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@Leisure

DOGS ON SITE

My work assistants come in the form of large, furry and loving Belgian Shepherd dogs. My first dog was employed in 1987, and to this day I have remained fortunate to have been (mostly) allowed to let my enthusiastic companions accompany me to work, and they have made my career so much more pleasant.

My current canine colleague is Buckaroo, known as “Buc”. He and I have been working in the Silo Precinct at the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town for years. Buc is a five year old Belgian Shepherd Groenendal, rescued from the SPCA. There are four types of Belgian Shepherd, a Groenendal, Tervuren, Malinois and a Laekenois. Belgian Shepherds are highly intelligent work dogs. They tend to be one man dogs, yet are great family dogs. They don’t like being left alone and love being where the action is.

Fortunately my work as a surveyor has allowed me to take my dogs to work with me. In the early days of my company

Edgeworks Surveys, most of my work took place on farms, in townships, or on roads. Having a dog with me was never a problem. When I started working on construction sites, the dogs became a safety concern. It was soon realised that they didn’t pose a safety risk and were good for the people around them, the dogs were made welcome.

Although Buc looks like a black bear, he welcomes a pat and a cuddle. He makes friends easily and is loved by our fellow workers. The ground work for his celebrity status was done by a few of my other fluffy companions.

In my teens, I was given my first Belgian Shepherd called Shinnon. She was a Groenendal, who loved to participate in ball games, joining a number of school rugby games, and puncturing a few balls on the beach. Her lovely nature made a “Belgie” the first choice for our family.

Taura was my first working dog. She was a Tervuren. I bought her as a pup in 1987. She loved hunting and would

I BECAME KNOWN AS “THE GUY WITH THE DOG”

CLIENTS WOULD PHONE AND ASK IF TESS AND I WOULD COME AND SURVEY.



spend her day digging for moles or chasing field mice. Mo, my mother's spaniel, was Taura's best friend. Occasionally Mo would join us and the two of them would deploy a team effort to catch moles. I didn't ever see them catch one, but they enjoyed themselves trying.

Tess was given to me at the age of one year in 1997. She was a grey Tervuren and a very pretty girl. She had been given to an old lady by her granddaughter, the breeder. Granny couldn't handle this ball of energy and asked the vet to find her a new home. Tess's arrival in my life wasn't well timed, as she was very naughty compared to Taura. But when Taura died a year later, I was very grateful to have Tess. She was a constant companion and highly intelligent. She loved chasing anything that moved, particularly cats. She got me in a lot of trouble and also never tired of chasing cars. Winning people's hearts and socialising with other dogs was easy for Tess. But if any dog gave her too much attitude, she'd fight. Fortunately, there weren't any serious fights or injuries.

At this time I was working on the construction of Grand West Casino, with Tess following me around. Unsuspecting workers would be offered sticks to throw or Tess would chase flies in puddles, until my work was done. If I climbed up a ladder to another level, she'd howl at the bottom for

me to climb down and carry her up to join us, much to the amusement of everyone. As the building grew, the ladders were replaced by scaffolding staircases. I wasn't going to carry her. Tess took a long time to build up enough courage, but when she did, she followed me up three floors of steps, very pleased with herself, and thereafter stairs were no longer a problem.

Lupie arrived in 2003. He was a Groenendael. He was four years old and his owner didn't want him anymore. The timing wasn't good as I was happy with Tess and didn't want another dog, but it was very difficult not to like Lupie. His name was Lupa, meaning wolf. He'd been kept in a very small garden and walked in circles constantly, and through this weird behaviour, he became Lupie. He was the scruffiest Belgian Shepherd I'd ever seen. The white of his skin was visible and he was always itchy. He was hyperactive and didn't want to be left out of anything. He had the deepest growl I've ever heard, but was one of the nicest, gentlest dogs I've ever met. He didn't like conflict and avoided dogs with aggressive attitudes.

When I got him, I was involved in the construction of the Cape Gate Shopping Centre, and Lupie had to fit in. He'd never experienced so much freedom and never tired of

offering people sticks to throw for him. Anyone resting on a shovel or broom had a stick placed on their boot. He made many friends and became very popular. Unfortunately Lupie suffered from the occasional fit and prior to a fit coming on he'd find me so I would be there for him. With age and better nutrition the fits stopped.

After many months of hard work on the Cape Town Stadium construction, Tess and Lupie were kicked off site because they were distracting the work force. This posed quite a problem for me, because I was working very long hours. Every morning the dogs would try and force their way into the garage and bakkie, in order to come to work. I missed them terribly. After three months I started bringing them to the stadium again. I tried to keep them at my office, but they were forever going on site and offering people sticks or just following me or my assistants. Fortunately, the project director loved dogs and softened the ban. Their presence certainly alleviated the stressfulness of the job. Sadly, Tess developed a tumour during the project and had to be put down, at the age of twelve. People still ask about her.

I was asked to attend a site handover meeting in Brackenfell. Consultants and contractors squashed into a container and at the end of the meeting the project manager

asked if my dog would join us for a site inspection. This was the first time that my dog had been officially invited on site. I collected Lupie from my vehicle and put his safety jacket on. To my surprise the labour force on site recognised Lupie from the stadium and passing vehicles hooted and people waved. No one had noticed me when I arrived, by contrast my dog received a celebrity welcome. It left me with a big lump in my throat.

A friend who knows of my love for Belgian Shepherds told me that the SPCA had two stray Groenendael youngsters, possibly a brother and sister, for re-homing. Lupie was getting on and needed an apprentice to take over from him. I was invited to interact with the two dogs in the SPCA's exercise yard. The female was more preoccupied with getting the male to play with her, to the point where he had had enough and came and snuggled up to me. He made my choice for me. With Lupie's approval, he joined our team. As to his name; since he had a floppy ear I started calling him "Buck-ore", then "Buckaroo" was decided on, but it is as "Buc" that he has become known by all.

Buc and I share a wonderful partnership – I manage his media career whilst he guards my equipment and keeps me sane in a stressful work environment.

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