

AnatShepJan2020

## The ripple effect

I don't know about you, Gentle Reader, but I'm getting older. I'm tired. I'm not certain, but I'm pretty sure the dogs' crates get bigger and heavier while sitting at the showsite from Friday night to Sunday afternoon.

I'm jaded. Maybe it's the random drink cups, handbills and other detritus that ends up on top of the crates over the course of a weekend, maybe it's the spot on the crate covers where someone has let their dog mark my dogs' crates as they went by.

Maybe it's the person with the smallest breed in the Working group who cuts me off going into the owner handled group ring and says 'Your breed is slow', even as I shrug and think to myself, 'Never been an issue in the other group ring'. The devil on one shoulder tells me to run up on her dog as we go around the ring. The angel on the other one reminds me that I tell my handling class not to crowd the dog in front of them, even as I make them practice moving around the ring behind a smaller, slower dog. If I gave in to my baser impulse to crowd the person in front of me out of spite on the go around I would no longer be fit to face the people in class on Tuesday night.

The rudeness of other exhibitors is a little more annoying on Sunday afternoon than it is on Saturday morning, the effort to bite my tongue and turn the other cheek a little harder won.

I'm writing this because of something that happened this weekend. Or several somethings. I was in the setup, stressing over a likely ring conflict between Anatolians and my other breed, Australian Cattle Dogs, when a member of the host club walked up and presented me with a softly spoken couple wearing matching deer-in-the-headlights looks. The woman was clutching an AKC new exhibitor pamphlet in her hands. The club member said something along the lines of 'Here! I bring you tribute in the form of fresh blood!' (Given the way some people act at dog shows, that wouldn't be out of place.)

Sorry. Actually, what she said was more along the lines of, 'These lovely people have working Anatolians and are interested in showing their dogs. I wanted them to meet you so that you could help them navigate dog shows since you're experienced in the breed.' Then the club member explained that when she first began showing in the U.S. she ran into a few hiccups because we do things differently here than they did at home in the U.K. We groom differently and present the dogs a little differently, and she said she wanted to make sure these newcomers didn't have the issues starting out that she had, that she wanted them to learn from someone who knew Anatolians. And I was humbled. I felt a ripple in the dog show pond.

The next hour was consumed with talking to the couple about their dogs, explaining about points and how to build them, finding out where they lived (they had driven several hours just to watch the show), and giving them contact information for other people in the state who show the breed, along with the promise that I would attempt to find a handling class near them. They wanted to buy a show lead before going to a class, so we went to a vendor who had been in business for as long as I can remember and picked out an appropriate lead.

We discussed the nature of working Anatolians and how some of the breed traits that make them excel as livestock guardians also make them less than ideal show dogs. We discussed how the judges who

truly know and appreciate the breed's characteristics are few and far between, but how it's always worth giving those judges an entry. Sometimes the most correct Anatolians don't want to be shown.

I was talking to a friend in another breed and asked her why I was still doing this when the temptation to quit has never been stronger, and she said she had the same question for herself on Friday night as she bathed her dogs and packed the van. She answered herself with the response that she still loved showing dogs. At the heart of it, she still loved the sport. There was another little ripple in the pond of dog showing when she said that. It buoyed me.

I stood ringside watching a breed I'm not familiar with and asked a longtime breeder judge to mentor me, and he did. Another ripple went out, a bump on the water. I got home last night and opened up Facebook to see what I had missed over the weekend, and I saw the brags from all the people that come to Tuesday Night Dog Class (if one of you is reading this, thank you – know that you keep me going and keep me sane) and I realized that as much as I'm tired and jaded, what I do does make a difference. Keep trying. Every kind thing you do in dogs means something to someone (conversely every spiteful thing does as well, so choose to be kind), and enough small ripples can make a wave.

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