

The Girl with the Curl

*There once was a girl,
who had a little curl,
right in the middle of
her forehead.*

*When she was good,
she was very, very good.*



*But when she was bad,
she was horrid.*



Lilou is our 2-year-old Cocker Spaniel. My boyfriend, Brey, and I got her from a breeder a couple of years ago. When we first got her, we were completely overwhelmed by the amount of biting she did. Everyone, including the teachers at puppy kindergarten, told us it was a “phase” and that she would grow out of it.

Unfortunately, Lilou’s intelligence and highly opportunistic behavior led to no end of trouble for us. Lilou, calm, poised and well behaved at one time, in another environment, became a savage beast who had no qualms about growling, lunging, barring teeth and even biting the people around her. She quickly sorted out where this behavior was unacceptable and where it would go relatively unpunished. Her exploitive nature caused us many a heartache, as we loved her very much but did not want to endanger our families or ourselves by having her around.

The teachers at our puppy kindergarten taught us that swift physical discipline was the way to go. Unfortunately, the old adage “Violence begets violence” was perfectly applicable in this case. Not only was it extremely hard for Brey and I to actually hit our dog, but also Lilou quickly became unfazed by her physical punishment. She would constantly act out and exhibit more aggressive behavior. We tried everything to calm her, from time-outs to holding her mouth closed, but to no avail.

Whether it was fate or just luck, I was given Barbara’s number and was told that she gave private consultations that dealt with dogs with behavioral problems. My meeting with Barbara was an eye opener. She came up with a tailored list of rules and regulations Lilou and the people around her would have to go by at all times, in all locations.

Reading, observing and reacting to a dog’s behavior is an obvious task once you know how to do it. However, it is counter-intuitive for someone who is not schooled in the matter. Barbara’s comments and suggestions were a lifesaver. Her teaching on positive reinforcement as opposed to negative reinforcement is perfectly matched to Lilou’s personality. The three of us have gone through two manners classes at the Dog’s Den and plan on starting an agility class shortly. Lilou loves going to school and is much better behaved. Although she is not yet an angel 24/7, we feel that we are well on the road to recovery. With guidance based on experience, Barbara and her school have enabled us to turn a poisoned relationship into a bond of real happiness and love.