

HIS HIGHNESS, SIR WINSTON

"There is no doubt about it," said my friend. "You are harboring true Royalty in your home in the guise of Sir Winston, your Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. Sensing that this animal demanded the up most respect his Veterinarian had added the 'SIR' to his name. Although at times he may respond to affectionately calling him "Winnie."

It was about four years ago that a three month old royal puppy came to reside at our home. The moment we laid eyes on each other, this bundle of soft copper and white fur, definitely choose me as his mistress, or rather his Hand Maid.

Six months earlier my precious Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, "Lady Victoria", A.K.A. 'Vicky' moved on to Doggie Heaven. (Don't all dogs go to Heaven?) She had been my constant companion for thirteen and a half years, showering me with love and devotion. During her entire life she amused and delighted me every moment we spent together. Parting with her was heart-rend/ing, leaving a huge dark empty space in my world.

"Your mother needs a puppy," my dear friend told my daughter on the phone. "She seems so down hearted since Vickie's gone. Think about it." Well, Anne,

did think about it. Anne is a beautiful busy actress, who is often out of town filming on location as she was a month or so before that Christmas, so I wasn't surprised when my son-in-law, Terry, called and asked if I would help out with her Christmas Shopping. Of course I agreed (What else does a mother do when her daughter needs her?)

"Would you come over to Katie's house Friday evening about five thirty?" Katie, one of Anne and Terry's dearest friends, had gathered some items for us to select. Dutifully I rang her doorbell at exactly five thirty Friday evening. An excited Terry greeted me at the door. "Good, you're here. We have some things laid out in the den. You can help us decide which to choose."

"That's a large order but I'll do my best." I followed Terry into the den of Katie's warm and elegant home. Upon

entering the room, the first thing my eyes fell upon were two adorable Cavalier King Charles puppies, and their beautiful champion mother. I was introduced to two ladies, one being the Breeder. Charming Katie sat nearby looking like the cat that swallowed the canary. Terry guided me to a chair where I sat down stunned. "Oh! Oh my!" was all I seemed able to utter.

"The puppies just arrived from Canada this afternoon," Terry reported enthusiastically. "One is to go to another home but you may have your choice. It will be Anne's and my Christmas present to you." For a moment I was speechless. "But Terry," I murmured, "We weren't planning to get another dog. Harry will never approve." Harry is my husband and even more senior than I. Harry had refrained from saying much when anyone suggested that now was the time for me to adopt a puppy. It was quite clear by his reaction he did not think well of the idea, in spite of the fact that he had reluctantly become as attached to Vickie as I had.

"I'm sure he wouldn't object if he thought it would make you happy," Terry insisted.

"Oh I don't know about that," I sighed watching the cute antics of the two puppies. One was a little larger than the other and since Vickie had not been small I rather favored it. Terry picked him up and put him in my lap. Now being a real dog nut, I expect all dogs to immediately take to me, but this little fellow seemed uncomfortable on my lap and made an effort to get down. I obliged and just as I did the other puppy, who was playing across the room, stopped and took a good look in my direction. He then darted over to me, put his front feet on my knees and wagged his tail excitedly. Naturally I picked him up. He slammed his paws on my chest and began showering me with kisses. Well, what was I to do? I laughed and held him close. Hadn't I said that If I were to get another dog I wanted a female? However, I quickly realized it was no longer my decision. This little fellow had definitely chosen me.

"But Harry," I commiserated. "He won't approve."

"I'll call and ask him," Terry said and before I could stop him Terry was off to another room to phone Harry. I waited cuddling the puppy, sniffing his silky fur which smelled sweet and clean.

Terry bounced back into the room. "Just as I thought, Harry says if it makes you happy what can he say?" It wasn't just the answer I would have liked but I knew that now there was no retreating. Right then and there we all knew this puppy had secured himself a home.

My arms filled with puppy food and a blanket I took him home that very night. I set his metal cage beside my bed where he slept for a short time but soon protested loudly to our separation; so what was I to do? He spent the rest of the night cuddled in my arms.

The next day it was quite evident that we had bonded. If I left the room to answer the telephone or doorbell he bounded after me. When a dear friend phoned the next day inquiring how I was doing, Harry answered. He told her all I did was hug and kiss the new dog so I must be O.K.

However, I soon learned that if I thought I had another Vickie to coddle, I was sadly mistaken. Although they had many of the same qualities of the breed, both being playful and affectionate, both finding squirrels and birds irresistible prey, that's where the likeness ended. Vickie always eager to please quickly learned to be obedient responding to training in a most satisfactory way, the epitome of the best qualities of the breed. Not Sir Winston. He had to take things under consideration and if it pleased him he may respond favorably, if not he went about doing things his way. He soon decided where he would sleep, not in that training cage, no matter how insistent I was. When it was time to play I was battered by his barking and his pushy toy presentation until I succumbed to his wishes. A simple - NO - was not his idea of a proper response.

"You've been at that computer monster all afternoon," he whined and barked, letting me know it was five o'clock and his playtime. Obediently I was ordered to turn off the

computer and spend the next half hour playing with him and his favorite toy, a little red fire hydrant.

Right from his first day in his new home, Sir Winton seriously claimed his territory. No one was to enter the house unless they were first properly introduced and presented, as in court, with the exception of well behaved children whom he always welcomed warmly.

A friend, when confronted by Sir Winston, without having been properly introduced, backed into the fountain in front of the house. Thank goodness she was more amused than angry. Yet occasionally some repair men arrive and Winnie will greet them warmly, wagging his tail and allowing them to pet him. He refuses to explain his choices. He does not tolerate anyone touching his head. The proper way to get acquainted is to put your hand under his chin. However this royal dog is never dull and he expresses his wishes very clearly.

In order to insure his safety I enlisted a dog trainer to teach him to come when called, sit, stay and heel. Sir Winston respectfully responded beautifully to the trainer but later when I tried to exercise the same commands he totally ignored them. When I walked him on a lead he went where he wanted to go at his pace which often resulted in a tug of war. Intruders on our property were not tolerated. Most Spaniels being hunters by instinct are ever on the outlook for some intrusive critter. A spunky squirrel arrived one morning and thereafter daily to feast on bird seed that Mirta, my housekeeper, set out for wild birds. Sir Winston was outraged and when possible charged after him. The squirrel turned instantly on his heels and disappeared much to Winston's frustration. However the squirrel soon returned when he felt it was safe. Winston watched eagerly at the dining room bay window for his reappearance and all but crashed through that window when he saw him. However the squirrel realizing that Winston was not able to get out taunted him mercilessly from the top of a small stature outside the window. This has become a daily ritual.

His first summer, Winston noted that every evening a rabbit and her three babies come to feast on our fresh

green grass. Waiting patiently at the window each evening Sir Winston responds hysterically when he sees them arrive. After they feast a bit I let him out and the chase that follows gives him more than his required daily exercise.

Beautifully housebroken until he reached puberty when he decided it was most necessary to leave his scent around the house in most every room. I would scold him severely and send him to his bed to think about his misconduct. One day I saw him run full speed from the living room through the dining room and into his bed in the laundry area where he curled up and put his head down in shame. Checking my living room, I discovered he had lifted his leg on a lovely potted plant and immediately ran to his bed punishing himself before I would do it. The problem was solved when we decided it that he would not become a father.

I recently employed two nice young men to install a new tub in my bathroom. I'm pleased to say that "His Highness", as I sometimes refer to Sir Winston, accepted the two young men. Of course, he had first to be assured they would allow him to escort them to the kitchen shelf which housed his biscuits and there present him with one when they arrived each day.

One particular time Winnie and I were enjoying a bit of lunch in the kitchen, when I noticed him sniffing the air, his tail raised, his posture signaling "ON GUARD". Suddenly he dashed madly through the house until he got to the far side where work was going on in the bathroom. There he was horrified to see a large man sitting on the tub with a measuring tape in his hand. Like a princely Knight, Winston charged snapping, growling and showing his teeth. I flew through the air sliding across the marble floor enveloping Sir Winston in my arms, hoping to avoid a major law suit. I carried his squirming body to his bedroom suite and caged him there. I then confronted the two young men. It seemed the man from the marble company had made the unforgivable mistake of coming through the open garage and entering the house from the garden not having been formally invited in by me or Winston.

"Never allow anyone to come inside this house that Winston and I don't know," I scolded the two young men.

They apologized profusely. The next morning I was awakened slightly after dawn. It was one of the young men with a strange new person. "So sorry to awaken you, but I have a new painter and I thought I should first introduce him to Sir Winston before he began his work." Winston stared at the man suspiciously but when I reassured him that I approved of him being there, he reluctantly accepted him, later conning the man into giving him one of his biscuits. Winston considered it the fee for entering the castle.

Whenever I return from a trip, having been used to Vickie, who always greeted me with over whelming delight, tail wagging and kisses, Sir Winston greets me with a look that clearly says, "Where on earth have you been." He ignores me until about half way home in the car, he will nonchalantly crawl into my lap as if to say, "Well, maybe I'll forgive you." I'm so relieved I hug him all the way home.

Even now in his senior years Winston is never dull. He communicates his every thought, with his expressive brown eyes. "Dat, dog he talk to me," a valet parking attendant told me one day when I returned for my car. "Widt his eyes he look at me, he say, 'She go!" Then he look after you then back at me and say "She leave me! Then he lie down and look sad.

My husband who bonded with him soon after his arrival refuses to meet me for Sunday lunch after I have attended church unless he can bring Winston to a restaurant that has an attendant and a shady place to park, as he refuses to leave him home alone. He too cares for, him, but then what is a family without a dog.

by Majorie Lord
(2009)