



kort's korner

And Then There's Maud!

Terriers and the People They Own

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD of a dog that gives you the middle finger, snubs you when you call, believes that you exist to please her and that she doesn't have to please you (unless she feels like it)—and channels the worst parts of your mother to boot? A dog that intentionally tries to trip you when you walk downstairs and in the middle of all of your hard work, intentionally shuts off your computer by sitting on the outlet? A dog that laughed at you when you yelled and screamed for obedience? Well that was my dog, Maud, who owned my partner and me for 12 years.

In August, 1995 my partner, Mike, and I purchased a Welsh terrier. At the time, we'd been together for two years and lived together for seven months. As we were nesting, we thought a dog would be a good way to start a family together. Mike is allergic to dogs with dander, so we had to stick with breeds that have no dander, and terriers were one of those.

Mike was raised with Schnauzers, and I was raised with a Sheltie named Taffy, the most obedient and loving dog who got me through a lot of hard times in my childhood by sitting next to me with a worried look on his face, as so many Shelties do. He wanted to please and I wanted to please him back.



I wasn't keen on terriers because I thought they were dominant and temperamental. Ultimately, after researching all terriers, we learned the Welsh terrier was supposed to be sweet, friendly and good with children. That was important to me, since as I knew my sister would start having children, and I wanted them to feel welcome in my home.

We agreed to name our terrier Maud for two reasons: I liked the lead character from the popular television series *Maud*, and Mike liked the name after running across it in English literature. This was a preview of how our differences would surface as a result of this dog—for better and for worse!

If you've attended my lectures, classes or workshops on relationships, you may already know that I used Maud as part of my shtick on how relationships can focus on the wrong things. During any

conflict, what a couple is arguing about is never their real issue. But I didn't know this in 1995, and Maud became part of the power struggle between Mike and me.

We purchased Maud as an eight-week old puppy. When I called her in from outside, and she defiantly ignored me, I knew this wasn't going to be the right a dog for me. After the third time she did this to me, I stormed into the house and told Mike she was dominant, hyperactive, and disobedient.

Being a psychotherapist, I diagnosed her as having an attention deficit, along with hyperactivity and Oppositional Defiant Disorder, according to the DSM- IV. But Mike would not hear of sending her back. It was as if she was his own flesh and blood. To me, she

continued

And Then There's Maud! continued

was simply an animal that needed to be medicated—and I knew I couldn't live with her! But after I saw how attached to her Mike was, and after turning to others who had quickly attached to their pets, I agreed to keep her. What a mistake that was . . . or so I thought!

Over the years, Mike and I would fight over the dog. He would gaze out the window into our backyard and see Kimba the white lion, and I would see a four-legged Nazi who was out to get me. Maud became the centerpiece of our arguments and became Exhibit A of how we viewed things differently. We took her to dog-training classes. She flunked both Level One and Level Two—and required a two-month stay at a dog retreat so she could be trained to listen.

Now, of course I knew she was just a dog. But many times, in my reactivity around her bad behaviors, I thought she was out to get me. Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean you're wrong—isn't that so?

What pushed me over the edge was an issue I had with Mike: He wasn't as emotive and affectionate to me as I'd have liked. He would tell me he "did not know how," and hadn't been raised to be that way. But when we brought Maud home, Mike was instantly affectionate, calling her cutesy names, rubbing noses with her, and giving her everything that I wanted from him. I remember asking Mike, "If I wet my nose and wag my tail, will you treat me that way?" This was before I learned about how couples operate in terms of their power struggle.

After nine months of fighting over Maud, we entered Imago Relationship Therapy (or IRT). In due course, I discovered that I was projecting onto this dog the traits of the adults who raised me, who did ignore me and said and did things to hurt me. Even though I

had done a lot of therapy around this issue—not to mention even being a therapist myself! This dog found a way to pull out my reactions from my past.

In therapy, we learned that Maud was simply a metaphor for how different Mike and I were from each other. He would react to her by staying calm and acting the Alpha Male, and she would often (not always) respond by obeying him. But when she snubbed me and disobeyed me, I would scream and yell and stomp my feet, which she viewed as an invitation to a playful sparring match. This was truly the acting out of the turtle and the hailstorm behaviors, which I learned about in IRT.

Maud was also very sweet and friendly. She loved people and loved to play—and we enjoyed playing hard with one another. I would always get tired out before she did, with her standing over me with a paw on my chest, begging for more, while I huffed and puffed, begging for mercy.

Maud had a big personality and always let you know she was in the room. If you didn't pay attention, she would sit and stare at you. And if you did not respond to that, she would whine; and if that didn't bring you around, she would pace back and fourth staring at you. This behavior was particularly annoying to me on days I needed to write. I would curse her for making me get up to play with her, let her out when she insisted on going out even when I was in the midst of a thought. If she wanted to go for a walk, she would make it be clear by pacing and whining until I gave in. To get a break, I tried shutting her in another room, but she would have none of that. She would whine, scratch on the door, and bark louder and louder until I let her out to sit or sleep right next to me.

"I have to write!" I would scream. "I can't be disturbed." But she would just

look at me with that terrier frown, which I knew was really a smile turned upside down.

I joked that I marked off on the calendar every day she was with us, as if I was serving time in prison. Mike joked that Maud had a calendar too; marking off each day she had to be with me. "I will never get another terrier," I would repeat—over and over.

As she grew older, something shifted in me with her that I did not grasp at first. I learned that her need for play were a sign that I needed to play more. Her need to go outside made me aware that I needed a break from the computer, after hours of writing. Her demands for walks (and I do mean demands!) increased my awareness of my own need for exercise. I realized that if I did not become more of an Alpha Male with her, she would dominate me every day. I learned how to show her that I was in charge while still being willing meet her needs too. And best of all Mike and I stopped fighting over her and got down to our real issues.

Maud died Saturday, June 30, 2007, ten days after her 12th birthday. When she turned 12, I joked that I looked forward to her *Bark Mitzvah* the following year, when she turned 13. Now that will never be. But now I realize how much I loved her, in all my anger and outrage. I see now that she was here to teach me something I'd been resisting fought. She was my teacher, and led me kicking and screaming into her classroom. But I did learn from her, as I now know. I miss her terribly and have wept every day since. Our house is not the same.

And the biggest surprise, we went to buy another dog—a Welsh terrier. She'll arrive in September when she's three months old. I'll make sure I listen to this dog. ■