

A "GHOST" STORY

by

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Autumnwood

Nope, not a spooky story to be told around the campfire, although it was written one week before Halloween. It's about a Sheltie of a unique, often disapproved-of color and his foray into the world of Performance events—a Sheltie who, unknown to him, would become an ambassador for his color in the eyes of the Sheltie world.

I had wanted a color-headed white Sheltie for several years, after seeing photos of them in a Sheltie magazine. I thought it was the most beautiful color I had ever seen. Since blue merles had always been my favorites, I had my heart set on a blue-headed white. After several inquiries to breeders with color-headed white puppies, I was always disappointed to find they were

either older than I wanted or the wrong color. Then by a stroke of luck, I noticed an announcement in my local Sheltie club's newsletter of a litter in my own town that had a blue-headed white puppy. When I saw this mostly-white ball of fur, I knew he was just what I was looking for. Sired by the tri-color Ch Ashwood Slight Of Hand, CD, ROM out of Moonshine Ashes Of Snowfall, CD, a blue-headed white Obedience bitch, this was a two-puppy litter, consisting of a blue-headed white dog and a "normal" tri-color bitch. The little male, with his blue head and two small body spots, was a tiny dynamo and immediately stole my heart! That little white hairball didn't know it yet, but he was destined to have a future as a Performance dog.

"Ghost" (Autumnwood's Ghost Dancer, CD, HT, PT, HCT) has become that for me—and more. I was determined to prove that color-headed white Shelties were not only beautiful but could also work as well as Shelties of "normal" colors. I had heard and read so many disparaging remarks about them and wanted to show that they were a color worthy of notice. "Ghost" flung himself into his part of that endeavor with gusto.

We started with Obedience, which "Ghost" loved and where he qualified eleven straight times on his way to his CD title,

all with high scores. Heeling was his forte, and his animation and driving desire to please never failed to elicit favorable

comments from judges, spectators, and exhibitors alike. He became known as "that white dog" around the Obedience rings and more than once became an Obedience judge's first white he or she had ever seen/judged. He finished his CD, appropriately enough for a dog named "Ghost," at a Sheltie Specialty on a dark and stormy Halloween night.

It was around the Obedience ring where I became accustomed to hearing, "Is that a parti-colored Pomeranian?" "What a cute Papillon," and, amusingly enough since it came from supposedly-knowledgeable Sheltie people, "Gee, your blue merle has a lot of

white!" I got really good at fielding their questions and clearing up their confusion!

Shortly before starting CDX training, I introduced "Ghostie" to sheep, and he let me know in no uncertain terms that as much as he loved Obedience, Herding was where he truly belonged. His first reaction to sheep was to dive right into the middle of them. You can imagine my concern as I watched my 14-inch dog disappear barking into a sea of wool and hooves. A moment later he emerged on the other side of them, mouth still running, and happier than I'd ever seen him! Needless to say, I strived to make subsequent lessons a little more sane.

I also found that the prejudice in regards to his color wasn't limited to Obedience and Conformation people. One old myth in Herding circles is that sheep don't respect a white dog. The thinking is that sheep only fear and respect black and dark-colored dogs since they more closely resemble wolves and other predators. "Ghost" put that myth to rest because when he went after those sheepies, they reacted with as much respect for him as they did for my big, black Belgian Sheepdog! And I've seen other color-headed white Shelties, and many predominantly white Border Collies, work livestock with as much success as



Autumnwood's Ghost Dancer, CD, HT, PT, HCT.



"Ghost" loves to heel!



"Ghost" sails over the Utility bar jump.



Tracking his way to the glove.

the dark dogs do.

"Ghostie" earned his AKC HT and PT Herding titles, as well as his AHBA HCT. He has proven to have a fair amount of talent and a great amount of enthusiasm and desire, which really makes up for a lot. Unfortunately, sheep and instructors in my area are few and far between, so "Ghost" has limited access to working and his progression toward Herding titles has been

much slower than both of us would like. Some years, the poor little dog went into a Herding trial looking for a leg or a title after only having worked sheep twice during the whole year. Sometimes he pulls it off and sometimes he doesn't, but he gives it his all and always gets compliments even when he doesn't quite qualify.

While earning the first leg on his HT, he had obviously demonstrated everything that the class required. When our judge, Jerry Rowe, had still not indicated to me that "Ghost" had passed, I looked at him inquiringly and a little nervously, wondering what more he could be looking for from my dog. Jerry just smiled and said, "Oh, don't worry, he's qualified. I'm just enjoying watching him work!" So we let the little white dog work until his entire 10 minutes were up, much to "Ghost's" delight.

"Ghost's" latest endeavor is Tracking, which he pursues with the same gung-ho attitude as he has shown in his other activities. When he sees the tracking harness come out, it's hard for him to contain his enthusiasm long enough for me to put the harness on him. Once on the track, it's comical to watch him often disappear in the tall grass. He's such a little guy, but that white coat is a definite plus in helping me keep an eye on his progress through the heavy cover.

Both in and away from the Performance scene, "Ghost" has been an educational tool as well. His eye-catching color has attracted many "fans" and has afforded me the opportunity to educate those admirers on the merits of his breed and his color, as well as cautioning that the color-headed white Sheltie is not a color to be taken lightly and that breeding them is best left to experienced Sheltie breeders. I take that aspect of my dog's color very seriously and don't wish to leave people with the impression that breeding white Shelties is something everyone should be doing.

Now 10 years old and showing no signs of slowing down, "Ghost" will work toward earning his TD and finishing his HS title in Herding and will pursue more AHBA Herding titles. But regardless of whether he attains these objectives or falls short, he has definitely achieved my long-ago goal for him—that of furthering the image of color-headed white Shelties as a useful and worthwhile color in this breed.

Over the years, "Ghost" hasn't garnered multiple Obedience High In Trial awards or set any earth-shattering records during his Performance career, but when I walk into a ring with him at my side, I am delighted to be the one on the other end of his leash. And as I watch him work his heart out at anything I ask of him, I'm proud to consider him proof that true Sheltie temperament is in no way color-conscious.

Hats off to ALL the working whites! □

Nancy began showing dogs in 1981 and enjoys exhibiting Shelties, Belgian Sheepdogs and Cardigan Welsh Corgis in Obedience, Herding, Tracking and Conformation.