

The “No-Good-Cardigan” Who Makes a Difference By Katrin Andberg

On December 5, 2004, Visions Breakfast at Tiffany’s gave birth to three cardi pups (by Ch Sno-Shu Grizzly Bear). The third little pup born, a little black and white boy with brindle points was a stubborn one and refused any milk teat but the one his siblings had already exhausted. So for the first 48hrs of his life, his breeder, Holly Goldman-Craig, had to physically force him to a full teat to keep him alive. Though she loved him dearly, to this day she blames him for her back problems, and so started the life of the “No-Good-Cardigan.”

The little obstinate black boy, turned out to be a show prospect. Holly thought she’d found the perfect home in a couple that had experience with Dobermans and German Shepherd Dogs, and so Visions Okemo became known as “Spike” for the next 2.5 years. But, things didn’t exactly work out as planned. “Spike’s” owners never really understood him. Though they too loved him dearly, to them he was the “No-Good-Cardigan.” He tried to herd the tractor and the lawn mower, he was food aggressive with their male shepherd, and basically did what ever he wanted, when he wanted.

In late May 2007, Holly received an e-mail from “Spike’s” owners explaining that his ‘aggression’ was getting worse and they needed to place him in rescue. Being a responsible breeder, Holly said, “No, I’ll take him back.” So in June, “Spike” returned to Visions.

Here is where I enter the picture. I am a positive dog trainer and owner of Maplewood Animal Care & Training, Inc run in Massachusetts. I have been a Flat-Coated Retriever owner since 1998. Regal was my 1st, a liver boy, who I competed in conformation, obedience and agility with. Then there is the rescue black boy, James, who is my Service Dog (I am high functioning autistic which includes some neurological balance issues). And finally there is Niche, another liver boy, and performance dog extraordinaire.

Being very involved in agility, I had the resources to start checking out the area corgis, both Pembroke and Cardigan, when I decided that my next dog was going to be a small one. After meeting many of both, I decided as a whole, the Cardis were more my style. I had met a few of the puppies Holly Goldman-Craig’s dogs had produced and I loved their temperament, over all structure, health history, work ethic etc. Plus they were all gorgeous! After talking back and forth for a few months, I met up at Holly and Leonard, her husband, in NY and I met the crew of Cardis they reside with. That day I fell in love with a little blue merle girl named “Destiny,” Visions What Dreams May Come. She was a spit-fire, so I offered that if they ever wanted, I would take her to my home in MA and work with her. That was in January 2007.

A month later, Regal was diagnosed with Hemangiosarcoma and on February 22, 2007, he was gone from my life.

Holly soon gave me a call, asking if I would be willing to take Destiny in early April. Realizing that this little girl was probably just what I needed in my life right then, I agreed.

When “Spike” was returned to Holly, she sent out an e-mail, saying how she had this boy who she thought would be a great performance dog, but that needed a special home to change his negative behaviors. I e-mailed her back, saying I would keep my eyes out for a good home, but that I wasn’t taking him!

Then Destiny came into season a month early, and I offered take “Spike” when she went home. But, before he came, I said, “That name has got to go!” After some thinking, I decided to call this dog, “Monty.” His registered name “Okemo” is a ski mountain in Vermont, a state I have always loved and wanted to live in. So “Monty” is short for “Vermont.”

Holly and I did the ‘exchange’ on Sunday June 24, 2007 in western MA. My good friend, Lisa, went with me. As we pulled out of the parking lot, she said, “You know, Katrin, he is here to stay.” I said, “No, he’s not staying! This is just temporary!”

By Thursday, June 28th, he was mine. I had fallen for this little “No-Good-Cardigan.” He was everything I’d sworn off- a black dog with behavior problems, who was not a puppy! But alas, he was too good to let slip through my fingers. He got along with all of my boys, he was food and toy motivated, he really liked working and hanging out with me, he picked up new things like a sponge, was incredibly smart and agile, after just 2 days of work we had made huge headway on his ‘food aggression’ and he was just the funniest little creature ever made! He has a way about him that makes everyone smile!

In early August 2007, Lisa and I took our annual “Clara Across America” trip with a pack full of dogs in my pick up truck. This year we went down to visit Dina Delsman (owner of Sam, the 1st cardi I fell in love with. And it turns out that Monty is a great-great-grandson of Sam!) in Virginia. And that is really where this “No-Good-Cardigan” started to make a difference.

As part of my job I train service/assistance dogs for the disabled. Dina knew this, and asked if I would be willing to bring James, my Service Dog, to her work to meet a developmentally delayed, probably autistic, non-verbal 5 year old, who is the daughter of a co-worker. Paige, the little girl, loved dogs, but didn’t have one of her own and Dina thought it would be nice if she could interact with James. I said, “Sure we’ll stop in, but really Monty is the kid lover, not James.” I told her that Monty had no certifications, but Dina said that was ok, to bring him along. So Lisa, James, Monty and I went to Dina’s work place where we were introduced to her co-workers and Pam, Paige’s mom. We all then went into the back kitchen area, to wait for Paige.

A few minutes later Pam and Paige came around the corner. Paige took one look at Monty and her entire face lit up with a big smile! Monty stood there, tail wagging, yet calm as could be and I thought, “Oh good, this will go just fine.” And it did.

Over the next hour or so, Paige, Monty and I had a great time. Paige learned how to properly pet a dog, stroking in one direction, not back and forth. She learned a number of hand signals, such as for 'sit' and 'down.' But most amazingly enough of all, she started to learn dog related words. Monty helped Paige to learn: "Monty", "sit", "come", "stay", "get it", "Katrin", "James" and a number of others. About half way through, I looked up, to see Pam, Paige's mom, with tears running down her face. I learned later, that this was the most Paige had done in front of her, in her life.

Monty, through this entire meeting, was having the time of his life! Paige learned how to give him a treat and to play fetch! She was able to learn an entire behavior chain, and repeat it! She learned to tell Monty to, "sit", "stay", then she'd throw the toy, and "get it". Once he had gotten it, she'd clap her hands and say "Monty!" and he'd come running over, happy as could be, toy in his mouth. It was then my job to take it from Monty, as she was a bit nervous about that.

After a while, I could tell that Monty was getting tired, as were Paige and I. So I asked her if she knew how to say, 'bye' to a dog. She didn't. We worked for a little while longer, getting her to remember and say each dog's name, and then wave bye to them.

That was one amazing day and all due to one "No-Good-Cardigan." It was Monty with his love for kids and his desire to do what was asked, that made it all possible.

A month later, Monty went on to pass his Canine Good Citizen test and his Therapy Dogs International test on the 1st try, with flying colors! He earned the two most important certifications he will ever earn when he passed those tests, as they are the ones that will allow him and me to continue to make a difference in the lives of kids with disabilities.

Over the next few months, Monty and I are to start volunteering together in an occupational therapy facility for children on the autism spectrum. I am sure that those weekly sessions will be the highlight of his life and the lives of the kids he interacts with.

Thank you Holly Goldman-Craig of Visions Cardigans for making sure this "Very-Good-Cardigan" made it through those first 48hrs, and every day since, and for knowing that he was meant to be a part of my life. And thank you to his previous family, for giving him up. Monty is an amazing dog who will always have a very special place, not just in my heart, but also in the hearts of those whose lives he makes a difference in.

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Thank you to Margo for asking me to write this about Monty)