

# What You See Isn't Necessarily What's Going On



--**Author Unknown**, but deeply appreciated.

When I moved to this city I found people were welcoming and friendly. But as I attempted to settle into my new life, I found myself feeling a little lonely most of the time. I thought maybe a dog would help, give me someone to talk to, someone to hang around with. It seemed like a good idea to get a dog from the shelter. And that's where I found Reggie, a big black Lab. The shelter worker said some other people had been interested in Reggie, but that he discouraged them from taking him...said, "They just didn't look like 'Lab' people." Whatever that meant. He must have thought I did.

At first I thought the shelter had misjudged me in giving me Reggie—and a big bag of Reggie's things. See, Reggie and I didn't really hit it off when we got home. We struggled for two weeks (which is how long the shelter guy told me to give him to adjust to his new home). Maybe it was the fact that I was trying to adjust, too. Maybe we were too much alike.

For some reason, his stuff (a dog pad, a bag of toys—almost all of which were brand new tennis balls—his eating dish and a sealed letter from his previous owner) got mixed in with all of my unpacked boxes and I didn't find it for a few days. In the meantime I tried to get acquainted with him—my new best friend. But nothing I did worked out. I tried the commands the shelter guy told me Reggie knew, ones like "sit" and "stay" and "come" and "heel." And he followed them, whenever he felt like it. He never really seemed to listen when I called his name. Sure, he'd look in my direction after the fourth or fifth time I called him—but after that he'd just go back to doing whatever.

Things were not working out. In fact, I couldn't wait for the two weeks to be up. When it was, I looked around for my cell phone to call the shelter and let them know Reggie was on his way back—when I found the bag that contained his stuff. I opened the bag and tossed it in Reggie's direction, and he sniffed it and wagged his tail. His moving tail was the most enthusiasm I'd seen since bringing him home. But then I called out, "Hey Reggie! You like that? Come here and I'll give you a treat." Instead, he glanced in my direction and flopped back down.

Just as I was about to punch in the shelter number, I saw the sealed envelope. I had completely forgotten about that. "Okay, Reggie," I said out loud, "let's see if your previous owner has any advice."

The letter was addressed To Whomever Gets My Dog, and read: "Well, I can't say that I'm happy you're reading this, a letter I told the shelter could only be opened by Reggie's new owner. I wrote this just after dropping him off at the shelter. He knew something was different this time. I've left him before, when I've gone on other trips. It seemed like he knew something was wrong this time. Which is why I'm writing this letter, to try to make things right.

Let me tell you some things about my dog. First, he loves tennis balls, the more the merrier. Sometimes I think he's part squirrel the way he hordes them. He usually has two in his mouth, and he tried to get a third one in there. Hasn't done it yet. Doesn't matter where you throw them, he'll bound after them. So be careful—really don't throw the balls by any roads. I made that mistake once and it almost cost him dearly. Next, commands. Reggie knows the obvious ones, like "sit," "stay," "come," and so on. If you put your hand out, he can "shake" it and will give you a paw for a "high-five." He knows "ball" and "food" and "bone" like nobody's business. I trained Reggie with small food treats. Nothing opens his ears like little pieces of hot dog. Be forewarned: Reggie hates the vet. Good luck getting him in the car—I don't know how he knows but he always knows when its time to go to the vet, but he knows.

Finally, give him some time. I've never been married, so it's only been Reggie and me for his whole life. He's gone everywhere with me, so please include him on your daily car rides if you can. He sits well in the backseat and he doesn't bark or complain. He just loves to be around people and me especially. Which means this transition is going to be hard, with him going to live with someone new. And that's why I need to share one more bit of information with you...His name is not Reggie.

I don't know what made me do it, but when I dropped him off at the shelter, I told them his name was Reggie. He's a smart dog and he'll probably get used to it. I just couldn't bear to give them his real name. For me to do that made it seem so final, that handing him over to the shelter was as good as admitting that I'd never see him again. And if I end up coming back, getting him, and tearing up this letter, it means everything is fine. But if someone else is reading this, well it means that his new owner should know his real name. His name is Tank, because that is what I drive.

I told the shelter that couldn't make "Reggie" available for adoption until they received word from my company commander. See, my parents are gone; I have no siblings, no one I could have left Tank with. My only real request of the Army upon my deployment to Iraq was that they make that one phone call to the shelter...in the event...to tell them that Tank could be put up for adoption. Luckily my colonel is a dog guy, too, and he said he'd take care of it personally. And if you're reading this, then he made good on his word.

Tank has been my family for the last six years, almost as long as the Army has been my family. And now, I hope you make him part of your family and that he comes to love you the same way he loved me. That unconditional love from a dog is what I took with me to Iraq. I hope I honored him by my service to my country and comrades. Good luck with Tank. Give him a good home and give him an extra kiss goodnight—every night—from me. Thank you, Paul Mallory.

I folded the letter and put it back into the envelope. Sure, I had heard of Paul Mallory, everyone in town knew of him—even new people like me. Local kid, killed in Iraq a few months ago and posthumously earning the Silver Star when he gave his life to save three buddies. Flags had been at half-mast all summer.

I leaned forward in my chair and rested my elbows on my knees, staring at the dog. "Hey, Tank," I said quietly. The dog's head whipped up, his ears cocked and his eyes brightened. "C'mere boy." He was

instantly on his feet, coming to sit in front of me, his head tilted; searching for the name he hadn't heard in months.

"Tank," I whispered. His tail swished. I kept whispering his name over and over, and each time, his ears lowered, his eyes softened, and his posture relaxed as a wave of contentment just seemed to flood over him. I stroked his ears, rubbed his shoulders, buried my face into his scruff and hugged him. "It's me and you now, Tank." He reached up and licked my cheek. "So whatdaya say we play some ball?" His ears perked up again. "Yeah? Ball? You like that? Ball?"

Tank tore from my hands and disappeared into the next room. And when he came back, he had three tennis balls in his mouth.