

Who's Training Who?

People used to come from miles around to watch me train my black lab Leroy. Not because he was so smart, it's just nobody had ever seen a dog swim the back-stroke.

Leroy wasn't what you would call 'full blooded'. In fact, I highly suspect his mom might have engaged in some sort of twisted affair with a sire of the feline persuasion. But like all labs, Leroy loved to fetch. He just happened to be deathly afraid of water! It was sure something to see when those two driving forces collided. If I'd of had any business sense I'd have charged people admission to watch him go. I'd have gotten richer than whoever owns that talking Gecko.

Most folks were a might skeptical after hearing the tales of the backstroking dog. I'd see them shaking their heads as I warming him up with a few runs on the dry land. Then, to my shame, I'd throw that training dummy way out across the bayou. Leroy wouldn't hesitate. He'd tear off at full speed and lay out across that water, landing with a tremendous splash. There'd always be that split second of silence as Leroy disappeared under the surface. (I knew from experience he was under there contemplating his big mistake.) Once he realized what he'd done, he'd shoot up from there like a school of piranhas was snacking on his tail.

I'm not sure how long you actually have to walk on water to qualify for sainthood, but I'm sure Leroy would've at least deserved an honorable mention. He'd be whooping those gangly front legs like a nuclear powered paddle boat, sounding like an angry beaver tail-slapping symposium. The poor bayou had never taken such a beating, and it'd cough him up every time. His head would be riding two or three feet off the surface, and just when you thought he was about to drown, he'd lay back and start that famous Leroy back-stroke.

Over on the bank, you never heard such cackling in all your life, and it was all at my little buddy's expense. It was downright shameful, but I took some comfort in knowing everybody else was laughing too.

But anyway- It's sad a lot of folks misjudged Leroy on the basis of his one little short coming. The fear of water was such a small part of his life. Thankfully, ole' Leroy never took it all to heart. He never let his faults define him. He just kept on plugging along, wagging that tail, loving, and living life to the fullest. You'd have thought he'd wrote the Scripture: *(I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. Psalms 139:14 NASB)*

For example, one day I brought Leroy on a teal hunting trip. My dad scoffed, "Leave him home son. He just ain't gon' make no hunting dog." Boy was dad surprised. Leroy didn't lose a single bird that day in chest high Johnson grass. That dog had a nose that could trail a gnat poot through a fertilizer farm. Leroy also turned out to be quite the fisherman. One summer, when the bayou dried up, he sloshed around out in there in the shallows until he wrestled his jaws around a nice mess of big catfish.

Another time Leroy got lost several miles from home. Mom took me back to look for him for two days. The third day I was sitting out on the front step with my head down praying, trying not to let anybody see me cry, when suddenly I felt a big wet tongue rake across my face. I looked up and there he was, wagging his big happy tail!

I was blessed to have Leroy as my friend in those formative years of my life. He was the best dog a fellow could ever have. He taught me to not let my shortcomings define me, to just keep wagging my tail when I'm laughed at, and to not let anybody keep me from giving life my best shot. Makes me wonder, "Who was training who?"

-Guy Sheffield 11-16-06