesn’t rescue kittens out of trees anymore, who does?”

My point here is that we can’t expect humans to know much about birds when they can’t even tell a *bird* from a *cat*.

## Appendix A

### Trouble-Shooting Guide

Immediate Problem	Possible Cause	Solutions
Your owner’s favorite shoe is in pieces on the floor; the owner of the shoe is not yet home	You chewed the shoe.	Find the matching shoe and destroy it so as not to leave one good shoe standing in effigy of the one you ate!
There’s a big crash and a watery mess on the floor	You knocked over a vase.	Destroy the evidence! Drink the water and eat the flowers. If they are dried and inedible, bury them under the rug.
Your human is screaming at you, pointing at the floor and wrinkling her nose.	You peed on the floor.	Go to the spot, sniff, look up proudly, give the “not me” face, and calmly walk away. This works best if you have another pet in the house.
You have bad tummy ache and hear strange ringing coming from your tummy.	You ate the cell phone.	Hope it’s the vet on the phone.