



The Story of Zima

by Bruce Butcher

I met Zima when he was just a puppy. Already I could see this Australian Shepherd was very intelligent, perhaps too intelligent to live well with humans. Zima lived with Brian, a lieutenant with an area fire department and Jayne, a medical office manager, and their cat, Samson. We began training with Zima right away so he could learn to direct his energy in a manner functional to his human family. Brian, Jayne and Zima proved to be very good students; however, Zima was using his intelligence to think circles around his people. He always seemed to be trying to get a step ahead of his people. When the dog begins training the humans, it usually indicates trouble for the human partners until they are able to think and act at the dog's speed.

"Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking. Live in silence." - Rumi

Brian and Jayne saw the potential for trouble and dedicated themselves to training. During the first few months of puppyhood, I held individual dog training sessions with Zima and his people at their home. As summer came around I saw Zima in group dog classes; his people were coming up to speed quite nicely by that point. Unfortunately, their cat, Samson, had died of a tumor in his sinus area. What occurred next would be a defining moment in my life and in my work.

One day, as I was driving home from a Yoga teaching engagement a couple hours away, I began communicating with a friend's dogs. I do not recommend communicating while driving, but it was a quiet highway and an excellent opportunity for me to expand my awareness. I was happily driving down the highway, talking with the two dogs, Jack and Sadie, about their likes, dislikes and needs when a voice came in saying, "Hey... Hey... Hey!" I really didn't want to be interrupted, and I didn't want to show disrespect to Sadie and Jack by letting this uninvited voice distract the conversation, but the voice wouldn't go away. It became clear that the only way to continue was to ask Sadie and Jack if they wouldn't mind a pause so I could find out who or what needed to break in and why. The conversation that followed seemed, at the time, like nonsense. Once I put Jack and Sadie "on hold," the following exchange took place.

Hello, who is this? **Zima.**

What can I do for you? **I know my job.**

You know your job? **Yep! I know my job.**

OK, what is your job Zima? **My job is to take care of the cat.**
Your job is to take care of the cat. Yup.
Is there anything else you want me to know? **Nope, my job is to take care of the cat.**
Is that all? **Yep, that's all.**
O.K., Zima thanks for letting me know. We'll talk again sometime. **Ok, bye.**
Good-bye, Zima.

None of this message made sense to me -- the cat is dead. Nevertheless, I respected Zima's need to share his excitement and returned to my conversation with Sadie and Jack.

That evening I thought how was I going to explain that their dog talked with me telepathically? Did I really have to go so far out on a limb for this seemingly nonsensical message from their dog? Yes, I did.

I arrived at our next dog class very early to try and calm my nervousness about the conversation that I needed to have with them. I took a deep breath and began. "Something kind of weird happened on my drive home Tuesday," I told them. I explained how I was kind of "meditating" and thought I heard a voice break in that said it was Zima. This voice, Zima, said he had something he wanted me to know. I observed Brian and Jayne as I built up to the most difficult part -- how to tell them their dog's job is to "take care of the cat" -- the dead cat. I continued by disclaiming, "I don't know what this means because I know the situation, but..." I was absolutely churning inside as I told them "Zima knows his job. ... It is to take care of the cat." I was about to come totally unglued -- I'd just put it all on the line, but the two of them cracked wide smiles, looked at each other, then looked back toward me. One of them said, "Do you want to tell him or should I?" Confusion flashed through my brain as they smiled even more broadly now. "That's a very interesting message, Bruce. Because we just got a kitten last week ... and a couple of days ago we set down with Zima and told him his job is to do just that, to take care of the cat!"