

# BREED COLUMNS

## NON-SPORTING GROUP



*Breed columnist Andrea Reiman with her Tibetan Terriers*

### Tibetan Terriers OF BLACK SWANS AND TIBETAN TERRIERS

*“We need the sweet pain of anticipation to tell us we are really alive.” —Albert Camus*

The Tibetan Terrier is many things, but predictable they are not. They quickly corral their formidable repertoire of behaviors to catch us off guard. The part of us that must be fully alive and able to tune in to subtle, high-frequency wavelengths, heretofore inaudible, begins to flourish after a few weeks with a TT.

A “black swan”—a random and unexpected event—is something one learns to anticipate with a TT.

Unlatching a secure fence-gate to take a self-guided tour of the neighborhood, exhuming old bones while on an off-trail hike, unabashedly showing delight or dislike for visitors, treeing a bull snake, hiding the reading glasses left on a nightstand, or secretly burying jewelry in the backyard ... these black swan events are themes shared among TT owners. And then there are the hazing stories shared by humbled participants in AKC performance venues.

Beware of columns in buildings or commercial trashcans that happen to be in the line of sight inside a conformation ring. Combine these with dim light, and on the down and back or the go-round a TT may try to caution exhibitors that there are possible sinister auto-bots about to attack. Likewise, obedience, agility, and rally titles are rich with “failure to anticipate” anecdotes. Perfect heel position will be politely modified as a TT may detect a suspicious spot on the mat that needs to be stepped around in order to avoid getting the scent of death on his feet. Why are there not bonus points for such discretion?

“Overthinking it” is a popular genre of black-swan-meets-TT stories.

Black swans can also be positive unforeseen events. There is the unexpected perfect recall that occurs against all odds in a high-temptation, potentially dangerous situation; the heart-melting gentleness shown with baby chicks, a new puppy, or a frail human. There is true wonderment when owners discover their TT gives an over-the-top, enthusiastic greeting when reunited with his breeder after many years. They may discover their veteran TTs are still adept at tricks or obedience routines they have not practiced for over a decade. The “impressive memory” of the TT

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is another category of black swan stories, as the retention of both good and bad impressions is revealed only in hindsight.

Perhaps the most unanticipated black swan emerging from shared life with a TT is the education acquired in learning their language.

We become enlightened to the signals of nuanced body language and their infamous range of vocalizations. Like learning to read and play music, or the ability to solve advanced mathematical equations, TT owners become fluent in a language not spoken with words. We become students learning to perceive and translate the hidden, interior life of our dogs. After years of living among a TT pack, every flick of the tongue, every angle of the tail carriage, glance of the eye, movement of the ear, pace of the breath, tenseness of muscle, smile of the lip... it all conveys information. Ignore it at your own peril.

Sociolinguists posit that language is a reflection of how a particular culture views the world. Given this perspective, the “linguistic” world of the TT is astonishing in its depth and breadth. Their interpersonal human and canine relationships can seem highly opinionated, somewhat emotional, maniacally genius, genuinely accommodating, rigid, playful, sensitive, terse, always humorous, melodramatic, creative, brutal, and empathetic. The TT might simply counter that his behavior is consistently rational, and would beg for a telling of his own experience with humans and their black swan events.

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