



Maggie, 3, Purebred Lab from East Coast 'breeder of the best Labs'

Maggie had it all. She came from the best stock (with papers to prove it!), she was bred for temperament, and she was being adopted into a busy, dog-loving family in California. There would undoubtedly be countless opportunities for fun! Life is great.

As a Labrador retriever, Maggie was bred to do stuff: fetch, retrieve, find, chase, chew, bury, and so on. So of course Maggie needed to do at least some of these things to 'feel right'.

Maggie's family loved her with all their hearts. Unfortunately, with 4 small children in the house, Mom and Dad didn't have much time to devote to developing 'productive' play times for Maggie. So Maggie, being the confident, fun-loving Lab she is, took advantage of the high-energy and sometimes-chaotic environment and created her own 'jobs'. Maggie fetched shoes, children's toys, wooden spoons, many of which she'd enthusiastically chew before burying in a houseplant for a go-round later on. She chewed on chair legs, carpeted steps, and leather coats, ceasing only to chase an on-the-run toddler on the slippery wooden floor around the kitchen. Maggie took the shouts and cries she heard to be cheers of encouragement, displays of joy. Oh the fun she had!

The problem was that although Maggie's people understood part of Maggie's unruly house behavior was because she was a young, energetic lab, they didn't understand the other part of what Maggie needed to 'fit in with the group': direction. Maggie is loving and eager to please (especially for treats). And she's not stupid. If she learned that certain behaviors result in her getting something good (a treat, a pat, a scratch, the ball), she'd be all over it! It wouldn't take long to train Maggie that when she sits or lies quietly in the house, she gets attention, like a happy 'good girl!', a smile, a pat or a treat.

When I ran into Maggie on the street (she's my neighbor), I seized the opportunity to snap a leash on her, grab my treat bag and clicker, and take a little walk. Within seconds Maggie took off in a bounding leap, attempting to levitate me to Rose Parade float status. When I stopped dead in my tracks and stared up at the sky, Maggie turned around and gave me the "what's up?" look. "Why did you stop?" The moment her attention was on me, she was rewarded. And we got to start again. Because Maggie quickly (within 10 minutes) realized she wasn't going to make any progress by pulling forward, we were able to engage in a quick-but-intense series of walking-behavior exercises. She wanted to pay attention to me because she learned that I had something wonderful to offer (mmm...desiccated lamb lung!) And she was being told what a good 'job' she was doing, keeping her attention on me.

When we returned to Maggie's house, about 25 minutes later, we walked in with Maggie on leash (I held her leash so I could step in the door first, which is how any 'leader' enters her house), and did a little 'house tour'. If Maggie started to show signs she was getting too excited, I stopped walking, waited for her quiet attention, quietly said 'good girl' and gave her a treat. Within just a couple of rooms, Maggie learned that she was not only going to get to see and smell around the whole house, but she was also going to get treats along the way. Only if she was calm. Otherwise, everything stopped and everyone stared at the ceiling. Very boring for a dog. She could definitely handle that job, especially with some practice. And so could her people. With a treatment plan and clear direction, Maggie continues to enjoy her life as queen canine in her human kingdom.