

TRUST: A DEADLY DISEASE

There is a deadly disease stalking your dog; a hideous, stealthy thing just waiting its chance to steal your beloved friend. It is not a new disease, or one for which there are inoculations. The disease is called TRUST.

You knew before you ever took your puppy home that it could not be trusted. The breeder, who provided you with this precious animal warned you, drummed it into your head. "Puppies steal off counters, destroy anything expensive, chase cats, take forever to house train, and must never be allowed off lead!"

When the big day finally arrived, heeding the sage advice of the breeder, you escorted your puppy to his new home, properly collared and tagged, the lead held tightly in your hand.

At home, the house was "puppy-proofed". Everything of value was stored in the spare bedroom, garbage stowed on top of the refrigerator, cats separated, and a gate placed across the door of the living room to keep at least part of the house puddle free. All windows and doors had been properly secured, and signs placed in all strategic points reminding all to "CLOSE THE DOOR!"

Soon it becomes second nature to make sure the door closes in nine tenths of a second after it was opened and that it really latched. "DON'T LET THE DOG OUT" is your second most verbalized expression. (The first is "NO!") You worry and fuss constantly, terrified that your darling will get out and a disaster will surely follow. Your friends comment about who you love most, your family or the dog. You know that to relax your vigil for a moment might lose him to you forever.

And so the weeks and months pass, with your puppy becoming more civilized every day, and the seeds of trust are planted. It seems that each new day brings less destruction, less breakage. Almost before you know it your gangly, slurpy puppy has turned into an elegant, dignified friend.

Now that he is a more reliable, sedate companion, you take him more places. No longer does he chew the steering wheel when left in the car. And darned if that cake wasn't still on the counter this morning. And, oh yes, wasn't that the cat he was sleeping with so cozily on your pillow last night?

At this point you are beginning to become infected. The disease is spreading its roots deep into your mind. And then one of your friends suggests obedience. You shake your head and remind her that your dog might run away if allowed off lead, but you are reassured when she promises the events are held in a fenced area. And, wonder of wonders, he did not run away, but came every time you called him!

All winter long you go to weekly obedience classes. And, after a time, you even let him run loose from the car to the house when you get home. Why not, he always runs straight to the door, dancing in a frenzy of joy and waits to be let in. And, remember he comes every time he is called. You know he is the exception that proves the rule. (And sometimes late at night, you even let him slip out the front door to go potty and then right back in.)

At this point, the disease has taken hold, waiting only for the right time and place to rear its ugly head.

Years pass -- it is hard to remember why you ever worried so much when he was a puppy. He would never think of running out of the door left open while you bring in packages from the car. It would be beneath his dignity to jump out of the window of the car while you run into the convenience store. And when you take him for those wonderful long walks at dawn, it only takes one whistle to send him racing back to you in a burst of speed when the walk comes too close to the highway. (He still gets into the garbage, but nobody is perfect!)

This is the time the disease has waited for so patiently. Sometimes it only has to wait a year or two, but often it takes much longer.

He spies the neighbor dog across the street, and suddenly forgets everything he ever knew about not slipping outdoors, jumping out windows or coming when called due to traffic. Perhaps it was only a paper fluttering in the breeze, or even just the sheer joy of running -- Stopped in an instant. Stilled forever -- Your heart is as broken as is his still beautiful body.

The disease is TRUST. It's final outcome -- hit by a car.

Every morning my dog, Shah, bounced around off lead exploring. Every morning for seven years he came back when he was called. He was perfectly obedient, perfectly trustworthy. He died fourteen hours after being hit by a car. Please do not risk your friend and your heart. Save the trust for things that do not matter.

By Sharon Mathers

Courtesy of Canine Concepts and Community Control magazine, September 1986

Note from GPI (June 2011): While this is an old article, we find it still very, very relevant today. Please do not succumb to the Trust Disease.