

March 6, 2003

*An agility pioneer will be leaving us today for the rainbow bridge.*

*This afternoon I am spending the last few hours of companionship with my one and only "roadside special", The Noodge Dog NATCH, V.MAD. It is a time all of us dog lovers know we will be faced with someday, but always hope that somehow – someday will never come.*

*Noodge's life is one of those Cinderella stories. I found her 14 years ago wandering on a busy Seattle street dragging a chain behind her. I pulled over to catch her before she was hit by a bus, put her in my car and took her home. 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.) She was very stinky and dirty, so the next step was a bath in the kitchen sink. Then I waited for my husband to come home to see what I had found today! 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 a very good thing that she had broken her chain and wandered away.*

*She got her name because she never stopped pestering me to pet her. One day I exclaimed: "oh you are such a noodge!" and it stuck. For those of you that don't know, Noodge is a Yiddish word that basically means a pest. Eventually we concluded that she is most likely a Jack Russell – Chihuahua cross. She's nine inches tall and weighs about ten pounds. She has a rough coat that can be stripped, mostly white with red patches and a tail that until recently, wagged like a little metronome.*

*Noodge spent her first year or so with us as a much loved and pampered pet. 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 an 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 somehow one day ran across a little index card on a bulletin board at a pet store. It said classes would be forming and to call for information. Well, I don't have to tell you guys 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 I. 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 what wonderful folks participate in agility and this was the beginning of many special 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! This was in the days when you only needed one starters leg to move to the Advanced level. (Those rules later changed to the three qualifying scores requirement). We didn't make it out of starters before that rule change took place because the time issue continued to be a problem for a long time.*

*I believe it took us two years to qualify three times and earn our A.D. title. But you know, I am part terrier too, (Irish that is), and we just kept on trying to shave minutes off here and there. 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 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 she is the first mixed breed and first 12" dog with a USDAA V-MAD title. We competed at the very first NADAC trial ever held and participated in 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 fly ball demos to raise funds for the local Humane Society. Our group provided half time entertainment at UW Husky basket ball games. She was a real crowd pleaser, as we would have nine-inch Noodge running in one lane and a Great Dane in the other!*

*I spent last night going through my box of Noodge ribbons and 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 of the wonderful folks in our "community".*

*So, here we are – a little over 14 years from the day I found this scruffy little dog wandering along the side of the road and of course I am crying as I type these words. It is time 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 will miss her so much, her scruffy coat and the softest ears you can ever imagine.*

*Hug your faithful pals and love 'em up as often as you can - because sadly, this day does come much sooner than any of us can bear – God bless.*