

## Dealing with a Dog

(by Mrs Sproulle and Mr Sproulle)

Sarah had always wanted to be a vet. She loved animals, all kinds of animals and when an animal was in distress she wanted desperately to help it.

Her neighbour, Mrs Higgins, was a veterinarian and she had helped birds with broken wings, hedgehogs who lost their homes, rabbits who injured their paws and cats who got their tails caught in wire fences.

But there was one evil dog Mrs Higgins was having real problems helping. This dog, named Tank, liked chasing hamsters. Any hamster that escaped his or her cage, got chased by Tank. Doesn't that sound horrible? And dangerous for hamsters?

Tank's owner didn't know what to do with him anymore. Tank had been a rescue dog and must have had a pretty bad time because when he was taken in, he was not a friendly dog. He would snarl and growl and bark and then started chasing any hamster that ran across his path. And then more hamsters and more hamsters. Soon no hamsters wanted to live in Windy Hollow.

Mrs Higgins was about to give up and tell Tank's owner that, even though Tank had been abandoned, he might have to abandon him again. This was one fierce dog.

But Sarah couldn't bear giving up on a poor, homeless mongrel and believed that Tank could be trained and taught to behave. So she persuaded her neighbour to let her try.

First she had to gain Tank's trust. That wasn't easy since Tank would bark loudly at anyone who approached him. She had heard her neighbour say that it is best to approach dogs with your head down, not to stare so they won't think you are threatening them.

Mrs Higgins also told her not to pat his head but to let him smell her hand. Sarah was a bit nervous about this. What if he decided her hand looked like a hamster and wanted to bite it off?

On the day when training was due to start, Sarah approached Tank cautiously - she was carrying lots of treats. He was still snarling and growling but not

barking as much. He seemed interested in this little human who didn't seem afraid of him - and was carrying treats.

Sarah reached out her hand and let this very large dog sniff it. Tank seemed to like what he was sniffing and gave it a lick.

"That's good," said Mrs Higgins. "He seems to like you. Now give him a command. Point your finger to the floor and say 'Sit!'"

Sarah did as she was told. Tank did not. He gave a loud bark and walked away to the other end of the garden and started digging holes.

"It means he's unhappy, possibly because he didn't get his treat. But don't give up," said Mrs Higgins who was almost ready to. "It will take time." She then went into the house to make a cup of tea.

Sarah wasn't about to give up. She followed Tank to his corner of the garden. Standing a little distance away, she started speaking to him in a low, comforting voice. She told him about her day at school and what she was reading and where her family were going on holiday. She even said, "Woof!" which was doggy-speak for "Hello!"

Tank turned his head to look at her. Who was this person who seemed to like him, who didn't look like she was going to hit him? And wasn't afraid of being bitten.

Sarah kept on talking and moved slowly closer. Then she sat on the lawn with her head down and started to sing. It was a folk song with a lovely, soothing melody and it seemed to intrigue Tank. He came over to stand beside her.

Sarah brought out the bag of doggie treats and put a few on the grass beside her. She held one up and said quietly, "Sit, please." Tank sat down and Sarah gave him his treat. Then she said, "Lie down, please", gave him another treat and showed him what she meant. Soon both dog and human were lying side by side looking up at the sky.

That is where Mrs Higgins found them. She couldn't believe what she was seeing and wondered whether Sarah had been hurt and whether Tank had done the hurting. But, no, dog and human seemed very content in each other's company.

When Sarah saw Mrs Higgins, she got up and Tank got up with her. They walked towards the house, Sarah giving him commands and treats and Tank obeying.

Mrs Higgins was still amazed and said, "Sarah, it may take a few more days, possibly even weeks before Tank is completely trained. But from what I've seen today, I think you've got the makings of a really good dog trainer, even a future vet."

Sarah thanked Mrs Higgins and looked at Tank. She was convinced she noticed him nodding. She told him she wasn't going to give up on him, they would be working together. Which is what they did. She also intended to teach him how to do a 'high-five' but that was going to take a bit longer.

Oh yes, and no more hamsters were harmed in the training of Tank.