

# True Case History

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## One Golden is addicted to the thrill of the chase...

Oh dear. Nothing is less pleasant than being dragged around by the wrist or having to run around like crazy in hot pursuit of a focussed Jenny! Helen was a pre-veterinary course student in my behaviour classes at The Ohio State University in Columbus, USA, this year, where, as well as getting good doses of theory about cat and dog behaviour, the students are encouraged to bring their dogs for some hands-on work. When I first met Jenny in the arena where we hold the practical sessions, I was most impressed by her strength. She ran to me and leapt up against me in an enthusiastic greeting and nearly knocked me over, even though I was ready for it! This gal knew how to throw her weight around, and I could see why she was posing a threat to her owner's arm health. If she really put her mind to running away and 'chasing stuff' on walks, not an awful lot would stop her.

Helen had adopted Jenny from a nearby humane society shelter. She already had three other dogs of all shapes and sizes, all of whom happily walked calmly and nicely on a lead and came back when called. Jenny had received little or no previous training, it seemed, and was also a bit nervous of men. Helen had managed to teach her some basic obedience

Dear Peter  
Our family urgently needs your help! Jenny has an absolute obsession with taking off after anything that moves, which usually results in someone being yanked off their feet or with chafed wrists from leashes being yanked out of hands! Is there anything we can do to stop her from taking off after birds, squirrels, joggers and unfortunate cyclists?  
Kind regards,  
Helen Phillips

commands, which she did very well at - as long as they were at home or out in the yard. There, Jenny was a sweet and good-natured pet, who loved being groomed, cuddled and played with. She would sell her doggie soul for a treat, and as long as Helen kept a stash of these on a walk, she would be slightly better both at walking and around passing men... until a bird flew in front of her or a would-be Usain Bolt came roaring round the corner at speed!

Since she was becoming impossible to handle on walks, Helen battled to get her out and about. Her husband, Dave, could hang on to Jenny, being quite a big chap, but he works long hours and waiting for him to come home often meant that walks for Jenny could only happen in the dark (which neither of them were keen on), or at weekends when Dave was around more.

Unfortunately, the lack of mental stimulation associated with fewer walks was also frustrating Jenny, leading to her becoming more active and demanding around the house. She had recently started chewing on things, and, instead of relaxing, would now steal household items and clothes, which resulted in Helen chasing her around the yard on several occasions, trying to recover her stuff! So who was the retriever in the house now?

**No laughing matter**  
While we chuckled at these tales, I could fully understand the poor dog's side of things, as well as her owner's. Jenny had become accustomed to her daily walks, which usually lasted about an hour. Without these, and the extra stimulation of being able to sniff and look at the outside world, she was doing her best

to 'make up' for the loss of the major activity highlight in her life. At the same time, I also sympathised with Helen, who was definitely starting to feel as if she was in mortal peril every time she tried to take her dog for a walk. And then there was the risk that Jenny might pose just through her untrained enthusiasm - if she ever did storm up to the wrong kind of person or to a running child, who might get a big fright or be knocked over, Jenny could get into big trouble.

**Taking control**  
After chatting to Helen about her expectations in class, I decided to address the biggest problem first. In order to walk Jenny, Helen needed to be able to control her. Being off the lead was just not an option at present, but first we had to get her back out of the door and being walked on a daily basis, so I introduced Jenny to the Gentle Leader headcollar, now made and distributed by Beaphar UK Ltd in the UK. This was fairly straightforward, as many of the dogs in class were being introduced to Gentle Leaders and their student owners were learning how to fit them etc.

The Department of Animal Sciences at The Ohio State is predominantly a large-animal faculty and the arena is usually used for work with cattle, horses and other large animals, so there's lots of room for lots of dogs! Jenny, bless her, was quite happy with her Gentle Leader, and even happier when

a random treat was popped into her mouth for being good. In addition to fitting and demonstrating the Gentle Leader to Jenny, I showed Helen how to teach a reliable 'leave' command, which, when used in conjunction with the Gentle Leader, would enable her to control her without using any physical force or coercion. She could hopefully then be walked without any further hassles.

Teaching a dog to 'leave' is pretty easy. Show him a treat, say "Leave", and if he looks away from the treat, click and reward him. I won't bother explaining clickers again here, as everyone knows about them now, but they are an important part of my practical courses in Ohio, and we try to get every student owner to teach their dogs some new behaviours or tricks using them. That's after we've got the students to play the 'clicker game' on each other to understand how difficult it can be to shape any specific behaviour in dogs at distance sometimes! But dogs up close are easier than students in a hall and thankfully usually quickly learn to turn their heads away from whatever they're looking at when they hear the word 'leave'.

Since Jenny was definitely in the 'genius' group of dogs with brains, she very quickly learned what the word meant and how easily she could earn a treat for doing it. Unusual, I thought, for a one-time nervous dog to be quite so



Jenny

<b>DOG:</b>	Jenny
<b>BREED:</b>	Golden Retriever
<b>SEX:</b>	Female
<b>STATUS:</b>	Neutered
<b>AGE:</b>	Four years
<b>PROBLEM:</b>	Pulling on the lead
<b>OWNERS:</b>	Helen and Dave Phillips
<b>ADDRESS:</b>	Ohio, USA

Jenny wearing a Gentle Leader headcollar

'foody' in a large arena alongside so many other dogs and people, but there we are - fortune favours the brave sometimes!  
Once she was wearing her Gentle Leader, Jenny was also noticeably more relaxed

and comfortable around everyone, including all the dogs in class.  
Of course, doing this in the arena was all fine and dandy. The real test would come when walking Jenny in the park, so, after classes,

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## Ask why, say no!

If you are unsure about what is being recommended for your dog when you seek help from a dog trainer/whisperer or behaviourist, **ASK WHY?** and **SAY NO!** if you don't like it. **ASK WHY?** they might want to abuse your dog with any physical or psychological unpleasantness. Then, if you are not satisfied that your dog will be safe from harm, protect him! **'SAY NO!'** and walk away.

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Helen duly went off with Jenny around the campus grounds and in the nearby formal gardens. Even though it wasn't 'rush hour', it allowed her to work with Jenny in an environment that was slightly distracting, without being overwhelming.

### Star pupil

Armed with a bag of treats and with Jenny sporting her nice red Gentle Leader, she set out. She reported back at the next class a few days later. Initially, Helen said, every time it looked as if Jenny was going to run off and chase anything, she gave her the 'leave' cue. Jenny tried the first time to chase after a jogger across the park, but as soon as she started to pull, she felt the effect of the calming pressures of the nose loop and neckstrap of the Gentle Leader, steadied herself and then chose to look directly at Helen, who was ready with a treat and loads of praise. Perfect!

The next time she heard the 'leave' cue from Helen, Jenny looked at the jogger,

then chose to look back at her mum, without even pulling, and heard the click and got her treat. For the rest of the walk, Helen found that she could work with her until she started to offer frequent 'looks' consistently without being asked. I suggested to Helen to click and/or praise her whenever she offered eye contact, and to keep the food rewards for whenever Jenny left something that would previously have resulted in her running away.

Since that was only one part of the problem resolved, I also gave Helen some advice about how to address the chewing and, of course, the running off with clothes and stuff at home. I explained to her about teaching Jenny to come back and to swap what she had for a suitable chew or ragger toy. All in all, it was just an attention-seeking behaviour, and instead of making the poor dog anxious or frustrating her, we could just teach her to bring items and to exchange them for

something suitable. Not too tough for a retriever!

A collection of chews and toys would prove tremendously helpful, including a Busy Buddy foraging toy or two, and an Activity Ball to nose around would prompt Jenny to work for her food instead of lying around being bored all day thinking up ways to get Helen to spend more time chasing her.

### Home help

At our next class, the following week, I was very happy to hear that the walking was still going perfectly. Jenny had not taken off since her first walk with a Gentle Leader, and the 'fetch it' games had turned her into a useful 'paw' around the house - Helen had taught Jenny to bring washing and put it in the basket, as well as to bring shoes to be put back in the cupboard. Since Jenny was now getting so many opportunities to earn rewards in the form of praise and from doing something she loved, she was already even better behaved than usual at home.

Helen had graduated to using an extending lead in association with her Gentle Leader, so that Jenny could be given a bit more freedom to run on walks around campus, and she was responding well to being called back on this, even if she saw a bird or squirrel. Helen has now joined her local APDT (USA) training class with the specific aim of perfecting her recall in a safely enclosed dedicated large outdoor area. Hopefully, Jenny will soon be allowed off the lead to run around at will safely and tire herself out!

As my teaching programme came to a close for another year, and I said goodbye to a really nice class of students, Helen resolved to keep up all the good work, indoors and out. Although Helen had had a few problems with Jenny, many of the other students had been attending training classes long before I turned up in Ohio and had slim, fit, well-behaved and well-cared-for dogs... a sign of the times, I hope! ■

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