

THE DOG WHO CHANGED MY LIFE

A tribute to BROK
ADM CGC CD AAD JD NJC-V NAC-V NGC-V
12/4/94-15/12/04

by Janene Branc



In March 2004, I was reading "Working Dogs", a compilation of stories from around Australia, compiled by Angela Goode. I was astounded by the antics of an amazing yellow kelpie called "Broc", owned and loved by Mr. Geoffrey Blight of Narrogin, Western Australia. By the time I finished reading the book, I knew my next dog would be coming soon, and that his name would be "BROK".....



Brok aged 8 weeks, June 1994.
Photo by Ian Cogdon

One Saturday afternoon in June 1994, I saw him in the pet shop window, along with his litter-mates, the most adorable Cattle dog puppies. I picked up each puppy in turn, saving him until last. He was the only pup to look into my eyes and wag its little tale. He was mine and I was his. I named him Brok and brought him home. That's how our life together started.

He enjoyed running and playing in the back yard, and then would flop down to sleep for 10 minutes, then he was up and off again. He thought our cat was quite amusing, but she knew all about dogs, and she quickly put him in his place. He revered her always, even when he was more than twice her size!

Brok's training began when he was 4 months old at the local dog-training club, where we met others who were to become good friends to us both. At five months old, we started our agility training, just for fun. Little did we know where these innocent ventures would take us!

Obedience

It took us a while for Brok to gain his CD title, we both learned a lot about each other along the way, and I had started learning and understanding more about canine behaviour, positive reinforcement, benevolent leadership and operant conditioning.

Brok received his Canine Good Citizen award by the Delta Society in early 1998, and our relationship changed dynamically because of this course. I decided that one-day I would do the Delta Instructors course, so that I might help others realise their dogs' potential. I completed the Certificate IV with Delta in 2002.

It took a total of four years to gain our CD title together from our first trial. Brok would generally find something interesting to do during the heel free section, like sticking his head down a hole, or inspecting a blade of grass that was larger than all the rest, or go pee on a tree just outside the ring ropes. He was notorious, and we always wondered what he would get up to during the trial. On one occasion, he had actually done well through all sections, and we were up to the recall. I was rather excited, as he was always 100% at this exercise. So what does my boy decide to do? When I left him, he ducked outside the ring ropes, has a roll in some wildflowers growing there, grabs a mouthful of them and returns to his sit position. So I then call him to come, and he takes off towards me like a rocket, and makes no effort to slow down for the sit in front. I have to duck down, and he soars over me, runs a few more metres, then returns to the heel position. The judge, myself and others watching, were cracked up totally. The judge, Mrs. Betty O'Connor, scored us 1 point only, for entertainment value!! We received a round of applause from the spectators!

His novice obedience passes were:

1. Eastern Suburbs DTC, 29/9/96, 3rd Place with 175 points;
2. Metropolitan Mid Week, 29/10/97, 3rd Place with 174 points;
3. Sutherland DTC, 16/5/99, 2nd Place with 170 points.

I was very proud of Brok, as each time we qualified, we placed, and received lovely ribbons and trophies. It just goes to show that persistence and patience does pay off!

After a long break from the obedience scene, in October 2002 we started training and trialing in Open. We both thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, and he loved to heel beautifully off lead. His favourite exercise was retrieve over jump. We did not get to do many trials, as I had to retire Brok due to health problems in late 2003, he was nine and a half years old after all, and had nothing to prove to me anyway. He had shown me his ability and willingness to perform in Open just by being there! He was a joy to train and work with!

continued on page 21



Fun Stuff
During this time, Brok and I were having lots of fun learning and performing tricks. He would consistently take out places at the dog training club Christmas fun day, in both the best trick category and the slalom (rally o) event. He won first place in the best trick competition at the Sydney Annual Pet Show on 4/8/96 for his singing! Wherever there was a best trick or best singing dog competition, Brok would generally win or place in both categories. He also performed his tricks to raise money for dogs less fortunate than himself, and was known locally as "Busker Brok".

Left: "Busker Brok"
Photo by Ian Cogdon

Brok loved to slide down slippery dips, and there was a big slippery dip at a nearby park. He would climb the wooden fort tower all the way to the top by himself, and then slide down, with a huge grin on his face! At a Coogee festival one day, Brok and I went on the giant slide together, we each had a ticket, – and it was wonderful! Everyone stopped to watch the dog on the giant slide!

For his third birthday (to celebrate his 21st!), I held a canine party at Centennial park, for 21 of his canine friends to attend. We had some agility games, and plenty of party food for both canines and people! The dogs particularly enjoyed the liver birthday cake! Some of the dogs thought that a swim in the canal was the best part of the day! We even took a photo of all the dogs assembled; they were all so good. And what party is complete unless there are "gate crashers"? So a few more dogs and their people joined in the celebrations. Back then, we all knew everyone, so it was no big deal. All the (invited) dogs took home a doggy bag of goodies.

Television and Film:

Brok made his national Television debut on 28/8/96, as part of the Canine Fun Sports Demonstration team on the Midday Show with Kerry Anne. Brok stole the show, by being both the best performer on the day, and also being the only dog who tried to eat the small camera inside the tunnel!

On 1st December 1997, we did auditions for Red Faces, however, Brok was a bit overwhelmed by it all, and did not sing his best for our audition, although he started singing along to others who were auditioning, to the amusement of all concerned! The organisers wanted us to join forces with the other act, but Brok just wanted to eat their costumes!

Brok appeared on TV a few more times: on Totally Wild with Canine Fun Sports; on the Channel 10 news with Agility Dog Association Australia at the Sydney pet expo in 2000; on Burke's Backyard in an agility feature (2001); and his most monumental appearance on the Footy Show, where he won the competition to be Bluey, the NRL Mascot in May 2002!

His film career got off to an interesting start – his first audition was for "the Man who sued God" in November 2000. Although he was short-listed for the role, sadly, it was not to be. His first role was for a short film called "Black Talk" in 2001, starring the late Russell Page. This film was part of the Sydney Film Festival in 2002, and aired on SBS on December 14, 2003. His second film, the story of Anna Yen called "Chinese Takeaway", in which he makes a "cameo appearance", was part of the 3rd Sydney Asia Pacific Film Festival 2002, and premiered on Sunday 11th August 2002 at the Dendy in Martin Place, Sydney. It was subsequently aired on SBS Friday 20th June 2003. He also did some still photography work for various advertising campaigns.

Agility:

Brok and I started Agility just for fun back in 1994, and he was entered in his first fun event at six months of age, being the first and youngest dog to compete at the Inaugural Dog Sports Australia Competition. Being a puppy, all equipment was as low as could be, and he had such enthusiasm! From 1995 up to 2000, we were in many fun events with Canine Fun Sports, including fetes, fun competitions, TV appearances, and the Sydney Pet Expo's of 1998 & 1999! Brok's first "official" agility competition was at Easter in 1997, at the Inaugural ADAA Nationals, held in the main arena at the Sydney Royal Easter Show, Moore Park, on Farm Sunday. You can imagine we were both very excited, our first competition in front of hundreds, maybe thousands, of people, all barracking for the dog in the ring, cheering when they went clear, a sigh of disappointment when they didn't. Brok just took it all in his stride, but the adrenalin rush I experienced was amazing! There were 27 individual dog/handler teams competing, and seven club teams, each comprising three-dog/handler teams. All of them were seasoned competitors, having from 1 year up to more than three years competitive experience. Brok and I were the new kids on the block, and overall we did very well! In the individual, Brok placed 11th overall, and in the teams, we came 4th! We continued to enjoy ADAA competitions for many years, and I completed my ADAA judges training in 2002. We were part of their Sydney Pet Expo team in 2000 and 2001.

Now that I had the competition bug, I entered Brok in trials affiliated with the Royal NSW Canine Council. I entered him in four Novice Agility trials, just to see how we would go. Brok was amazing – he received three qualifying cards at his first three events, gaining his Agility Dog title. So I contacted the fourth event organiser, asking if they could put us up into Open category, which they kindly did. Brok gained his first open pass at that event! Everyone was sitting up and taking notice of this team – we were quite dynamic! We were encouraged to enter the

continued on page 22

NSW Agility Dog of the Year competition, which meant we had to travel all over NSW to compete in the various qualifying rounds. And so our journeys took us North, to Newcastle, Cessnock, Central Coast, Coffs Harbour, Grafton, Armidale & Tamworth, south to Wollongong, Nowra, Wagga and Albury, and west to Orange, as well as all the local events. 1998 was a big year – Brok qualified for the Finals, ranked 11th in the state. Apart from 1999, Brok qualified and competed in the ADY finals every year, his last one was in 2002. During this time, he went on to gain his ADX, ADM and JD titles. He gained three passes towards his JDJ, we needed 5 to gain the title, but I retired Brok in 2003 due to health problems.

In 2002, a new agility organisation called ADAC started in Sydney, and as Brok was now 8 years old, I could enter him in Veterans class. Well, Brok won or placed in every single event he was entered in at every competition that year, gaining his Veterans titles in Agility, Jumping and Gamblers, and was awarded the NSW Veteran Dog of the Year runner up Trophy for 2002! Such an amazing dog!

Brok retired from agility in 2003, as he had been diagnosed with a spinal disorder, and his hips were not the best. Old age was catching up with his framework, but his mind and spirit were still agile! Over the years he was awarded many ribbons and trophies, and they have pride of place in my home. Any food prizes he won were promptly delivered to our local Animal Welfare League branch, to assist those dogs less fortunate. Some of the lovely prizes he won were grooming tools, dog wash, many stainless steel dog bowls, lovely ceramic dog bowls, a delicate crystal dish, and two fantastic dog beds, which he won on the same day, as well as many collars, leads, toys and useful housewares. We never had to buy anything!

I have so many wonderful memories of our agility competitions; there are four separate events that are outstanding from all the rest. One is the day at Hawkesbury where he placed 1st in both Masters and Open agility consecutively, winning the two lovely dog beds. Another is the day Le Hammer ran Brok for me (I was sidelined with injury). They blitzed the course together, resulting in Brok beating both of Le's own dogs, (he placed third!); and the day in November 1998 at the Spring Fair, where Brok gained his 3rd qualifying pass towards his Master title by

one hundredth of a second under course time! The most memorable of all I would like to share with you now.

It was February 28th 1998, and Brok & I had made our first journey to Wagga Wagga to compete in the ADY heat being held at Kyeamba. It was very hot. I walked the Open course, carefully

planning my position and directives to give to Brok to give him the best opportunity to succeed. It was a lovely course, with just enough challenges to create a problem if the dog/handler team were not up to the standard. Soon it was our turn to compete. I readied Brok about a metre before the start – this gave him optimum speed and propulsion to clear the first jump! Well, he took off like a rocket. I very quickly realised that there was no way I was going to get into any of the positions I had worked out - he was already about 5 metres ahead of me! I kept on calling out the commands and directions I wanted him to take, using whatever body language I could, while getting myself in the centre of the course, hoping to "catch up" with him eventually! He was in the far left corner of the course, and there was a pin wheel configuration with a crossing jump that would be the wrong one to take. Brok responded to all my commands, and I have to say, it was as if he knew exactly what to do, and did not take the wrong course option, which would have meant a disqualification. We finally met up again mid course for a few obstacles, but he was on fire! He completed the home stretch, and the judge called out "Clear Round"! I was ecstatic! Brok meanwhile, was still running – past the spectators watching; past the amenities block, and out into the backfield, doing his very own lap of honour! I checked

the scoreboard to see if we had made the course time – and we had! (45.78 seconds).

This was Brok's qualifying round for his Agility Dog Excellent title! I was screaming with elation, and Brok came racing back to me so I could give him lots of cuddles and praise for his wonderful achievement! He did the course virtually by himself, and certainly deserved his title. The ribbon we received from Kyeamba has pride of place on the wall. I will never forget that day, and tears of joy flow from this recollection. Thank you Brok!

Dancing

Brok started dancing in 2001, while we were attending the APDT Annual Conference with Jean Donaldson & Donna Duford. I had

continued on page 23



"The Grand Finale"
Brok performs one last time 28/11/04.
Photo by Claudia Ford.

never heard of Canine Musical Freestyle or Heelwork to Music, as it is correctly known, but we gave it a try anyway. Brok as usual, caught on very fast, and he thoroughly enjoyed himself! We did our first ever public dance routine to raise money at the local Animal Welfare branch fund raising event in Randwick, and soon started to dance in fun events. We were then asked to be part of the Camarna Dancing Dogs Demonstration Team for the 2002 Sydney Pet Expo, and so we danced in front of hundreds of people, enjoying every moment of it all! In early 2004, the RNSW Canine Council held its Inaugural Dancing with Dogs Competition, and although I had retired Brok from "Public Life", we were encouraged to enter. As they did not have a veteran's category, I had to enter him in Advanced, and to my utter astonishment, he was placed 3rd! On 28th November 2004, I brought Brok out of retirement to dance one last time, to again help raise money for animal welfare at Randwick Dog Rescue. Brok danced and sang his heart and soul for everyone, with the biggest grin on his face. He was captured on video, and also photographed by amazed onlookers, at what an 'old' dog was capable of. This was to be the last thing we ever did together.

The end of an Era

Brok started to have brief coughing fits, and seemed to be lethargic, yet was always willing to go for a short stroll around the park. I took him to the vet for a check up, and the prognosis was not good. Through blood tests, x-rays and ultrasound's, a tumour was located in the wall of his heart, with many secondary tumours throughout his lungs and chest cavity. I asked that they stabilised Brok so I could bring him home. I did not think he would even make the journey. We spent the

BROK: 12/04/1994-15/12/2004 THE DOG WHO CHANGED MY LIFE

© Janene Branc 2005, Sydney, Australia.

“Writing this has brought on much sadness and despair at my loss, I miss him so very much, words cannot explain it.

At the same time, so much joy in the memories of his achievements.

I am so lucky to have had
Brok in my life.
I wish he was still here.”



next 5 days together, during which time he improved considerably. We even went for a short stroll out the front! I camped downstairs with him, as he could not get up the stairs any more. I was loath to be away from him for very long – I put all my energy into him, keeping him comfortable and just being. But then he deteriorated very quickly.

My beautiful blue boy, Brok, passed away on 15th December, after a brief yet brave battle with cancer. He went peacefully and with dignity, cradled in my arms. Oceans of tears flow.

As you can understand from reading this brief story, Brok is the dog who changed my life. Through him, I met people, went to places and experienced events I never would have done otherwise. I would not be the person I am now if Brok had not come into my life. I can honestly say that everything I learnt for life, I learnt from my dog Brok. If not for him, I would not have become a dog trainer – Dogology™ would not have come into existence, if not for Brok. His legacy continues to enhance dogs' lives and improve the human/canine bond of others.

Brok touched many lives, and endeared himself to all that knew him. We will all have our own special memories of him and his antics. He was a one in a million dog, and I am so pleased he came into my life. I miss him and love him with every fibre of my being.

***"They lived and laughed and loved and left..."
-James Joyce***