



Hello my name is Jacqui and this is our dog 'Sonny'. Three years ago I finally persuaded my husband Paul that it was about time we introduced a dog into our family. Our sons, Liam and Jordan, were at an age where we felt they could be responsible for the care of a dog, so after much thought and the powers of persuasion I got my wicked way. I had never had a pet before, never mind a dog, so therefore I knew it was going to be a big responsibility for all of us. I did all the usual things like read books and soaked up as much information as I could about dog training etc. but nothing prepared me for the reality !!!!

A couple of months later a family friend told us of someone they knew who's dog had just had some pups and did we want to go and take a look? We knew they were cross Lab/Springer and we knew that they were going to be lively, to say the least, but we still went along. I had all along wanted a chocolate coloured bitch to laughingly try and balance out some female hormones at home, we had a name picked out and she was going to be called 'Bella' ...hmmmmmm but destiny had other ideas in store for us! Out of the blue, I suddenly had eyes for the little black sleepy fella snuggled in the corner, he made me melt and when I asked to pick him up and held him close to me I just knew he was the 'one'. We all fell in love with him and decided there and then he was going to be our dog and that we would call him 'Sonny'.

By the time we took him home at 9 weeks we had everything in place for him. I found him easy to care for and I thought "this is going to be easy" but I spoke too soon and that's when the real dramas kicked in. It was only after one destroyed sofa, one chewed dining table, and a million and ten chewed up socks, Sonny finally settled down and at almost a year old we felt that maybe had overcome the worst of the puppy stage. Around this time however, we did notice that there were some minor issues with my then twelve year old son Jordan, and that Sonny seemed to be more boisterous with him than anyone else and he certainly didn't like it when Jordan went near his bowl of food, he just seemed to get a little bit grumpy and would chase Jordan away, Jordan would then turn it into a game and in my stupid naivety and lack of experience with dogs I didn't correct it at the time. Little did I know I was going to pay a very high price in the coming months.

In the summer of 2009, Paul and I had a lovely walk with Sonny at a local country park. On our way back to the car we stopped to give Sonny some water, coming towards us were what seemed like a family with a large group of children and their dogs, there was a lot of commotion going on around us, the children were running and it was just generally chaotic. Then, what seemed like complete slow motion, one of the children screeched as he ran past Sonny whilst he still drinking from the bowl. All hell broke loose and Sonny lunged forward towards the little boy and caught him on his back with a graze (not a bite, thank God), thankfully Paul also had him tight on his lead, however it was still bad enough to obviously frighten the little boy and for all of us to be in complete shock. The parents, understandably, were livid and began shouting "get that ***** dog away, I was crying and shaking, in complete shock trying to see if their little boy was ok and Paul was trying to calm everyone down. I couldn't apologise any more and in between my sobs I was writing down my name, address and telephone number. I told them they must do what they need to do as they were screaming we hadn't heard the last of this. They walked off and Paul and I walked home with a heavy heart completely devastated and thinking "did we have an aggressive dog on our hands?"

Once we got home I immediately phoned the RSPCA, mainly to get advice and to see where we stood. I tried to explain everything in detail but it was difficult as I was still so upset by the whole incident. They advised me I should think about getting a dog behaviourist to come over and that I should perhaps get a muzzle for Sonny, just for the time being.

We knew the dog behaviourist was going to be costly but we didn't care, we just wanted answers as to why it happened. Our vet recommended a lady who was quite well known, and we arranged for her to come over and meet our family. She soon established that there was in fact a problem between Sonny and our son Jordan. It seemed that Sonny thought he was way above Jordan in the pecking order and she gave us some advice on how to correct the situation which we gladly followed and hoped for the best. We had everything in place when we got the dreaded phone call from the police four weeks later. They read me the riot act on the phone and they were very blunt when they told me they would have Sonny 'destroyed' if he ever did anything like this again, I replied that I had in fact put everything in place and "did I sound like I was bringing up and aggressive dog"? I was just as upset as I was when the incident first happened. For someone who has never even had so much as a parking ticket, being spoken to by the police like that left my confidence as a dog owner at complete rock bottom. So my anxiety went on for twelve long months. I started to dread taking Sonny for a walk, I felt guilty when I didn't, and I was a complete mess whenever I went out with Paul and Sonny for walks. I was terrified when he went near people, and so I withdrew myself from walking him and left it down to Paul.

One day it suddenly dawned on me that I wasn't giving Sonny the best life and I needed to overcome this fear once and for all. I started to look on the internet and came across 'Woodland Dogs'. I suppose I just wanted advice really but after speaking to Janine I just knew she could help me. We arranged for Janine to come over and get to know Sonny and from that day I felt absolute relief that I could work through this. We agreed Sonny would go over to her once a week in order to go for long walks and socialise with other dogs and relieve the pressure from me for a while. Within the first week I noticed changes in me, I started to feel more relaxed and suddenly I just felt more in control. I started to take him for short walks again and realised that I had been missing walking him so much. I felt something just finally clicked and felt relaxed with him at long last!

Meeting Janine has been the best thing that could have happened, I feel so much happier that I have gained someone who I trust to give me advice if I need it with regards to Sonny and also I feel I have gained a friend. Janine is looking after Sonny for us when we have a family holiday this year. It's our first holiday in four years! I feel so comfortable that he will be in good hands and she will give him lots of affection as well as show him who's boss.

Some people may think I have over reacted and that I have blown things out of proportion, after all the incident with the little boy was not a full on lock on bite, but to me and of course the poor little boy involved it was bad enough. I am a holistic therapist so I like calm and good energies around me, so therefore Sonny comes from a home that is really calm and peaceful most of the time, so an incident like that knocked me off my feet. I know that I have done everything in my power to hope that it never happens again.

I still have a way to go as I still get nervous around people and when there are lots of dogs around. I still struggle to read the body language of a dog and the difference of dominance and aggression, but I know with Janine's help I will overcome these things. I am happy with the progress I have made so far and I feel better knowing that Sonny is having the most wonderful life he deserves!

Jacqui