

A Rose By Any Other Name

Taking your dog for a walk in the morning is a great way to start the day and one that I indulge in whenever possible.

The day I recall was just perfect. The weather was more than decent, and most of the town was just waking up. We pattered our way through the little business district in relative isolation. Our usual route got us almost to the park when the quiet was shattered by screaming, running man. He was all waving arms, flying feet, topped off with a red face that was a sure sign of being almost out of breath. However, he did have enough air left to bellow, "Sweetheart...Sweetheart where are you Sweetheart?"

Was I in the middle of a tragic, human drama? Was I about to witness a heartless rejection or a touching lovers' reunion?

Nope. In a flash, the man flew into the shrubbery and emerged with a small, fluffy white dog. All he could manage to say to us was that Sweetheart slipped her collar. Relief flooded his face, then with a flush of embarrassment, he quickly turned and was gone.

What flashed into my mind was, "Be careful what you name your dog...you might have to shout it out in public."

There's a great divide between what we register as opposed to what we call our dogs. When it comes to a registered name, for most of us it involves a kennel name followed by something of our own choosing. It's a chance to be creative and stamp a mark on the new human/canine relationship with a formal registration/naming document. What we call our dogs in everyday life may or may not relate back to the registered name.

Here are a few good tips to remember the next time you name a dog:

- Keep the name relatively short. Your dog will respond to the sound of the first few letters. Having a mile-long call name is a waste of your breath and time. In addition, people will use a shortened version of a long name when referring to your dog and you might not like the result. There once was a dog named Rumpelstiltskin who everyone called "Rump." You get the idea.
- Remember the story of "Sweetheart"? Make sure what you call your dog is a name that you are comfortable with when other humans hear you say it. Maybe you call your 80 pound, masculine, hunk of canine muscle "Cuddles" in the privacy of your home, but how will that sound at the dog park?
- Don't pick a call name that sounds like a command word that you use in training. Names that are close to the sound of a command word will confuse your dog and make you a frustrated trainer. "Downy" is a great name but confusing to a dog when you are training a prone position. If you plan to train your dog to do a stand, "Standish" is not a great choice for a name. And then there was "Stacey" who did a great stay but not much else.
- Don't decide on a call name before you get the dog. The personality or physical characteristics might not match the name. What if you have your heart set on the name "Pixie" and the puppy turns out to be BIG and less than light on her feet?

Naming a dog is no small thing. You're making a decision that you will live with, for hopefully many years. You're choosing a word that you will repeat thousands of times, so you better come up with something that works well for both you and your dog. Have fun with naming your dog, be creative and remember my cautionary words.

Carole Lee Richards

ymar_column@yahoo.com