

My name is Astro. My kennel name *is Astro v. Wingeier* and I hail from somewhere on the prairies - Saskatchewan rings a bell. Anyway, I was born on a farm with a bunch of brothers and sisters on June 22, 2002. I don't recall spending a lot of time around "people"...two legged creatures with big heads that speak funny. At around 8 weeks, me and one of my brothers left the family behind and went for a long airplane ride. I can tell you right now, that was not a whole lot of fun. You try hurtling through the air in a metal tube stuffed in a crate with a whiney brother!

Turns out, we ended up in a really cool place...up north somewhere, in a place called Whitehorse, Yukon. My brother and I were split up at the airport and I met my new humans and went to their house. They didn't have a farm, so I was going to have to get used to hanging out in a much smaller area than I was used to. I was also going to have to live with another dog! I was none too pleased about that. I thought I was going to be the boss of this place. Plus there were two more humans I was going to have to deal with, called "teenagers". I couldn't wait to be a teenager, but I would have to get through puppyhood first, and something in my puppy brain told me that was going to be a challenge.

Zeus was the other "dog", and he was actually pretty cool; Swiss, like me, but much more chill. I guess I should explain that I'm a Swiss Cattle Dog, called an Appenzeller. Our job is mainly to herd cows, and as a breed, we are pretty darn good at it. We don't put up with any nonsense from those dim creatures, and make sure right from the get go, that we mean business! We like to bark out our orders, nip at their fetlocks, and if a bull gives ones of us any sass, we will jump and grab its nose and make sure he submits. Otherwise, we're very loyal to our humans and pretty much get along with the rest of the world; most of us, that is. Zeus, on the other hand, was a Bernese Mountain Dog, and had a very pleasant personality...not as intense as my family. I could boss him around most of the time, especially in the house. We made a deal when I got there....if he let me rule the roost inside, he could boss me around outside. We got along great, and he was my best dog friend ever and I was very sad after he died; I'd lost an ally, of sorts.

I thought things were going along pretty great and got away with lots of cute, puppyish things for the first while. The best was when I'd been with Paula, Brett and their dorky teenagers for a couple of weeks. They had some other humans over for a dinner type thing, and there was some pretty good pickings left over...including a big, huge bowl on the table with some salad left over. I thought it would be fun to see how far I could leap (practising for the bulls) in the air get at that thing on the table. I took a running start up the stairs, cleared a chair and made it onto the table, and bullseye, landed right in the bowl, which was just "astro" size! Nailed it! Have to say I was pretty pleased with my performance! My early dog agility training, I guess.

My humans, however, were NOT as impressed as I thought they might be, and that was kind of the beginning of how things were going to change in our household. I guess I should also share some of my other peccadillos here. I come from a line of working breeds, and we need things to do to keep us busy and more than that, happy. No one wants a bored Appenzeller. We also need to be well socialized early on so we can function in the world of humans. Unfortunately, that didn't happen for me on the farm so I was a bit nervous around humans I didn't know. I loved my human family, no question, but I guess I was a bit insecure and didn't always act so nice when I was introduced to other humans; other dogs, no probs! So that's

about the time my main human, Paula and I started going to school to learn some manners and get used to being around lots of humans and dogs. I think my farm family forgot about some of that.

I loved going to school and learned lots of great stuff really fast. I really wanted Paula to think I was super smart and to like me, because I knew where my dinner was coming from, and besides I really liked her and all the stuff she and Brett and the teenagers did with Zeus and I. Being in the Yukon was a great place for dogs like us. We had lots of space to run around, and romping in the snowy mountains was the best!

I graduated from my first school with flying colours because I'm so smart, and then Paula introduced me to another human, Erika! Paula was a pushover, but I knew I'd met my match when Erika came into my life. By this time, I was growing up and getting bigger and while I was getting used to my new family, I still was uncertain around other people. I kind of wanted to be friends, but something inside was telling me something different...kind of a fight or flight response. I guess I was conflicted, but I was just a kid, so what did I know?

We started going to a new school, Erika's school, called *Canines and Company*. Zeus went there too when he was a puppy, but he stopped going I guess because he was the kind of dog that was like "been there, done that". He didn't really like "formal" training stuff. He really liked to just hang out and look cool. Everyone loved Zeus, but not everyone loved me as it turned out. I was just as good looking, but I guess it was a personality thing.

I loved going to Erika's school. There were lots of other dogs there, some were smart and some not so smart. I got along ok with most of them, but mostly I just wanted to be with Paula. We got to do fun games and I learned how to do lots of cool things. I loved long distance recalls the best, 'cause I got to run really fast. Out of sight sit stays were hard for me at first because I was far away from her, and I didn't like that, but I learned quickly that I would get to see her plus get a reward as a bonus! In the winter months we had school inside, but in the summer we got to outside and practice things in different places. Sometimes we went downtown and practiced our obedience with lots of distractions. I didn't care so much about them (the distractions) if I could see where Paula was. I could do a down stay forever if I knew she was nearby.

That's what I liked best about Erika's school. It was always different and I wasn't ever bored. She thought I was doing really well at school and told Paula that she thought we should enter a formal obedience trial. I didn't know what that was, but it sounded ominous and what if there were humans there I didn't know? I had gotten used to the ones at school, and most of them I liked. Some of them were kind of scared of me I think. I'm a pretty expressive guy and intense at times, and that makes some humans uncomfortable. Anyway, she talked Paula into it, but said it would be hard work. We would have to learn how to do things with strangers around me, like having some stranger come and touch me! Boy, that really scared Paula! I didn't know what this all meant at the time, but if it meant being with my best friend, I would try just about anything.

Some of the new stuff I had to learn was super easy. I could heel on and off leash with the best of them, and I could do a down stay forever, even if there were other dogs and humans

around me. I also had to learn to heel around two humans in a figure 8. Piece of cake for me as long as Paula was there. In the obedience world, they called these humans *posts*. Well, they may as well have been posts as far as I concerned; I had a job to do, and that was do a perfect heel with my favourite human. So far so good! I could nail this obedience trial thing for sure....but wait, there was one last thing I had to do, which scared the bejesus out of most humans who knew me...a little reactive? intense? Paula would put me in a stay, walk away from me, and then some perfect stranger was going to come and touch me on the head and back? Not many humans other than those I lived with and a few that I liked had ever touched me. I was a little unsure of that concept. To be honest, I really don't care for perfect strangers approaching me, especially if I'm with Paula. My main job is to look after her....we Appenzellers are also guardian dogs, so no one is going to mess with my human; No way! Over my dead body! This could be a little tricky for me. To be honest, I have to say the concept made me uneasy. I didn't even know how I would react to that, so I guess we would have to try it out with a few humans at my school.

I have to hand it to these brave souls! How we did this was to have a pretend obedience trial, with all the accoutrements, including posts! Haha! Someone would have to pretend to be the judge, the silly human that was going to attempt to touch me with my human a few feet away. To be on the safe side since no one, including me, knew how I would react, Paula put a muzzle on my face. God, how I hate that thing, even tho it made me look tough and super cool, it also made me feel vulnerable! It didn't go well at first, I think because the first person to try it was clearly scared of me, so naturally I growled and snapped at her; what did she expect? No harm done tho...no blood. We tried this a number of times with different humans, and after awhile I got used to them coming to me and touching me on the back. Besides, Paula had told me to stay, so I was doing a job for her, and it was important that I get it right. This went on for a couple of weeks, and then it came time to try it without me wearing my Hannibal Lector mask! Who was going to be the crazy human to come near that crazy Appenzeller and touch him on the head! I can't remember who it was, but someone did and quite frankly, I didn't really notice because my Paula was nearby and I was doing my job.

Well, that was a relief for Paula and Erika and everyone else. Maybe that Astro isn't such a bad guy after all! Not so fast, I thought to myself. I will do this for my human, because I trust her, and I really didn't want to be shipped back to the farm, or a fate worse than that.

So the trial weekend came and there was a full house. I had gained a bit of a rep around town. Some humans thought I was an aggressive dog and had no business in an obedience ring. I could tell Paula was really nervous, but I sure wasn't! Bring it on! I've got a job to do today, so let's go. I have to say, it was a pretty great day and I made my human and Erika very proud. As a team, Paula and I were almost perfect. I scored 198 out of 200 points (whatever that means) and won some big "high in trial" award, got some nice ribbons (who cares) and some awesome treats -yeahh! Finally something worth doing all that for. In fact, we cleaned up and did the same thing the next day and got something called "High Aggregate" which in the obedience world is kind of a big deal.

We carried on with the obedience stuff, and traveled around lots, but it was getting a little boring doing the same old thing, so Paula introduced me to the world of agility! Now, that's something I could really get into! What cattle dog wouldn't love jumps, tunnels, weave poles

and basically going berserk with fun things to do? Paula had her hands full for sure, because apparently, there's such a thing as staying at a start line before I get to berserk! I had more learning to do, but it was worth it for all the fun I was going to have for the next hundred years!

As my career as a dog switched gears, so did my human's. Paula eventually moved away from the Yukon to Vancouver Island. We were having a blast with agility and then we met The Rabid Racers and got into flyball. Wow, another game where I'm allowed to be berserk, and it involves a ball, and running super fast! I've got the best life and human ever. It does not get much better! Agility one weekend, and flyball the next. I retired from flyball at 11, but agility was still a big part of my life with Paula. She has kept all my ribbons and prizes, and let me tell you, I have lots...tubs full, in fact, but I really don't give 2 hoots about that stuff. Having fun with her is really all I care about.

I got really sick when I was 11 and had to have a big operation to put my tummy back in the right place. Paula says I nearly died, but she must have forgotten I'm an Appenzeller, and we live a long time because we're a healthy breed overall. I was playing agility again 6 weeks later!

Then we moved to some little place at the top of Vancouver Island; Port Hardy, small, and not much to do in the world of agility, but Paula made sure I got out lots, and we went tracking quite a bit and did lots of runs on the beach which I really really liked. We had to drive "down island" for agility, but that was OK; at least I still got to play from time to time, even though it was getting a bit hard for me in my old age!

Things were going swimmingly with me and my family until one day, after Paula and Brett went on a vacation and took me too a really nice "spa" for a few weeks, they arrived to collect me and had another dog with them!!!! OMG! A puppy, and it was an Appenzeller puppy. Let me tell you, I was none too impressed! Now I was going to have to share Paula with this annoying (cute) little creature. Things were pretty tense for awhile, and we lived in a teeny tiny place with not a very big yard, so it was really challenging for me, Hektor (what a stupid name) and Paula and Brett. But we made the best of things, and I tried to learn how to share...that did not go well, so toys, food for us two dogs were always separate. Hek (as he came to be known) really liked me and just wanted to play, but I was having a really hard time with that for quite a long time. I got used to him a bit, and then we all moved to the city of Nanaimo.....way better for all of us! Lots of room for all of us ( I had my own room) and a fantastic big yard. I was still having a hard time "sharing" my humans with Hek, but eventually I decided to get over it, after all, he was not going anywhere and I wanted to make the best of things.

We've had lots of fun this summer; trips to the beach (on my 15th birthday was the best- even though Hektor was there) and I got to play agility a few times with my friends the Sclallywaggs. Lately though, I've been feeling a bit tired and I'm having a harder time getting around. A couple days ago, I felt quite sick to my stomach and I threw up a few times...gross, but I felt better after that, in fact I felt so great I ripped around the yard with my Jolly egg, barked at Hek and was having a super fun time; maybe a bit too much fun in hindsight. That night I didn't feel so great again and yesterday morning I couldn't get up! So embarrassed....Paula had to carry me outside....demoralizing for me!

This is where my story starts to get sad, just so you know! Paula put me on my bed outside and was on the phone a lot. I tried to get up to pee, and my legs gave out. After awhile, Paula's friend Michelle came over and they carried me on my bed and put me in the car. I was really tired and didn't argue about it. We went to see the doctor and she took some pictures of my back and stuff. They must have not been pretty because Paula was really sad and crying (she does that sometimes.) The people were really nice, and kind and then they helped me back into the car. After we got back home, I was nice and comfy on my bed on our deck. I was feeling very tired and was having a hard time breathing. Hek came out to see me, and barked at me....of course, but I was too tired to say anything to him. Suddenly there were more people there, Brett, and another human from my childhood....one of those "teenagers" I lived with, Peter, and then another nice lady named Ann. I think she was a doctor too. I remember it was such a nice afternoon, a nice breeze; I had my people with me and it was all so peaceful. They were all talking quietly and giving me lots of pats....that felt so wonderful. I think the doctor gave me some medicine, because I was really, really sleepy. All of my aches and pains kind of just drifted away...the last thing I remember was Paula putting her head on mine, and saying "you smell so good".....

Well, that's my story! I guess I have made the humans in my life a little anxious over the years, but I was a pretty good guy overall and I had a terrific life! Believe it or not, I actually made some friends and a lot of them are human too! Note to Hek, you're in charge now, little buddy and I'll be watching!

*Astro, aka OMA*

*June 22, 2002-August 31, 2017*