

## Don't You Dare Steal My Joy

By Connie Cleveland

On the occasion of my tenth anniversary, my husband asked me how I wanted to celebrate. I asked that we take a very dear friend, my adopted grandmother and one of the greatest of all the great southern ladies, out to dinner with us.

At dinner, my husband, Brian, presented me with a diamond ring. It was gorgeous and I was speechless, but even as I thanked him, I worried about the expense and extravagance of such a gift. As if he knew that the next line belonged to my grandmother, my husband excused himself from the table. He was barely out of sight when she reached across the table and grabbed me by the shoulder, "I know what you're thinking, I know you think he couldn't afford it and it's too extravagant. I don't care if he had to put a second mortgage on the house to buy it, don't you steal his joy! It's beautiful. Accept it as the token of his love that it is and say nothing about how he shouldn't have bought it for you." Then she repeated, "Don't you dare steal his joy!"

That was the end of the conversation. She sat back in her seat, smiled at my returning husband, and we had a lovely dinner. I took her advice and put my reservations out of my mind. The ring has never come off my finger, but most importantly, I learned a wonderfully important lesson, never to steal another man's joy.

Are you a joy stealer?

"You know if my dog hadn't gone down on the sit, I would have won the class," said, unfeelingly, to the winner.

"I sure didn't think your dog worked that high a score."

"I can't believe you placed. I thought Jane Oneup and her dog would beat you."

"I thought I had that class won! My dog had a great performance." Said to the winner.

"Isn't that judge an idiot? I can't believe the dog he put up!" Said to the winner.

"Boy, aren't you glad Mrs. Winallthetime wasn't here today or you might not have won."

"You passed that Master test because the water blind was so easy."

"That was the stupidest set of water marks I've ever seen. No trail should end so easily." Said to the winner.

Do you discourage or encourage fellow competitors? Do you tell them their goals are too lofty and their dreams too big? Are you trying to be helpful or trying to keep them from accomplishing something that you never had the ability or perseverance to do yourself? It is equally as harmful to steal joy by destroying the dream.

"No Basset Hound gets UD's." said to the owner of Basset in Utility class.

"I've never seen a Rottweiler that could do fronts and finishes." Said to the owner of the Rottweiler practicing fronts and finishes.

"Do you have any idea how hard it is to get a UD and a Master Hunter? Do you know how few people have ever done it?" Said to the first time dog owner setting out to do both.

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When FC AFC OTCh Law Abiding Ezra had both his field championship and 65 OTCH points including all the necessary first places, someone had the guts to come up to me, his owner, trainer and handler and say, "No dog will ever be a field champion and obedience champion." My jaw drops when I think about it. Isn't it unfortunate that I remember this attempt at stealing my joy much more than I remember all the cars and letters and congratulations I received when those last 35 points were earned?

If you are willing to destroy someone's dream, perhaps you don't realize that it is the JOY of pursuing the dream that keeps the dreamer motivated not just reaching the accomplishment.

My husband and I travel and compete together. I remember an event, early in our relationship when I watched his Doberman fail articles. "Darn it," I said, as he came out of the ring. "She didn't even try to find the right one!"

"Oh," he replied, "but weren't her heeling and signals wonderful?"

Unknowingly, I had almost stolen his joy. He was celebrating the improvement on the exercise that had been giving him trouble, and I was focused on the failure. Since that experience, Brian and I have learned that the best response to a questionable performance, "What did you think?" That way, if the handler is excited about some aspect of the performance, you can share that excitement. If the handler is disappointed in another aspect, you can share the disappointment. You are safely removed from being a joy stealer.

I hope you have a lot of dreams and goals for your dogs in the coming year. Undoubtedly there will be moments of disappointments as you venture through the landmines of injury, failures and other setbacks. Remember that the joy of the journey is worth the difficulties along the way and don't let anyone steal that joy. Guard it well and at the end of the road you can own it and revel in it with all the other memories of the trip.