

# DOG STAR DAILY

## Doggy Dialogue With Amy Tan

Ian Dunbar PhD, MRCVS

Dr. Dunbar was lucky to enjoy a few woofs with Amy Tan following a book-signing at Book Passage in Marin County. Extracts from this dialogue were previously published in The Bark magazine.

ID: Tell us what your Yorkies mean to you.

AT: How can I summarize this in a sound bite. Well, my Yorkies are... second to Lou. (Amy's husband.) I am actually pretty dog obsessive, most people know that I travel with my dogs. They go everywhere with me. I'm involved with Yorkie rescue and I've done fund raising events for that. Also, I'm involved with the Canine Health Foundation.

ID: Do Bubba and Lilly ever give you any problems?

AT: Well Yorkies are notorious for getting very excited and puffed up with adrenaline...

ID: Really!?!?

AT: Yes, they are rated as the noisiest dogs in the world. Also, I had a pressing problem because they travel everywhere with me, in a bag on airlines and into restaurants and so as an interim step, I used a Citronella collar, so the dogs would get consistent and immediate feedback each time they barked. I figured that would work and indeed it did. "

ID: Actually, the Citronella collar, uses exactly the same principle we use when teaching dogs to "Shush" and then letting them sniff a piece of freeze dried liver. Barking and sniffing are mutually incompatible behaviors; the dog can not bark and sniff at the same time. When it stops barking to sniff, the smell of the liver rewards the dog for being quiet. Some people think that the citronella collar is aversive, but I discovered that it works even better with a liver odor instead of citronella. The dog barks, the collar sprays, the dog stops barking to sniff the odor, and the smell of liver rewards the dog for stopping barking.

AT: Yes. Well, also I followed your advice and taught them to speak on command so that it would be easier to teach them "No Bark". Then carried the idea of cueing natural behaviors to all kinds of things. We started cueing them to bark appropriately to... the door bell, when people came over, I praised them for barking so that they felt... accomplished...and then, rewarded them for being quiet. I gave them little tiny slivers of beef jerky from time to time. I don't know whether you realize this but tonight to be around so many dogs and not to bark the entire time you were speaking was very different from how it used to be. They would go bonkers and be barking the whole time.

ID: That's wonderful that you actually took the time to reward them for being good — to catch them in the act of doing something right. But we might consider Yorkie's wasteline: You could just use a little kibble from dinner as rewards instead. Your dogs have been excellent

this evening. Especially impressive was the little demo you did during the book-signing, when you asked Bubba to whisper-woof and then to shush immediately afterwards.

AT: Well actually Lilly did it as well. She heard me ask Bubba to speak and joined in.

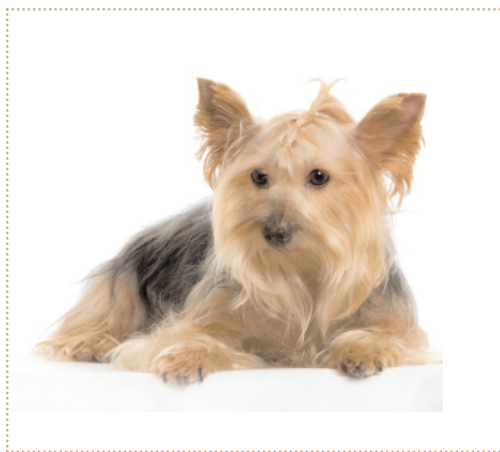
ID: Well they were both picture perfect this evening. It looks like the barking is all under control. Are they here with us now?

AT: Thank You. Yes. They're underneath the table... right here in the restaurant.

ID: Shushhhh! Don't say anything. They're being very quiet now. I must say, when I visited you both in Manhattan, I was quite astounded to see, that not only had you taught your Yorkies to speak and to shush on request but also, that you had taught your husband to control the dogs as well. Tell me, what's the secret to successful husband training?

AT: Shock collars! (Paroxysms of laughter from Amy as her husband Lou went face down in his sushi.)

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