

# Eric Melvin & Angelyne the Amazing Deaf Cattle Dog

By Eric Melvin



## When I Got My Dog.....

*I asked for strength that I might raise her perfectly,  
I was given weakness that I might feed her more treats,  
I asked for good health that I might rest easy,  
I was given a "special needs" dog that I might know nurturing,  
I asked for an obedient dog that I might feel proud,  
I was given stubbornness that I might feel humble,  
I asked for compliance that I might feel masterful,  
I was given a clown that I might laugh,  
I asked for a companion that I might not feel lonely,  
I was given a best friend that I would feel loved,  
I got nothing I asked for,  
But everything I need.*

- Author Unknown

I found that poem online. The first time I read it I felt as if it could have been written about my life with Angelyne. I read it at many of our presentations.

Angelyne "the Amazing" Deaf Cattle Dog was born in Fort Collins in a litter of six puppies on October 31, 2005. She was five weeks old when I first saw her. I grew up with Australian Cattle Dogs (ACD) and my family's dogs had two litters of puppies during my high school years. I was very excited to see ACD puppies again. All six puppies in Angelyne's litter came to greet me, but when Angelyne made her way to me she did something the other puppies didn't do. She tapped my knee with her nose. I couldn't keep my eyes off Angelyne.

After watching and playing with her for awhile I made up my mind that she was the one I wanted to bring home. The way Angelyne greeted me combined with her unique color and mannerisms struck me as very exceptional. I brought Angelyne home after she started eating hard food three weeks later. The first day of our life together began on December 7, 2005. I had no idea that Angelyne was born bi-laterally deaf when I brought her home.

Angelyne was 12 weeks old when we started puppy obedience class. In addition to her being my companion, I was considering a future with her in agility or flyball. Puppy obedience not only gave us a solid base of training but it would help create the bond and mission we are known for today. In the second week of class our teacher, Laura Bevacqua, told me she believed Angelyne was deaf and recommended Dr. Robin Downing from the Windsor Veterinary Clinic in Windsor, Colorado for Angelyne's hearing test, examination and further advice.

At our appointment, Downing explained that genetics and breeding imperfections may cause deafness in Australian Cattle Dogs, among other breeds. After Downing confirmed Angelyne's deafness I questioned my future with and without her. I had fallen in love with her but felt like failure was imminent. In my heart it was not right to return Angelyne to the breeder or surrender her to a rescue. I also did not agree with the stories I had heard about the statistics of deaf dog abuse and euthanizing. Despite my love for Angelyne, I was doubtful of being able to give her a normal and fulfilling life. I considered quitting obedience class yet we returned. I knew keeping Angelyne would be a labor of love and commitment with no guarantee of success, however, the positives outweighed the doubts and fear. I was in love with Angelyne, had a working knowledge of ACDs and had the help of people like Downing and Bevacqua. Our success would take a lot of time, patience, compassion and a belief that accomplishment could come from uncertainty. One attribute that I knew could benefit my outlook with Angelyne was the resilience I developed growing up with and facing my lifelong challenge with type 1 diabetes.

Angelyne and I were awarded "Most Improved Team" in our class and left with confidence and a belief that we could persevere despite my doubts. The class, and the hard work and bonding process that came with it, made me fall in love with Angelyne even more. In the first year we spent over two hours each day practicing, bonding and learning new things. I created most of our hand signals and body language commands. Bevacqua showed us a few of our first signals but most of our signals are non-American Sign Language (ASL) and happened by thinking "outside of the box," being creative and never giving up. By the time Angelyne was a year and a half, we had created and mastered 22 different hand signals and commands. I was amazed by how much we were accomplishing in such a short time. From the start of

## Come Meet Angelyne...

Come to the Dumb Friends League Furry Scurry and meet Angelyne and her partner Eric. You can have your photo taken with her and get your copy of Mile High Dog autographed. Send an e-mail with the subject line "Angelyne" to [info@milehighdog.com](mailto:info@milehighdog.com) and we will e-mail you with our meeting location. Please also consider joining Team Mile High Dog & Friends for the walk.

our training, many people enjoyed gathering around to watch. Most people had no idea Angelyne was deaf until I told them. Throughout our time together, Angelyne has made unique connections with people of all ages, abilities and social situations. Early on, one observant neighbor was convinced that Angelyne was the most awesome dog he had ever seen and convinced us to enter a local dog talent show.

Our first public appearance and talent show was on June 9, 2007. We competed against 10 other dogs and won. After the show we were interviewed by a local newspaper for an adjoining online news video. We were also approached by several people in the community with invitations to bring our story and performance to them. Since that first show, we've won 11 dog talent shows and through 2011 we've made 230 presentations all over the Rocky Mountain region. In 2009, I dedicated my life to my work with Angelyne. Our mission is now multi-faceted with character education programs for schools, motivational and inspiring speeches and poems, a deaf dog training program, and of course our eye-catching trick demonstrations using our 40+ unique hand signals and body language commands.

This is the poem that I wrote and dedicate to our work with the deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) community. Although it was initially inspired by and for the students at the Rocky Mountain Deaf School, the more I present it in our shows the more I realize there is meaning in it for us all. Signed copies of this poem joined with a photo of Angelyne and me are displayed in many deaf education programs in schools.

## The Quiet Room

*To most it may seem like I exist with no sound  
I do not live in a quiet room, I'm always around  
My world is filled with laughter, senses and sight  
Like you I have many experiences and daily delight  
I do not lack anything for which I need to grow  
I may not hear like you but I learn all I'm supposed to know  
I hear with my eyes, my heart and my touch  
I experience life with undeniable zest and with so much  
Do not see me as different, special or with sadness  
My world is full of amazement, light and gladness  
When we see each other let us know we're both ok  
We will always see each other in our own unique way  
We can both live, learn and exist the same  
Neither you nor I live in a quiet room*

- Eric Melvin

In addition to our performances we have also volunteered over 200 hours in various communities since our start. This



Photo by Mark Fox, Summit Daily News

past year was our busiest yet with 76 presentations including a headlining performance at a canine cancer fundraiser with Guy Gilchrist (cartoonist for "Today's Dogg") and Wendy Francisco, author of the best-selling book, *GoD-DoG*. We also spoke and performed at the "No Barriers Summit," a bi-annual special event for the No Barriers USA foundation for disabled people and athletes founded by Erik Weihenmayer, the first blind climber to summit Mt. Everest. I believe inspiration has no boundaries and we are honored to be able to utilize our story and lives for that purpose. I consider Angelyne the "dog for the underdogs" because of how strongly she connects with people with disabilities and other challenges. Angelyne is the most distinctive dog I have ever known. Angelyne and my work with her have taught me how to be a teacher, inspirer, leader, companion, provider, buddy and best friend.

As I reveal to our audiences, "Sometimes the best things in life happen when you're not expecting them." Angelyne is the best thing that has happened in my life and we're blessed and ecstatic to be able to share our talents, story and services. For more information about Eric & Angelyne the Amazing Deaf Cattle Dog or booking presentations, please see our promotional video at [www.amazingangelyne.com](http://www.amazingangelyne.com) or e-mail Eric at [amazingangelyne@gmail.com](mailto:amazingangelyne@gmail.com). "Like" us on Facebook at "Angelyne the Amazing DEAF Cattle Dog." You can also check out YouTube videos of her amazing tricks.