

## My dog Trooper, by Jacque

Trooper is a German Shepard and quite a character. He's very smart. He amazes me, what he does. I swear he really understands English. He's also a bit of a comic relief.

At one point, whenever the doorbell rang, we would put him outside. It got to the point where he would hear the doorbell and would go outside. It got to be funny when he would hear the doorbell on the TV and went outside. When I worked, we had to put him the bathroom; otherwise he would get into the garbage or other things. At first, I had to bribe him with cheese. At one time, he would run to the bathroom whenever I offered him cheese, as if that was the "only place he could eat it." Later on, all he had to do was see me in my work uniform or even have it in my hand and he was in the bathroom. He knew what "was coming." It didn't work when I wasn't really going to work. And yes, I did try it out on him. He just looked at me like "you aren't going to work today." When the company changed the color of the uniform, he just looked at me. I picked up one of the old shirts and said "does this give you a clue," and away to the bathroom he went. He never "got it" that the reason he had to go in the bathroom was that he got into the garbage. I guess he wasn't that smart.

Whenever he was bad, especially when he got out of the house, we would put him in the bathroom. That was "his room." It got to the point where I would say "go to your room" and he went. It was funny when I said "go to your room" and he got up and went to the bathroom. I was really talking to one of my boys. And the tub was also "his crib." He would spend a lot of time in the tub, I guess because it was cooler. One time I wanted to take a bath and he was in it. I told him to get out but he wouldn't get out. I hopped into the tub with him and said, "Look, I'm going to have this bath whether or not you get out." He got out. Like I said, I swear he understands English. He likes the tub; he just doesn't want to get wet. I think he feels that a bath is "a good long pet spoiled by soap and water." He's not too happy when he gets a bath. Now because of his hips giving him problems he doesn't go into "his crib" any more.

He loves to be petted. But he's rather loud about it. He will moan and groan as he's being petted. It's not that it's hurting him; he's enjoying it. He also will "talk" to me. At one point, I had my boys convinced I understood what he was saying. They would say "what did he say" when he "said" something. Now, it's "you don't understand him."

Trooper is really amazing. I will put something on the floor and he won't "take" it until I say "take." I can say the word "take" in a sentence but he seems to know that "doesn't count." I sometimes have him "ask" if he wants it. He'll "talk" (no, he doesn't say any words). We also have a little game we play. I will hold up one food item in one hand and two items in the other. I ask him a simple math problem and he will "take" the right answer. For some animals the "cue" is the last word said. Not with him—I will say "one plus one is," "one times one is," "one divided by one is" and he "takes" the right answer. When I say "one minus one is," he will look at both hands, going back and forth and then he just sits there. When I say "one plus two is," he "takes" the food in both hands. He will also get the right answer with "big vs. small," "round vs. flat," "meat vs. cheese," and "take the one you like the most vs. least." He will "answer" questions like "do you like this game" and "do you like it only because of the food" with right hand being "yes" and left hand being "no" (or the reverse). My favorite question is "do you love me."

He always picks the “yes” hand. My kids think I’m “clueing him” somehow. But I have put the wrong answer right at his nose and he has pushed it away to get to the right answer. It’s fun playing the games with him and petting him, even with all the noise he makes.

He’s also been there when I’m sad or having an anxiety attack (I don’t have them often. The last time was after waking up from a dream—I don’t even know what the dream was about). He will come and let me pet him for as long as I need. It really helps. It’s also nice to come home to his “greeting me.” But sometimes, he’s the one that needs the loving. I think sometimes I’m his “service person.” I guess it’s a shared job between the two of us.