

A Personal Story:

Peruvian Hairless Dogs are Pieces of Gold!

I am Hanna Sjöblom, a 28-year-old nurse from Finland, and I have a Peruvian Hairless Dog (mediano), a 2½ year old male called Roli. He was my first dog, and looking back now, I didn't really know much about the breed, but these years have given me some deeper insight to this wonderful, primitive, and elegant breed. I did choose a Peruvian Hairless solely because I was hopeful I could tolerate him because of my allergy. Usually you choose a breed because of the looks, temperament, type, possibly bearing in mind its suitability for different hobbies such as obedience, agility, hunting, whatever. Generally speaking, you choose a breed that suits *just you*. My only dream was to get a dog. It didn't matter to me if it was "show quality", and I didn't have anything special hobbies in mind for us. I just wanted a great companion, a dog I had longed for all of my life. **I surely got what I wanted!**

During our time together, and being in touch with other PH owners, I got a deeper understanding of the nature of a PH. I learned that there can be a vast range of personalities in this breed. As breed standards are generally only a short description of a breed and cannot give any deeper understanding of the dog personality and temperament of a chosen breed..... I learned, by getting to know several PH Dogs, that there are dogs who are reserved, a few can be very reserved and don't let a stranger come near. Of course this can be a question of genes or socialization, or both. On the other hand, there are very open natured ones and extroverts, and those who seem to be coy for a short moment, then come to kiss you. In addition to gaining more information and insight into PH nature, I got more interested in doing things with Roli. I started showing him in conformation, and now he has a Finnish CH title. Shows are over, so I neutered him recently, but luckily there are so many more things waiting for us!

I now realize I got a piece of gold when having Roli, and even his temperament has given me gray hairs! I know I made a lot of mistakes with him when he was a pup, as I didn't have clear understanding of how to train a dog, and no patience! The methods I used didn't make him behave well, didn't make him stop pulling on the leash, barking and acting silly around other dogs, nor did they make him focus on me. Roli's temperament is very extrovert, alert, active, bold, and as PH Dogs generally are, he is highly intelligent and needs to be stimulated mentally. I sometimes wished he was one of those easy breeds who take things calmly, don't care about other people and dogs, just follow their owner without letting out a bark. My dog was a wild child! Our first

obedience class when he was 1 year old was mad barking, storming circles in leash, and not a single look at my eyes -- no attention at all! We've come a long way from there, and looking back, there was nothing wrong with him. It was just me because I was inexperienced and couldn't "read" my dog.

My PHD has a wonderful personality and enormous capacity to do different hobbies. He is the very first Peruvian Hairless Dog in Finland to compete in agility. We started in late Spring 2004, and we entered our first official trial in March 2005. He made 3 clean runs, and has been transferred into upper competition class. Most important.... he really loves it! He cannot be forced to do anything, and he tells me. Agility suits well his feisty, fun-loving personality and elegant, sporty, body structure.



Some 1½ years ago I found a brilliant way to train Roli and my other dog, an American Hairless Terrier from Florida. It's clicker training, based on operant conditioning method. I suddenly noticed that Roli got absolutely thrilled when we started our training sessions. He really became a sucker for the clicker! Of course finding the right method, and generally broadening my understanding of training, gave us more possibilities to train different and more difficult, things. He is food-motivated, as most PH are. I taught him tricks just for fun, and nowadays, as we just started doing canine freestyle, those tricks come in handy.

We attended a canine freestyle training day in Helsinki, and I feel it was a great kick-start to this fascinating sport, where the bond and focus between the dog and the handler is crucial. It's a very joyful, challenging, and fun hobby, and Roli seems to enjoy our canine freestyle training sessions in cheerful, tail-wagging spirit. Our day in Helsinki was long and we had lots of exercises, but he managed to wag his tail until the end, and performed so well. I felt so proud of him, considering how he used to be before!



PH Dogs are challenging and fascinating. Most of the PH Dogs now are open natured; very reserved ones are quite rare. I know people don't see a PHD as a potential dog for doing hobbies, but in my opinion, this breed does need some kind of stimulation, whether going to group trainings or just stimulating the dog at home. They need puzzles to solve and some exercise leash-free to satisfy their need to run, in order to keep them happy. Roli, for example, loves to run free in the forest, and rallies around like mad! There are a few PH in Finland doing lure-coursing and they've proved to be fast!

I know there are prejudices against this breed as a shy, primitive dog you cannot really do anything with. I would say it's most usually not the case. There are many others with PH Dogs in Finland and abroad, who train their dogs successfully and participate in different dog events. I heard one narrow-minded breeder say that a PH Dog is happy when laying on the couch because their nerve construction isn't good for tolerating training. That's a breeder who

does nothing other than the act of breeding... no training, no fun. It's just the contrary!

A PH Dog needs mental stimulation and challenge to stay happy. That doesn't mean constant activity and tiring the dog, though. Mine loves to lounge under the blanket in bed, sleeping happily late in the morning if I do and spending lazy days, doing not much anything special. I've learned, by discussing with fellow PHD owners, that there are individual differences in attention spans and "trainability" -- some cannot tolerate many repetitions in training, some do, like Roli, who nowadays can focus for a long time and really has fun. He is a funny guy at heart and loves to fool around and show off. When teaching him a new thing, I can almost hear him thinking, "Hey, what next...I'm not getting it...let's try again...Bingo! Got it mum! You want me to spin clockwise? Yep! Let's do it again!"

PHD's need to be well socialized during puppyhood to ensure they grow up as balanced as possible. I would put



extra focus on socialization in this breed, as it can be easy to ruin a naturally suspicious dog with poor socialization. Naturally, this primitive breed will never remind you of a Golden Retriever, in general, as there are a vast range of personalities! The reserved nature can show up in situations like barking to all strangers, shyness in the conformation ring, or in new situations. This is quite natural and should be accepted as one normal feature of a PHD. When speaking of reservedness, there are many forms of it, from slight shyness in certain situations to total panic or aggressiveness towards people or new places. In my opinion, a PHD this severely reserved shouldn't be used for breeding. Even Roli is extrovert and loves people, also strangers in rather enthusiastic manner, he did show some of this normal PHD behavior yesterday when I visited a friend's house. He's been there many times, but this time there was a relative, hidden in one room, cleaning. Roli didn't realise there was anyone first, but when he did, he started barking madly, in suspicious way. Soon he went to see this man, sniffed him, obviously thought he's not there to rob the house, and went away. Later he went to greet him with a wagging tail.

Sometimes he wants to greet strange people on the streets, sometimes in conformation ring he gave the judge suspicious looks, sometimes jumped on him, giving kisses. It's all so very "*Peruvian Hairless Dog!*"

I feel I'm totally enveloped by the world of hairless dogs, and I've totally fallen in love with Peruvian Hairless Dogs! I hope to breed PHDs in small scale in the future when I have space and resources to do so. I continue to have fun activities with Roli and hope to gain more as a team. I like to compete in trials, such as agility or maybe obedience, and I do have some realistic aims concerning competition. But I never, *ever* want to keep a beloved friend like Roli as a competition tool, as an object to satisfy my needs to win and gain victories. The most important thing is to have fun, meet new people and most of all, win *ourselves*. The challenges are personal, such as making us work well as a team without noticing distraction, or making us to work even better in agility track. With a PHD, you have to work much with the dog's terms; being sensitive to his capacity and resources. Not every PHD tolerates the same things, and reading your dog is important.

I'm lucky I have found so many good friends through Roli, other PHD and dog people, people in agility, obedience, canine freestyle, and pet therapy. I want to thank all my PHD friends in Finland and Melanie Chan in the USA for great friendships, and Mrs. Reija Puolakka for being an awesome canine freestyle instructor and "lighting the spirit" for dog dancing. Greetings to fellow AHT lovers too!

Hanna lives with Roli, a Peruvian Hairless Dog born in Finland, and Jimmy, an American Hairless Terrier born in Georgia, USA. Hanna passed the English foreign language exam for nurses with flying colors, and is studying to take the nursing exam for the USA. She is an artist, and one of her numerous canine etchings is shown in the article entitled "Primitive, Elegant, Strong... Peruvian Hairless Dog".

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