

A really mini Documentary

by Fiona Geiser

How did humans and wolves meet up? Whereas humans descended from the primates in East Africa, the first canids, *Canis ferrox*, appeared in the fossil record in North America about 6 million years ago. Humans and canids probably first encountered each other about 1.75 million years ago after *Canis etruscus* crossed the Beringian land bridge that connected North America to Asia. The skeletal remains of our ancestor, *Homo erectus*, and of the Etruscan wolf have been found at the archaeological site of Dmanisi in Georgia. Scientists speculate that wolves may have first followed humans as scavengers of the left-over animal carcasses - just as crows follow wolves today. The wolves may have helped early humans, though, by warning off other predators.

Which brings me to the early 1950's in Bath, Ohio where I lived on a farm with my Irish setter, Noreen, who you can see in this picture with my sister, Nancy. Noreen was the daughter of our beloved Peg O'My Heart, and both were my constant companions as a child. I currently live with two of Noreen's descendants who consider their primary job to warn off any other animal from our property. So, although it might seem that things have really not changed that much between the two species over the millennia, humans know otherwise. We are absolutely convinced that our dogs love us and that they are pretty smart. But, even the most avid dog lover would call it a stretch to say that our dog is a genius. So, you can imagine my surprise when I saw the title of Brian Hare's book, "The Genius of Dogs."¹ I read the book cover to cover and then checked out Dr. Hare's credentials to make such a claim.² Dr. Hare concludes that the genius of dogs is their ability to comprehend visual gestures and to learn new words. Dogs are also remarkable in their ability to "talk through vocalizations and visual signs, to copy other's actions, and to recruit help." Dogs are motivated to cooperate with humans and they are able to understand human communication. So, that explains why I was able to make a video with my puppy that I call: "A really mini Documentary." The video is a persuasive speech prepared as an assignment for an online public speaking course at Coursera.org. If you get a chance to watch the video on You Tube, I would love to know if my puppy and I were able to persuade you.

- (1) Brian Hare and Vanesa Woods. **The Genius of Dogs. How Dogs are Smarter than you Think.** Penguin Group, 2013, 367 p.
- (2) Virginia Morell. **Animal Wise. The Thoughts and Emotions of our Fellow Creatures.** Crown Publisher, 2013, 291 p.
- (3) **A really mini Documentary** by Fiona and William, August 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxGYODsAcJM>



Nancy & Fiona with Noreen
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