

Danilo: The Dog that brought TTouch to South Africa

DANILO'S STORY by his person, Eugenie Chopin

How do I condense into a couple of pages, the story of 18 years with Danilo?

It began when I went to the Sandton SPCA looking for a new puppy. What I found was a four-month-old pup that had been found on the street. A pointer cross who wasn't particularly cute, but who had something that spoke to me. I took him home and our life began together.

In 1990 I was a typical dog owner who loved dogs, had lived with several, but knew very little about them. When I look back I am appalled at how many mistakes I made and how instrumental I was in developing his character and challenging behavioral patterns.

Danilo (named from the operetta "The Merry Widow" that I was singing in at the time) was meant to be an outdoor dog that was going to sleep in a doghouse in the front drive area. We had had some trouble with thieves jumping over the wall and stealing radios etc. out of cars. I didn't expect him to actually guard the cars, but to simply let us know when someone was there.

At the time, I had 3 other dogs living & sleeping in the house and I can now imagine how confused he must have been that he wasn't allowed to sleep inside as well! He was a rescue dog and needed to feel secure in his home and being put outside at night certainly didn't help. Fortunately after 6 months when I went overseas, one of my softhearted staff, Sophie, let him in and by the time I returned, there wasn't any possibility of putting him out again! (She is still today wiser than I!)

There were many problems that started to crop up and by the time Danilo was a year old, he had truly terrorized my other dogs. Not knowing what to do, I typically called my Vet and asked for help. He sent me to a highly recommended dog trainer who used what I now consider to be old-fashioned training methods. It was based on the theory of Dominance and used very harsh punishment methods to correct unwanted behaviour.

We started Danilo's "treatment" by dealing with the problem of rawhides. A rawhide was something so precious that he would go for any dog in the vicinity. (His posture was enough to scare them into leaving their rawhide behind) He didn't want just his, but all of the other 3 as well. The idea was to throw pop crackers (fireworks) on the floor if he went for the other dogs or their treats. This was to scare him so that he'd leave them alone. Well, Danilo could have cared less, but the noise terrified my other dogs who promptly dropped their treat and ran out of the room! Score one for Danilo!

We dealt with many problems such as going out of the gate and not coming when called, chewing the carpets and furniture (always the Orientals and antiques!), turning over the garbage can for food, leaping over the garden wall (over 7 foot), not allowing the other dogs to get attention, wanting to kill the paper boy, being agro with other dogs on the street or at training etc. etc. The plan was to set him up so that he could be caught in the act and then give him an appropriate -horrible- punishment to deter him.

For carpets, catch him chewing, then roll him up in the carpet and beat it while making lots of noise!
For garbage cans, catch him doing it, then put him in the garbage can and bang the lid!
For going out of the gate, catch him in the act, then grab and hang by the neck on the way back in!

Today I understand this to be not only abusive but also majorly responsible for his becoming more aggressive. However, at the time, I had a problem and was ready to do anything to help my dog. Although it felt wrong to me, I had no alternatives from which to choose. It's a hard life's lesson to learn to "trust your instincts"! I now live by the principle that if it "feels" wrong, it probably is!

I was a typical owner who had a big concern and trusted the experts to tell me how to fix it. I would like to say that the trainer I used was very good and knew what he was doing according to what I now believe to be outdated training techniques. Most of the great dog trainers in the world today started exactly the same way, as it was the method they had been taught. However, today we know so much more! And there are many “cross-over” trainers out there who once used harsh training modalities who have found that there are more humane and effective methods.

Then from punishing and yelling at my dog, I found a dog psychologist who told me to ignore him! I did all sorts of things like never letting him initiate interaction, turning my head away when he was demanding attention, etc. At the end of 5 months, I was told that he was one of the few dogs who indeed only wanted to be President and not Vice-President! Well, while I knew little about the Alpha dog theory in those days, I certainly knew without any help that Danilo wanted to “be in charge”!

So it wasn't long before Danilo began biting people as well as terrorizing my other animals. For a long time we thought he was a “racist” dog as he only bite black guests or workers! Then I went to a well-known behaviorist who said that he needed to be more dependent on me so I should vary his feeding times. I.e. one day feed in the morning, next day afternoon, next day – no food at all. This would then make him constantly look to me to find out when his next meal would be. On day three of this regime, he bit the first person that walked into the kitchen while he was eating, who just happened to be white! So now he was multi-racial. When I called this “behaviorist” to ask whether this could be the result of the new protocol, he assured me it was not. Needless to say that was the last advice I took from this source.

With the trainer, we taught him to “down stay” so well that I could go off for a half hour and come back, having forgotten the poor dog was in “stay” mode and he would still be there! However, he was staying because the consequences of getting up were so unpleasant. In other words, **he learned to do things out of fear rather than co-operation.** As a result, even though with training he became better behaved, he still bit people! **He was a classic fear biter which was almost impossible to understand as he behaved with such bravado.**

So now I had learned many things about dogs and mine in particular from both trainers and behaviorists. Some of it helped and some of it didn't. But my dog still bit people! **The reality was that I hadn't dealt with his insecurity.** I kept hearing that he needed a man to handle him or that he was too dominant. I now know that he just needed clear instruction and communication from me and to know exactly what his place and job was in the home. The more violence we used with him, the more violent he became. Many people make this mistake. The fact that he is such a loving dog today is due to his wonderful basic nature. He never seemed to hold any of my mistakes against me! Is this not why we love them so much?

I will admit that it's embarrassing to remember what we did to this amazing dog, but I am not writing this for myself, rather for all of the people out there who might benefit from my misguided experience. In truth, I spent years and money working on Danilo with all of the best intentions. I found the best of the best experts in Johannesburg because I didn't trust my lack knowledge of what should happen. However, I am the type of person that when confronted with a problem, I will search and search for the answers. Hence eventually finding the TTouch work.

Midway into Danilo's life, someone in the States told me about TTouch. I was headed to the US for the wedding of my nephew and it was quite serendipitous that there was an Introductory Training starting the day after my arrival in the US and finishing the day before I had to be in Houston for the wedding. It was clearly “meant to be”! After my first training we never looked back! I had finally found something that felt right to me! **I had found a training technique that was based on respect.** I neither had to punish nor ignore my dog. I was ecstatic!

One of the many things going on at home was that my oldest dog, Musetta wouldn't come for walks in the garden with us any more or even come to the bedroom for our early morning gathering because she was so intimidated by Danilo. Within 2 days of coming home after my first TTouch

training and applying just the touches, Musetta was back in the family and Danilo was much more relaxed! (She has gained confidence and he was more chilled) It was a long road of TTouches, body wraps and ground work, but today there are many people who find it hard to believe the stories I tell about Danilo! I won't tell you that he became perfect and when I took him out, I used a Halti. It is almost impossible to change the basic nature of a dog, but we can certainly help them be more balanced, adjusted and confident in most circumstances.

(Later Note: As Danilo grew older, he no longer had to use a head Halter, but walked in a harness and was happy to see the dog across the street!)

Numerous experts told me that I would never be able to get a new puppy with Danilo, but at the time I wrote this I had Angelique for 10 years and Shanti for 5. He loved playing with both of them. As he got older, I tried to help him understand that he didn't have to protect everyone and everything, but came to realize that he still considered this his job, so I honor him for that. He enjoyed old age, still wanting to play like a puppy on occasion. Isn't this one of the reasons we are so enamored with dogs?

TTouch techniques played a big part in his transformation, but more importantly, TTouch philosophy and ideas about how to interact and communicate with him were instrumental in changing me, and my attitude about animals. I am eternally grateful to Linda Tellington-Jones and the TTouch team who helped me become a better person as well as teaching me how to work in a positive and productive way with my dog. **Today I believe that Danilo and I had a soul agreement to change the direction of Dog Training and Behaviour in South Africa.** Certainly when we started the Practitioner Training Program in SA in 2000, there was nothing out there working with gentle positive methods. In 15-16 years much has changed and as I sit at my desk looking at Danilo's portrait across from my desk **I'm sure he knows what an influence he has had on so very many lives here in Southern Africa. Thank you my friend!**



The picture used for the portrait across from Eugenie's Desk



Looking dark!



“We used to walk down the street and he would know every gate that had dogs behind it and I could see he body stiffening up in anticipation, so I would stop, do a few leg circle on the back legs, which softened his body and we would then walk on with his interest alert but no reaction. We had done a lot of work and this was the culmination of it that his body only had to be “reminded” of how to soften.”



“Danilo loving Angelique” Dan fell in love with Angelique and she with him almost from day one. I named her Angelique so that she would remember that she was his “angel-dog” and she lived up to her name her whole life.