



# KINDRED SPIRITS

BY KAREN GRACE MANGINI

As the spray from the hose came bursting out after her, she came sliding over to the edge of her cage, desperately looking for a way to save herself. Her dirty face pressed up against the meshed metal, and our eyes met. Her skinny little backside began to wiggle uncontrollably. I instantly felt my heart overflow. *That's my dog!* I thought.

The shelter told me she been brought in after a recent arrest at a puppy mill farm. Because she'd been raised in deplorable conditions, she had no idea how to have an appropriate relationship with anyone. Two couples had adopted her but brought her back to the shelter because she attacked their children. She had since been kept isolated in a tiny cage and declared unadoptable. In fact, she was to be put down that afternoon.

Half an hour later, I was leaving the shelter with her. Her quick temper showed itself instantly. On the way home, she leaped up and tried to bite me. I instinctively grabbed her snout and, staring her straight in the eyes, loudly said "No!" She started back and gave me a look I will never forget, a strange cross between utter relief and intense curiosity.

## LEARNING ABOUT LOVE

That was the beginning of my adventure in experiencing real love. I had no idea what love was until I met this dog

I named Mandy. The truth is, her upbringing sounded a little like mine. I came from an acutely dysfunctional and abusive household. By the time I was 15, I was acting out so much my parents tried to make me a ward of the courts. I became willful and feisty, just like Mandy.

It wasn't easy training her. She had a trust issue – something I could understand. Yet I wanted a well-behaved dog I could take anywhere. It seemed this dog and I were lacking in the same areas, so I decided to just listen to my instincts and start with what I knew. As a child, I needed understandable boundaries and lots of consistent love and affection. So I gave Mandy what I needed and craved.

For months, I instinctively ignored her bouts of frustration and aggression and calmly began to give her loving attention and to set clear boundaries only when she was relaxed. This worked, except for one thing. She would still try to bite me whenever she felt threatened. It was how she'd learned to protect herself. Even though I could relate, it was unacceptable now.

I finally ended up using the controversial "alpha dog roll-over." It took a few weeks, but she finally got it. For the first time, those wild eyes relaxed and looked up at me for approval. I explained this was her forever home. I

would be the protector now and all she had to do was play. She was a relieved little puppy!

## TRUE COMMUNICATION

I read somewhere that animals communicate in pictures, so I began sending clear images of desired behavior to her. I incorporated techniques of focused consciousness, mind power and intentional thought in a dog training manner. With every new trick, I would get her attention and project that image to her. As with children, consistency was paramount. That was the secret.

For example, I would leave Mandy with my mother for the weekend. She had two other dogs. After a few times, my mother told me I couldn't leave her there anymore. She said Mandy barely left the door after I left; she moped around all day, stopping only long enough to be nasty to her own dogs.

Next time I was to leave town for the weekend, I sat Mandy down and got her full attention. I created a clear, focused image in my head of the sun slowly coming up then going back down as the dark of night took over. I projected this image to her twice. I then imagined myself coming through my mother's front door. I made this image as clear and detailed as possible and also included the delighted emotion of reuniting. After projecting this vision to her, I left for the weekend with high hopes. Upon returning, my mother said Mandy was fine. She knew I was coming home.

I taught her all kinds of tricks using communication. It became effortless. I kept a clear image in my head of the desired scenario. I saw what we would be doing, the places we would go, and how she would behave around other people and dogs. Most importantly, I embodied the emotion encased in that


image, how I would feel about her, how people would respond to her, and so on.

My instincts were right. With understanding, patience, love and leadership, Mandy turned out to be a mild mannered, affectionate, purebred blonde cocker spaniel, who looks very much like Lady from *Lady and the Tramp*. Every place I take her, people stop me, wanting to experience her wisdom and calm healing energy.

## WORKING TOGETHER

Mandy is now a therapy dog certified with the Delta Society. She works with children in hospitals and schools for the developmentally disabled. I taught her many tricks, like sneezing on command, dancing and praying, and she brings joy, healing and compassion to the youngsters we visit.

Mandy didn't just teach me compassion and increase my capacity to love. She also led me to a new career and gave my life a completely new meaning. I am now a dog trainer and have developed a dog training system using the techniques I learned while training Mandy called the BowWOW! method. My mission statement is to do my part to change our relationship with animals. My specialty is in training "untrainable" dogs to be therapy dogs for the Delta Society through Paws 4 Healing. I'm also rescuing unwanted dogs from shelters in the hopes of rehabilitating them and turning them into therapy dogs. My ultimate goal is to start a service that trains and places dogs as permanent residents at nursing homes and rehabilitation centers.

My dog and I came from similar backgrounds. We were both misunderstood. All we needed was a little patience and understanding to grow into our true loving selves. 

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