



Paws for advice from new author

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Author Curtis the Dog replies to letters sent to his Web site seeking advice.

By Michelle J. Mills
Staff Writer

THE shelves in book stores are filled with a bevy of advice and self-help books, but it's doubtful that any of them will become as dog-eared as "Ask Curtis: Dog-Sense Advice from Curtis the Dog" (Dogwalk Press, \$15).

Agoura Hills resident Curtis is a 7- to 9-year-old collie/golden retriever mix who lives with his publisher, Dan Gersten, and Gersten's son, Matt. Gersten rescued him from an animal shelter in 1998 and Curtis is "passing it forward" by offering advice to dogs and their humans on his Web site, www.askcurtis-thedog.com, as well as in his book.

Canines have been given the gift of reading and writing from the dog god Canus, Curtis writes in the book.

"Most dogs read and write," Curtis writes. "I can't really speak for cats. We try to keep it from humans that we have this ability. Humans are very insecure and they like to believe that they are the only ones who can read and write."

As their best friends, then, dogs pretend that the humans are right.

Letters from dogs, humans and even cats, a flea and a tick, appear in Curtis' book. Gersten helped Curtis sort through his mail to select the best topics and keep the letters coming in.

"People tell me that I really give great advice and they continue to write to me," Curtis said.

As the human companion to two dogs, I decided to ask the expert a couple of questions.

Indiana Bones, a 3-year-old Belgian Malinois mix, is a former pound puppy

CURTIS THE DOG

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who is very afraid of water, especially the hose in the backyard. I wanted to know how to make water fun so he could play in the sprinklers or wading pool with Atticus, a 6-year-old Jack Russell terrier.

"It may be indicative of an experience that the dog had with water, like he might have been sprayed with a hose as punishment," Curtis responded. "It would take patience on your part. Take it slow and coax, but don't force the dog in efforts to get him into the wading pool."

Every morning, when I do my workout, my dogs join in. Atti loves to jump on top of me while I'm doing sit-ups. Why does he do this?

"I understand that people sometimes do sit-ups and crunches with a weight on their chest," Curtis told me. "I think your dog only has your best interest at heart."

"You also have to remember that we operate in a different time zone than you do. To us, it's really important that we can play and have your attention and love as much as we can because before you know it, we can be gone."

Doing sit-ups on the floor puts me at "Atticus-level," for play, he said.

The best advice Curtis has given so far was to a human who wrote to him about his best friend whose dog had passed away. The writer felt that his friend waited too long to ease the canine's suffering and was grieving excessively.

"The passing of anyone is a very difficult one to understand when you're on the outside," Curtis wrote. "Not to be judgmental of his friend. The time that it took was the time that it was going to take and the best thing the friend could now do was to help his own friend with the grieving process."

When he's not working at the computer or reading his mail, Curtis enjoys going for walks, playing fetch and lounging around the house.

He readily admits to occasional anti-social behavior, which he attributes to bad experiences in his youth and time spent living on the streets. He also loves to let Gersten know when there's a visitor long before the doorbell rings.

"I can't wait to see who's going to be at the door next," Curtis said.

Curtis is currently planning a book for children and their dogs, as well as one for celebrities and their pups. He is busy expanding his Web site and will be adding another writer, Coco the pomeranian, who will report on fashion, accessories and the lives of celebrity dogs.

"Get your pets, especially your dogs, to write to me and visit my Web site and have some fun," Curtis wrote. "Life is too short not to smile, not to laugh every day."

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