

# LIVING WITH MY PUMI

by TAMMY HALL

**I**t's a typical day. The sun is still asleep, but my body says it's time to rise. As soon as I realize I'm awake, I feel three sets of Pumi eyes fixed on me, waiting for my next movement as permission to spring into action. Even though I definitely would rather sleep, I'm busted. They know I'm awake.

This is going to be an exciting day. As soon as I begin to open my eyes, all three dogs leap off the bed, charging down the hallway. Running full speed ahead, they bank their turns on the throw rugs, using them as a launch point as the rugs slide on the wood floor. In a wild frenzy, they race to the back door, expressing their impatience in finding it closed. A chorus erupts. "Open the door, already!" My hand grasps the door knob. With some reluctance, they fall silent because that's the only way the door will open. Once the door opens and I say the magic word, all hell breaks loose. This is how every day begins.

If I'm lucky, after the initial display of enthusiasm subsides, I crawl back into bed, for a few more moments of relaxation. This, of course, doesn't last long. Before I know it, I feel pressure on my chest and a furry toy-stuffed Pumi-face staring at me. There is no such thing as a snooze button for a Pumi who thinks it's time for breakfast.

Living with a Pumi is a sure guarantee of plenty of exuberance. Plenty of demanding your attention. Plenty of noise. Plenty of fun. They are affectionate, loving, and loyal. They love their people. They love their pack.

My little busy-bodies definitely keep me on my toes. When we are in the house, each finds a favorite place to chill until they know I'm headed for the door. Whether or not they hear my car keys or see me sit down to put on my shoes, I don't quite know. But that's all it takes for them to turn on and spring



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into action. Then the chase is on to be the first to the door and the first out the door.

The play is rough among them... gripping one another's hocks, barking and charging, leaping and lunging. Quick swift movements. Instant acceleration, turning on a dime. It's the Pumi herding style. Nothing in this world is more fun for them than a game of "chase me to get the toy," even if the toy is a stick or leaf snatched from the ground.

Although Pumi are herding dogs, they are not Border Collies. Many of my friends have Border Collies. Everyone knows how a Border Collie loves to work. They obsess about work and will work for anyone. A Border Collie will happily play with whoever is willing to throw a ball. If a stranger picks up a ball and expects one of my Pumi to chase it, they will get a look that says "who are you and why are you throwing my ball?" My Pumi live to work and play, but only with me. And if the game is over and the ball is put away, they find their own special place to chill until it's time to spring into action again. I like that.

Pumi are not social with people they don't know. My Pumis have their favorite people, the ones they know and quickly recognize. These are people they greet with a lively chorus of barks, growly-type noises, and everything in between, leaping and jumping with excitement. All others are met with a bit of reservation, until they know these are people they can trust. It may happen in an instant or over a long period of time after several meetings.

The one thing people say when they meet my Pumi for the first time is "I just love their ears!" Once the words leave their lips, of course, my dog's ears start twitching back and forth. The second most common comment I hear is "They look like stuffed animals!" I assure them, they are not stuffed animals. Pumi are great dogs, but definitely not for everyone.

A Pumi is like the new kid in school. The new kid will watch and listen before they decide to interact with the people around them. They want to feel comfortable with the situation and the people first. Pumi are much the same.

Each of my three Pumi has their own distinctive personality. Zu-Zu is 6





years old. She is the most outgoing of the three when it comes to unfamiliar people. However, she is also the most reserved with unfamiliar dogs. She's my hall monitor. She keeps order and makes sure everyone obeys the rules. Every house needs one.

Pumi number two is Petey. He's 2 ½ and the first to initiate play within the pack and likes interacting with unfamiliar dogs. But, is the most reserved with people he doesn't know.

My youngest, Nagi, is not yet two years old. She pretty much follows what the rest of the pack does. If they approach someone or something, she does the same. If they bark, she does too. She is the most vocal and makes the oddest noises, a combination of a growl, a howl, and a bark. It's easy to over-face her, but she is young and still learning about her world. Nagi takes a good deal of time to size things up. In most cases, she settles nicely and adjusts well to her environment, once she realizes it's ok. She is very determined if it's something she wants.

My Pumi are the absolute best hiking companions. They always stay close and quickly alert me if there is something they think I should be made aware of. Most times it's a person in the distance or something on the horizon that doesn't look quite right. They are very aware of their surroundings. I have no doubt that if a real threat were out there, they would protect me.

Pumi are amazingly quick to learn and love to work. All of the focus, athleticism, and intensity that make them such a good herding dog also make them excel at performance sports. I have learned to be very thoughtful and careful with my training. If my dogs aren't giving me what I think they should, I take a step back. I've likely rewarded something different than I thought or was unclear about my expectations. When I train, I get further faster by using positive reinforcement and shaping behaviors. I reward for a good effort, even if it's not exactly what I'm looking for. I jackpot for things that are truly spectacular. If they are not

engaged the way I want or decide not to do what I ask, I take a time out and regroup. Then, I bring them out later to try again.

It is thrilling to see my dogs thrive and excel in activities we have trained, whether it be offering behaviors and training tricks, teaching them to stack and gait for the breed ring, or running in the agility ring. Just by watching them, you can tell how much they love what they are doing. And I love that we are doing it together. This is my biggest reward.

When I stepped to the start line for the first time with Zu, not many people knew what a Pumi was let alone seen one run in agility. Since then, we have been doing our best to show just how good a Pumi can be. Five years later, we still turn heads when we run. Now, when I step to the start line with my young dog, Petey, I know people are watching.

I would like to think because of us, and the other awesome agility Pumis out there, interest in the breed is growing. A feel a small victory every time I hear of someone who gets their very first Pumi with the idea of going into the agility ring. I smile and hope that maybe Zu and I may have had a small part in making that decision.

But at the end of the day, it's all about the dog you live with.

When our work day comes to a close, we pack our three Pumis in the van and head for home. All are sleeping in a heap until we make the turn up the gravel road to our house. In an instant, all three heads pop up and the singing begins. First in yowls and yodels, then as we get closer to the house, the more comparatively softer sounds break way for the loud barking...almost in harmony. These guys will never be able to sneak up on anyone.

After one-on-one play time in the backyard and dinner, it's time to cuddle in front of the television. One Pumi is at my feet, one is on my lap, and the third is lying on top of the one on my lap. There is never enough of me to go around.

We will go to bed tonight and I will be completely surrounded by my three Pumis in a bed that will always be too small. One under the covers. One at the foot of the bed. And the third one curled up next to me. This must be what heaven is like.

Tomorrow we will get up and it will all start over again. And tomorrow will just as exciting as today. My Pumis will see to that! ■

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Tammy and Zu-Zu were the AKC Agility Invitational Champions for the 16-inch jump height class in 2013 and 2014. Petey and Tammy were finalists at the 2015 AKC Agility Invitational, having the top cumulative score of the 16 inch class going into the final round of competition. Petey won all four preliminary rounds, with Zu-Zu finishing in second place behind Petey in two rounds. Zu-Zu was a 2012 Challenger's Round competitor and a 2013 Finalist at the AKC National Agility Championship. Tammy and her Pumis live in Shelton, Washington and share their home with Birdie, a 14 year old English Cocker Spaniel.*

