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Black Dog Can't Jump



by C. Flisi

Hollywood is planning a remake of “White Men Can’t Jump,” the 1992 film about streetballers whose hustle was based on stereotypes. One stereotype was that dorky looking guys who seem out of place can’t play basketball, and another was that Black guys always play better than whites. The two protagonists made their money from these erroneous assumptions.

My little black dog does not look

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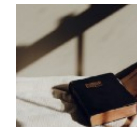
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athletic. Giada's lineage, so far as we could determine it, does not include any greyhound blood or that of some similar speedster. She is a smallish mutt of indeterminate breed, mostly min-pin but who knows the rest. Yet she used to be the fastest canine in the doggy park. She could race around the perimeter more swiftly than her peers simply because she was smarter than any of them: she knew how to weave and pivot and maneuver. She was smallish and light and super-flexible. She strategized and literally jumped over some of the smaller slower dogs in her eagerness to outrace the bigger, more powerful animals. She almost always succeeded. If the other humans in the doggy park had been betting types, I could have hustled a fair income out of Giada's unexpected prowess.

Those days are long gone. My gal is rising 18; she is arthritic and hobbles more than walks. I have to carry her to the park because she is uncertain about the sidewalk leading there. Once she is

inside the park fence, she feels more secure. She knows the dimensions inside and is confident walking around unleashed. Sometimes her movements are brisk enough to pass for trotting, but when we leave the park, she walks with a marked limp.

We used to take long ambles on country roads and paths through the woods. No more. She is mostly blind and almost entirely deaf; a route she doesn't know is frightening and disorienting. Steps and slopes, unexpected branches on a trail or cracks in a pavement are difficult hurdles.

Because she can't see or hear, she gets nervous if there is another dog nearby. She used to be sociable with females and flirty with males of any size but she doesn't know how to size them up these days without sight or hearing. To avoid undue stress, I take her to the doggy park when the place is empty so she won't feel threatened. Sometimes she reacts nervously to me as well,

since she can't see or hear me and my smell may not be evident; depends on which way the wind is blowing.

The wind isn't the only factor contributing to her confusion. Giada suffers from canine cognitive dysfunction (CCD), also known as doggy Alzheimer's. Therefore she might not know me even if the winds were favorable. She sometimes forgets to eat and wanders away from her bowl mid-meal. She will return an hour later, discover the food left behind, eat it all, then whine for more because she forgot that she ate the rest earlier.

She usually eats the doggy snacks I offer her. Sometimes she is so enthusiastic that she tries to jump up to snatch them out of my hand, as she used to do. But her hind legs won't support her and she slides or falls on the floor. I have learned to hold the snacks out to her almost at ground level to dissuade her from attempting an ill-advised jump. I have also learned to buy only snacks that can be easily

chewed. She used to love Dingo bones and would busy herself for up to an hour chewing one into oblivion. These days she snubs them entirely because her teeth aren't up to the task.

Nor are her bowels up to the obligations of apartment living. She drinks a lot of water because her meds make her thirsty, but she has forgotten to flag me when nature calls. So I try to watch her carefully. She spends most of her time curled up in her doggy bed these days, but whenever she rises, or begins pacing around, or lingers at the corner of the living room rug, I scoop her up quickly and take her outside. She almost always pees, outside if I am fast enough, inside if not.

As for bowel movements, I can usually stimulate her into doing them outside, but not always. Fortunately, she has not reached the point of diarrhea, so what she does is easily and quickly collected and disposed of, wherever it may fall.

In short, Giada seems to be living a dignified life as she winds down. She is not free of pain or confusion but seems relatively comfortable. As long as she is eating, keeping down what she eats, moving on her own steam, reacting to stimuli such as snacks and squirrels, and tolerating arthritic discomfort, I figure she is good to go for the foreseeable future. How long *that* is could be anyone's guess for an 18-year-old dog. Maybe there is a hustle to be made. Giada, are you in?

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