

Capturing canines on film comes with a lick and a promise of treats

People believe that because I write a pet column, I have a more evolved sense of pet ownership.

They seem genuinely surprised when they ask to see a picture of the "two spoiled dogs" mentioned at the end of the column, and I've got nothing to show.

Granted, I've learned plenty in the last few years just interviewing veterinarians, behaviorists, trainers, pet photographers, rescuers and people who give countless hours of their time taking care of the neglected, abused and strays. But I still have a ways to go.

But, there are lots of things I've done differently with my own two dogs than my parents did with their pets. I remember every night after dinner, scraping the dinner plates into the dog food bowls. Who knew then that ketchup or chicken bones were bad for dogs?

Whenever the dog that lived next door went into her season, we would spend hours reinforcing the fence where my dog Bimbo, who lived up to his name, would dig and climb and pine for the female dog. It never crossed my young mind to have him neutered.

Our dogs had their annual shots and took daily heartworm preventative, but we never got them groomed or their toenails trimmed or their teeth cleaned.

So, after I did a story last year on pet photographer Peggy Foster, I began thinking about getting some portraits done of my two dogs. I imagined the snickers from many of my non-pet loving friends and family who would never understand throwing away money on such nonsense. After all, they're just dogs, they'd say while thrusting pictures of their children in my hand.

But for all practical purposes they are my children, or at least the focus of my maternal instincts.

As I looked through my photos of Molly and Tipper, I realized that I could never truly capture their beauty and charm. Mostly because any time I tried to get at eye level to take their picture, Tipper would use that as an opportunity for a kissing-fest all over my face.

Foster said she manages to get even the wildest animals to sit still for her with the help of the pet owners. Sure, she managed to get seven Doberman puppies to look like angels on a bench, but she never met Queen Romp About and her daughter Princess Belly Rubs.

But Foster assured me that we could do it. She picked a sunny afternoon and brought her sack of squeaky toys, camera, blanket, two stakes and tiny tethers.

My tools were a bowl of water, a slice of bread with peanut butter on it (to convince the prima donnas that there would be treats for good behavior) and a couple of aspirin, which I promptly gobbled after the photo-shoot was finished.

I brought Molly over to the sunny spot. I tried using the command "sit," hoping to impress Foster. I might as well have said "Wisconsin" because there was no visible sign of comprehension or cooperation.

After some pushing and pleading, I managed to get that rump on the ground. I was supposed to let go of her collar and step back a couple of paces out of the frame. The nanosecond that the pressure left her collar, Molly stood up and walked away.

Time for desperate measures. Foster dug out her metal stakes and drove them in the ground. She looped the tether through the hole in the stake and I retrieved Queen Antsy



Oh, the precious angels, so alert, so calm, so back-lit — so long in reaching this picture-perfect appearance. But thanks to pet photographer Peggy Foster, pet owner Cindy Wolff can enjoy this portrait of her "two spoiled dogs," Tipper (left) and Molly.



CINDY WOLFF
Pet Scoop

Pants. Foster decided that Molly would do better lying down in front of the stake. Since Molly responds to the "down" command as well as she does "sit," I had to grab her two front paws and slide them forward.

A look of irritation crossed her face that no squeaky toy or glob of peanut butter could erase. She was angry, hot and didn't like to be handled. As punishment, she wouldn't look over at me when I called her. I stood behind Foster and tried all the key words that usually prick up my dogs' ears.

My clothes were soaked in sweat. I dropped the peanut butter bread, which Tipper quickly retrieved.

After squeaking a stuffed, green alien, a cow, a porcupine, a snake and a rabbit, Molly finally pricked up her ears when Foster, who was lying flat on her stomach, kicked her sandal off and it hit the fence.

We decided to try a shot of the two dogs together. Tipper had been watching the Mollycapades braced like she normally does when I give Molly a bath and Tipper realizes that she might be next.

I tried sweet-talking to her and gently coaxing her. No doing. She wouldn't have willingly budged from under that bush if I had dangled a squirrel in front of her. So I grabbed her collar and dragged her to Molly. We put a tether on Tipper.

Getting Tipper to sit or lie down is like trying to mold water. Whenever I tried to manipulate her, she'd simply collapse onto her back and show me her belly. I'd convince her to stand up and try again. She'd flop back over and if I tried to move her, she'd pee.

The 90-degree heat and total lack of cooperation began to take its toll on me. Foster tried to help me, but since my dogs didn't know her, they didn't respond. We finally managed to get Tipper to sit by Molly who, surprisingly was still. That's because her hunter/warrior instinct had kicked in and she was eyeing a fly that continued to buzz around us.

Foster snapped some more shots with me standing inches from Tipper cooing about what a good girl she was.

After about an hour, the shoot was over. I paid my \$35 sitting fee and ran for the air-con-

ditioning.

Foster called a week later and said she had some good shots, but she knew we could get better. She asked if they might be better in a park. I knew the only reason Molly didn't yank that stake out of the ground was because she had nowhere to go in the fenced-in backyard. So, trying to stake her out with freedom just a tug away wouldn't work.

She came on a Saturday morning, hoping the cooler 80-degree temperatures might help calm the dogs. I demanded that my husband stay at home and help manage the girls. He thought barking in his soccer coach's voice would do the trick. It didn't.

I told him to stand behind Foster and talk to Tipper after I got her situated. I told him to use a high-pitched voice and say words like "outside."

He rolled his eyes. Tipper rolled over.

I traded places and let him do the Tipper situating. After several rounds of talking in my best Minnie Mouse voice, Tipper calmed and Foster got great shots. We brought Molly in for the duo shot. This time, even the old sandal-flipping trick wouldn't work. She

wouldn't acknowledge us.

But at long last, our savior came. Molly saw the mailman and her ears became erect and her body rigid. Foster snapped away. We had liftoff.

You can't see the tethers or stakes or the mailman or the neurotic pet owner in any of the pictures, just the two spoiled dogs sitting in their field. Photography is an art that makes me glad to be a writer.

Pet adoption today

The Responsible Animal Owners of Tennessee will hold a pet adoption from 1 to 4 p.m. today at SuperPetz at 6208 Stage in Bartlett.

Dogs, cats, puppies and kittens will be available for a \$75 adoption fee. A fenced-in yard is required for all dog adoptions.

All dogs and cats are current on vaccinations and have been spayed or neutered.

Reporter Cindy Wolff, owner of two spoiled dogs, can be reached at 529-5220 or E-mail wolff@gomemphis.com

Send letters to The Commercial Appeal, 495 Union Ave., Memphis, Tenn., 38103.