

## NOODGE: Small Ambassador Into the Great World of Agility

*Pritamo Kentala*



**O**N MARCH 6, 2003 AN AGILITY PIONEER left this world for the Rainbow Bridge.

It's hard to believe that a year has passed since the day I spent the last few hours of companionship with my one and only "roadside special," The Noodge Dog NATCH, V-MAD. It is a time that all of us dog lovers know we will face someday, but we always hope that somehow, someday, it will never come.

Noodge's life was one of those Cinderella stories. I found her 15 years ago wandering on a busy Seattle street, dodging traffic and dragging a chain behind her. I quickly pulled over and caught up with her, put her in my car and took her home. She was very stinky and dirty, so the next step was a bath in the kitchen sink. After a struggle, I managed to

get the collar off her neck. It was so tight, that I figured she must have "grown" into it. Then I waited for my husband to come home to see what I had found! We spent a few days looking for her owners without success. We quickly came to the conclusion that since she was not spayed or house broken, it was probably fortunate that she had broken her chain and wandered away.

Noodge got her name because she never stopped pestering me to pet her. A few days after I had found her, she was bugging me while I tried to put on my shoes. I thought to myself "Oh, you are such a noodge!" and the name stuck. For those of you that don't know, Noodge is a Yiddish word that basically means a pest. There were numerous derivations of her name such as — Noodgala and Noodgarina.

Eventually we concluded that she was most likely a Jack Russell - Chihuahua cross. She was nine inches tall and weighed about ten pounds. She had a rough coat that could be stripped, mostly white with red patches and a tail that wagged constantly like a little metronome.

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Noodge spent her first year or so with us as a much loved and pampered pet. Going on trips to the beach to run on the sand, sleeping in our bed at night — she clearly had found a good spot for herself!

Then one day, I saw a dog Agility event on TV. I think this was back in 1990 or so. Having competed in Obedience for years starting as a teenager, I was fascinated by this new activity to do with your dog. I started asking all around and then one day ran across a little index card on a bulletin board at a pet store. It said Agility classes would be forming and to call for information. Well, I don't have to tell you



Noodge shows her style in the weave poles.

*(Photos courtesy of Pritamo Kentala)*



Noodge, above on plank and at right jumping, was the little stray that got author Pritamo Kentala hooked on Agility.



what happens once that Agility training ball gets rolling! Noodge and I enrolled in the very first Agility classes to be taught in Western Washington State. We drove 25 miles every Saturday morning to train indoors in what was actually an Obedience training building. Our equipment was the real thing — HEAVY SOLID WOOD, and our enthusiastic instructors were learning right along with us.

This was the beginning of a wonderful new world for Noodge and me. She was such a willing little thing — that tail constantly wagging, as she tried to figure out what in the heck I wanted her to do next. You all know the wonderful folks who participate in Agility, and this was the beginning of many great friendships for me. I feel indebted to Noodge for her willingness to hang in there with me and learn these new skills in spite of my being totally clueless, klutzy and confused!

Our very first trial was a GRAND PRIX regional!!! HA HA!! At that time there were very few shows or fun matches or anything anywhere, so my instructors encouraged me to sign up and go for it. Noodge was perfect, not one mistake. However, she never broke out of a trot and I think we were on the course for 2 minutes! But she was certainly the cutest and smallest dog in the trial and everyone clapped and enjoyed her efforts. I was thrilled and exhausted from ALL that stress of our first REAL trial!

We started in USDAA (that's all there was in this country back then), at a time when you only needed one Starters leg to move up to Advanced. That rule eventually changed to a three leg requirement before we were able to get even one Q! The course time problem remained an issue for a long time. We also had a slight (Ha Ha) contact issue which caused us many NQs. The slats were really big on the equipment at that time and I was trying to speed her up, right? So she responded by leaping off equipment above the yellow. I remember Stuart Mah saying she was trying to be "Rocky the Flying Squirrel."

Anyone who knows me knows that I am part Terrier too (Irish that is). We just kept on trying to shave minutes off here and there while re-teaching Noodge her contact "job". (For those of you who aren't familiar with "the old days" — Noodge was jumping 12 inches and climbing a 6'3" A-frame.) I believe it took TWO years to complete our A.D. (Agility Dog<sup>(SM)</sup>) title. Without the help and friendship of Sharon Nelson, I don't believe I would have been successful with Noodge. Sharon was incredibly patient and encouraging from the very first seminar of hers that I attended, and through many summers of camp as well. Actually, Sharon's daughter Amanda was always kicking our butt with Sunny, the Corgi. But if Sunny knocked a bar, then Noodge had a chance at the blue ribbon because she was usually very reliable on course.

Our career together included qualifying for several USDAA Nationals (although we never did make the trip to Texas for the finals). I believe Noodge is the only mixed breed or 12" dog with a USDAA V-MAD title. We competed at the very first NADAC trial ever held (in 1993), and participated at the NADAC Nationals in Olympia, Washington and Phoenix, Arizona. Just two months or so prior to her permanent retirement, Noodge completed her V-NATCH. We also participated in Flyball demos to raise funds for the local Humane Society. Our group provided half time entertainment at University of Washington Husky basketball games. She was a real crowd pleaser. We would have nine-inch-tall Noodge running in one lane and a Great Dane in the other!

I spent our last night together going through my box of Noodge ribbons. Remembering the places, the faces, the trips, the judges, the milestones that we chased and claimed as she was aging and, most importantly, the fun times we spent being partners in this wonderful sport called dog Agility. If it weren't for Noodge, I wouldn't have had all of these experiences or had the opportunity for friendship with so many wonderful folks in our "community."

So, here we are — over 15 years from the day I found that little scruffy dog wandering along the side of the road and of course I am crying as I type these words. It was incredibly difficult to say goodbye to my ambassador into the world of dog Agility. For any of you that knew her, think back and maybe you will recall her "signature spin." Once Noodge got "into" Agility, she would spin and bark at the start line and then we would take off together. Often times, when she successfully completed the weave poles, she would do a little spin as she passed the last pole.

I miss her so much, her scruffy coat, non-stop tail wagging, and the softest ears you can ever imagine. Hug your faithful pals and love 'em up as often as you can — because sadly, the day we have to say goodbye sneaks up on us much sooner than any of us can bear.

*Since taking that maiden voyage into Agility with Noodge, Pritamo Kentala, of Duvall, Washington, has continued to be highly involved in the sport. She is a long-time member of Rainier Agility Team (RAT) and is an Agility instructor both for RAT and for FunQuest Dog Sports. With her agility partners Noodge, Zita, Shimmy and FunQuest's Surfin' USA, Pritamo has racked up many accomplishments including numerous NADAC and USDAA championship ADCH and NATCH titles. She was also the 1998 and 1999 NADAC Nationals winner and a 2000 USDAA Finalist. She can be reached at K9FunQuest@aol.com or check out: [www.FunQuest-DogSports.com](http://www.FunQuest-DogSports.com)*