



## Huge, 12 weeks, English Bulldog

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When Huge's new family couldn't afford to pay his medical bills when, at 12 weeks old, he got overheated and extremely ill, his family elected to give him up, and I was elected to foster him back to health. It had been awhile since I'd had a puppy in the house, except for the occasional client. The good news about client puppies is I get to enjoy them while we work, then I get to send them home before they get the 'puppy crazies'. Ask any mom, it's usually while you're trying to cook dinner.

Huge, weighing 11 pounds, needed antibiotics, fluids, and mostly just to rest quietly, which he did for several days in his pen in the center of my family room. After 3 days, Huge was well on the road to recovery and his true self started to shine

through. He was a puppy, male, and a bulldog at that. He was eager to jump in with the rest of my pack of 3 adult dogs (one of which is a senior gal, most likely to be very annoyed by the presence of the blatant unmitigated energy that is customary for most young male puppies). He put on 5 pounds in a week, and welcomed his time getting to know his pack mates. All the yipping and nipping and sniffing and snorting. Such a good time!

After a few days, I noticed that Huge didn't seem to read the signals of the other dogs. He paid no attention to Murphy when she gave him her most menacing 'get the heck away from me you alien' growl. He seemed unafraid of Sierra's snapping in the air just above his ear, definitely her 'back off before I make you back off' warning. He only backed off when they chased him, snapping at his neck and face. And even then it appeared that he thought he might be playing a super fun game. As a casual but consistent observer of dog behavior for as long as I can remember, I thought that perhaps Huge was blessed with less-than-huge intelligence. Okay, I told another trainer friend that he wasn't the sharpest pencil in the box. So before I was to match him up with his forever family, I was going to give him some basic obedience training.

Over the next couple of days, my sense that Huge wasn't bound for Advanced Placement classes started to morph into a concern that he seemed ill-equipped to respond to my usually simple training exercises, especially the clicker. Like there actually might be something wrong with him. But it was clear as a bell when, one morning, I descended the stairs and crept up behind Huge in his pen, hoping to surprise him with my presence, which would illicit an adorable display of kisses and snugs. When I accidentally stepped on a toy Army guy (thank you son) and hollered, Huge responded in a completely unexpected way: not at all. He continued to stare in the opposite direction. I walked up behind him and clapped my hands and yelled "Huge!". Still nothing. Then I walked around in front of him. As soon as he saw me he went nuts, all shaky butt and waggy tail. Turns out Huge is deaf. Not uncommon in white dogs of certain breeds. Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...that explains a lot.

So I started to work with Huge using hand signals. The American sign-language symbol for 'I love you!' took the place of a click or the spoken 'Good boy!' and once we learned that, we were on a roll. Of course Huge's deafness presents some challenges not normally found in hearing dogs, like the ability to get his attention when he is not looking at me, but we found a vibrating collar to act like a 'page' letting Huge know I wanted him to focus. Huge is learning to be a happy member of his forever family's pack, which turned out to be mine. Although my other dogs know he is 'special', Huge, officially known as Donald J Huge after my canine enthusiast Uncle Don, is (usually) welcomed by my other dogs to roll with them in the doggy day-to-day.