

Do dogs really understand what we say to them ?!!!
MARCH 2010 ISSUE www.onthescent.com

Picture this. A glorious winter morning in 1991 and the sun just peering through the broken clouds.

A group of teenage boys are playing football on the Gainsborough playing field on the outskirts of Bury St. Edmunds without a care in the world.

They all got a bit warm running around and took off their coats and placed them in a heap near one of the goal posts.

I was walking Bertie, my then one year old brindle coloured Lhasa Apso (he has since passed away but I am sure if he is looking down on me will not mind this story being told) who was thoroughly enjoying himself running around and chasing the leaves which had fallen into seemingly neat piles about the place.

Over in the far corner I noticed a dog coming onto the field and so did Bertie who seriously considered going to say hello but I managed to call him and he came at once. Good timing for me for an early morning ! The teenagers looked up and saw us and started giggling, shouting in fun “you call that a dog...was it a Rottie who has now shrunk in the wash”!! I laughed out loud and replied without hesitation “ you be careful he doesn’t take offence and run over to you and pee on your pile of coats....”!!

It was as if I had a remote control because Bertie swung round and made a bee line right for the heap of coats on the ground and did just that...yes he peed for all the dogs that ever walked the field !!!

I was amazed and fell about laughing as did the shocked teenagers, their

faces were a picture and only wished I had a camera.

So do dogs really understand what we are saying in regular conversations.

I am not a scientist nor am I a vet but I do believe we still have so much to learn about what our canine family members can and can not understand.

If Bertie's response is anything to go by then in my humble opinion I would say yes, dogs understand more than we think, however some cynics could say it was just a coincidence ?

In 2004 when my mother was at our home and Guinness was about two years old, I decided completely out of the blue to place on the living room floor my mobile phone, a purse, the television remote control and my wrist watch.

Not having done this before I called Guinness into the room and proceeded to ask him to fetch each article..."Guinness, fetch watch"...he went straight to it and brought it to hand. I gave lots of praise and cuddles. "Guinness, fetch purse"...he did the same again. I was getting rather excited about it all.

There were only the two articles left on the floor now, the mobile and the television remote.

I asked Guinness to fetch the mobile and he went over to it and hesitated and looked at the remote as they looked similar.

I repeated my command and to my amazement he brought the mobile to me.

Why ?

Dogs learn by association and although Bertie's response was amazing

and I would like to think he simply understood what I was saying, Guinness learnt the articles by association simply by watching, listening and associating the article with the name.

For example when I had said to my husband have you seen my purse, Guinness had simply put the two together to know what the article was called. There really is no other explanation.

I have lots of fun with all my dogs playing this game and it's a good one to play in the house when the weather is really awful and the gardens are too muddy to play in. Why not have some fun with it yourselves and let me know via email how you get on.

Have fun !!!

S ophia MGodt

Next month in the April issue: Walking the dog.