

## A Promise Kept

In November 2008, I entered my dog 'Dini' in his first Rally Obedience trial (in fact, first trial ever) hosted by a Rally League of Our Own outside London Ontario. His incredibly enthusiastic attitude, and constantly wagging tail (which the judge, Ms Bonnie Christie said she would love to patent!) won the crowd over and his story did not leave a dry eye in the house. This is the story of Dini – the 'throwaway' dog – that was rescued by my grandfather from the Windsor/Essex Humane Society.

About 12 yrs ago, and after the passing of my Grandmother, my Grandfather decided to fill his loneliness and the house he built and raised his children in, by getting a dog. He did not make this decision lightly. Being in his 'golden years' and worried what might eventually happen to the dog, it was only after giving him my word I would take care of it if anything happened that he proceeded to adopt a two year old Wheaton Terrier that a family had to give up. Ginger (we called her 'Ginny') was a great companion for my grandfather and the bond was pretty obvious.

When Ginny passed on, my heavy hearted grandfather, also much older now, remembering my promise, did not hesitate to go to the Windsor/Essex Humane Society in search of a new friend. In spite the warnings on his label of being a loud dog, not used to other animals, pulling on leash and generally not being the ideal dog for my grandfather, he fell in love with this Jack Russell Terrier cross named 'Chance'.

Chance got immediately renamed to 'Dini' (which was close enough to 'Ginny' and easier for my grandfather to remember) and pretty well proceeded to bark non-stop at everything, which was not too bad since grandfather could not hear very well by this time. In fact, Dini would alert grandfather of the ringing phone. However, during this period, grandfather did not give Dini much exercise, almost no training, too many treats and generally did not help Dini either behaviourally or physically. Still, grandfather loved this little dog and Dini's fate was much better with grandfather than at the Humane Society.

Last November, grandfather met with a debilitating accident while raking the leaves. After his fall, he managed to drag himself into the house. From the time of the fall (around 2PM) until the neighbours came home from work, he lay on the floor unable to move while Dini barked continuously. The neighbours, recognizing that the bark was very different than usual, phoned over and, when they received no answer went next door only to find grandfather lying on his dining room floor.

Well, a broken hip and an operation later, grandfather had to convalesce in the hospital so I went to Windsor to take care of Dini and brought him back with me. While in my care, I put a collar on him that he could not slip and put him on a diet!

Dini went back to stay with grandfather after he was allowed to go home but, unfortunately, this was not meant to last long. His health simply would not allow him to stay in his home and he was admitted to a nursing home in March 2008. True to my promise, Dini moved in with us in our home in the town of Erin and, in effect, joined my pack as one of our own.

I really worked hard to teach him the simple stuff, like walking properly on a leash and trying to contain himself when encountering other dogs. My border collie was very

helpful in this regard – in effect teaching Dini doggy etiquette that he probably never knew existed! Gradually, he seemed to get increasingly more excited as he was put to work and, we decided to give Rally Obedience a try even though I had to keep all praise very low key so as to not ‘overexcite’ him..

I worked very closely with Jim Tsitanidis of Spirit Ridge K9 Training & Rescue who is experienced with rescued dogs having behavioural problems. Jim patiently helped me ease Dini of most of his anxieties to the point where his working desire started to push through. His great desire to please prohibited him from concentrating on treats and it was impossible to encourage him without sending him off the proverbial ‘deep end’, so we introduced a training program of quiet and low key verbal combined with hand cues.

On November 4, 2008, Dini entered his first Rally Obedience trial hosted by a Rally League of our own, in Arva Ontario. After only six classes of Rally Obedience (and a lot of hard work), Dini did us all proud by qualifying in both of his ‘runs’ and bringing in a third place in his first run and a second place finish in his second run!

I was in shock and tears at the same time. My trainer, Jim (also entered at the same trial) at the prompting of the trial organizer, proceeded to give everyone a brief summary of Dini’s story. There was not a dry eye in the house.

Later on that evening, I called my grandfather to tell him the news. He could not stop laughing and continuously thanked me for helping Dini out. In fact, Dini’s tail went into overdrive when I put him up against the phone so Grandfather could talk to him.

However, Dini and I had some unfinished business. We still needed one more qualifying run for his CARO RN title. Our plan was to enter the Georgetown trials hosted by Rat Pack on November 8<sup>th</sup>. I was definitely looking forward to it and was mentally preparing for a trial that had at least 5 times more dogs in it than the trial in Arva, Ontario did. The high excitement environment would certainly lend a test to both my new relationship with Dini as well as his ability to cope in such a high distraction environment.

Unfortunately, on the morning of the trial, we were ‘saddled’ with an unexpected handicap. In my haste to get ready and leave for the trial, I managed to fall down a set of stairs not once but twice! The second time was very debilitating to me as I could not properly walk and was visibly limping and in a great deal of pain.

My promise to my grandfather and all the hard work we had done motivated me to pick myself up and persevere the pain. We got to the trial, registered and I awaited my turn. I had the moral support and encouragement of all my classmates and instructor who were also there trialing with their own dogs.



Our first attempt was a bust! My awkward walk and heavy pain, completely threw Dini off – no call forwards, no finishes and no spirals and we appropriately did not qualify.

In our second attempt, having regrouped, we did a masterful ‘run’ only I, in the pain I was in, improperly ‘finished’ Dini at one of the stations doing a right finish instead of the required left finish. I was greeted by my supporters at the finish line with a great deal of support and encouragement in an effort to raise my spirits and encourage me to persevere just a bit longer instead of just leaving. While I fleetingly entertained the thought, I knew that a promise was a promise and I had to keep my word to my grandfather – not to mention it would not be fair to Dini and all the work and effort he had put into trying!

Third attempt; everyone is holding their breaths – Jim, my trainer, who was slated to go first arranged to switch his position with mine, to help prevent the pain from worsening and allowing me to try one last time. All I concentrated on was the course – it was just Dini, me and the 20 stations – no judge, no audience (who by now all knew the story and were watching intently), no distractions. We went for it and, less than 3 minutes later, we had emerged fully confident that we had finally done it! Indeed we had! Dini received his Rally Novice title rosette that day and, a week later, I took it to my grandfather along with Dini for what turned out to be one of the most emotional days of my life. By now, my grandfather’s vision had deteriorated so I could not show him any pictures or video, but he could feel the rosette and hug Dini and do nothing but smile from ear to ear ....

Dini may have been lucky to find two loving families after the shelter, but I find myself feeling privileged that he is part of **our** family. More importantly, Dini helped me keep the promise I made to this dear man who has meant the world to me. Not bad for a formerly ‘throwaway’ dog.

Lori Terrell  
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