

# Goldfish

Valerie Casperite

USA

## Winner 2006 Dog Short Story

*Valerie is a member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers and currently has three German Shorthaired Pointers (GSPs) and a retired Thoroughbred racehorse (now in his third career as a therapy mount for handicapped children). She has taught Canine Good Citizen classes, is an American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen evaluator, and along with her husband, Tom, is a volunteer for GSP rescue. This fictional story was inspired by Tom.*

*Valerie won our 2005 Dog Poetry competition!*

It was never my intention to have a dog. I used to tell my wife that I had a goldfish once and it made too much noise. I consider myself to be a creature of habit and I don't really enjoy changes to my lifestyle. Before I married my wife, I lived alone and without pets, and I rather liked it that way. I could come and go as I pleased and when I returned, the house would be exactly the same as it was when I left. Then I married my wife, and when I would come home I would find that little things had been changed, like different curtains on the windows, different furniture in the kitchen or different decorations around the house. Although at first it was disconcerting, I very quickly grew accustomed to the changes and in short order, liked the new arrangements better than the old.

But when she said she wanted a dog, I drew the line.

Not that I don't like dogs. There was always some kind of dog in the house when I was growing up and I remember most of them fondly, but I was a kid then and dogs were no real work and all fun. It's sort of how I feel about snow, remembering the times when I was a child and could catch snowflakes on my tongue, and stay home from school to build snow forts and snowmen. Then I grew up and had to shovel the walkways and worry about the slippery drive to work and snow wasn't such a good reason for looking forward to winter anymore.

Well, in spite of my many arguments, she won.

I told her she could have the dog, so long as it was a German Shorthaired Pointer. My mother had one rescued from a shelter while I was in the Navy, and when I came home I fell in love with that dog and swore it was the best breed ever. But I cautioned my wife (foolishly thinking she might give up on the

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## DOG DAYS

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idea), saying that Gretchen used to clear our six-foot fence regularly to enjoy a swim in the neighbour's pool or to chase squirrels in the neighbourhood. She was a maniac in the house at times, turning the dining room into her own personal racetrack. My wife countered by saying that that my mother's Gretchen simply needed proper training and management. Besides, she said, she'd house-sat for friends who raised field trial GSPs and Weimaraners, and she'd found the GSPs to be delightful. She loved their energy and intelligence, their silly antics and their loyalty. So, having won the short-lived battle, the love of my life set out to disrupt my life with a single, well-bred puppy.

That was three dogs, many titles, and one litter ago.

Since then, I have compromised my masculinity. I've learned to call the puppies in a high, squeaky voice rather than to shout for them to come, which would send them all running off in nine different directions. I've learned to talk baby-talk, goo-goo stuff to the older dogs who lay their heads lovingly in my lap while I'm watching television. I draw upon boyhood schemes to outwit those dogs who think they can outwit me. Over dinner I discuss the consistency of doo-doo and I revert to adolescent humour with guests when a drifting aroma signals the presence of man's best friend. And I simply get out of the way when they chase each other around the dining room.

Recently, my wife and I were at the pet store and I had my credit card readied for yet another "minor" purchase. What was it we needed today in addition to the huge bags of food? Could it be new toys (to be destroyed in 30 seconds flat), new blankies, new leashes, some sort of new treat? I left her to fill the basket with whatever our little darlings might need, and found myself wandering down another aisle, looking at aquariums full of

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beautiful, flowing-tailed, drifting, gliding, goldfish. Peaceful, beautiful, zen-like goldfish. Quiet goldfish. I felt a tap on my shoulder.

“Honey, are you ready to go?”

“I sure am,” I said. “These fish are boring.” =