

Bearded Collies

Hairy Houdini

“This is the finest crate made,” said the vendor, smacking his hand on top. “If your dog can get out of it, we’ll give it to you for free.” At those words, we came to a screeching halt, and my friend and I grinned at each other. “Will you put that in writing?” I queried. The vendor went on to extol the virtues of this sturdy crate, but he backed off when I again suggested I’d like to see his offer in black and white. Maybe it was because I radiated confidence, absolutely certain I could get a brand-new crate if he followed through. Because I knew there was no crate made that Brit couldn’t open. My brown Beardie boy had proved that, time and time again. Brit never destroyed a crate during his escapes; he simply studied how they worked, calculated how to tackle the job, and went to it.

From time to time, there’s a Beardie who definitely ranks as an escape artist, but I doubt there’s ever been a hairy Houdini whose escapades can top those of Brit. He first displayed his talent with one of the early fold-up, wire airline crates.

I came back to my van to find the crate on its side and Brit roaming around free. Initially, I thought it was just an accident—until it happened again, and again. Brit had deduced that turning the crate on its side took the pressure off the latch, and it slipped out easily.

His next crate had a spring-loaded latch, which Brit ignored. The top of the crate flipped over and fastened in place by means of two metal loops which hooked over the side. Duck soup! Brit merely pulled the side of the crate inward until the loops released and out he went through the top. Who needs a door? Then I acquired a Vari-Kennel for him; no problem. He started bumping and bumping until a couple of the bolts that held the two halves together came unscrewed. Squeezing through the opening, he was free once again. And so it went.

It wasn’t just crates. Brit felt any enclosure was a challenge. We worked all afternoon putting up his first run when he was just a pup of 5 months. Satisfied with the job, we put him in and walked off. We were only about 10 feet away when we realized Brit was bounding along beside us. So much for that run! The next run we constructed was taller, stronger, and big enough to contain the gang.

Forever embedded in my memory was the day I came home from work wearing a white linen suit to be joyously greeted by five muddy Beardies following Brit through a hole he had dug under the fence. I dove back into my car, slammed the door, and leaned on the horn. *Help!*

A professional fencing company was called in to put up a proper run. I explained that one of my dogs was an escape artist. As the fence man packed up his equipment, he looked proudly at his work and said smugly, “No dog is going to get out of that.”

Brit climbed out and was standing beside me before the truck was out of sight.

Eventually, we installed a run we felt suited his talents. It was constructed of six-foot-high heavy chain-link, which was cemented into concrete blocks on three sides. The fourth was firmly attached to a kennel building. Heavy wire had been laid on the ground and covered with gravel to prevent him from digging out, and the top of the run was covered in sturdy wire fencing attached to the chain-link.

He escaped, of course.

One day my son reported, “Mom, Brit’s running around on the roof (of the kennel building).” Brit managed by climbing to the top of the fence and holding on while using his teeth and paws to undo the fastenings that connected the wire top to the chain-link. Once the opening was big enough and he didn’t need a lot of space, he crawled through.

The odd part was that Brit never went anywhere after escaping. Usually, he’d show up at the front door or wherever I happened to be with this hey-look-what-I-did expression. And so it went for the 14 years of his life. When he died, we lived in a house in the country, where a fence separated the yard from the surrounding fields. I asked my son if he would dig a grave for Brit.

I went out to run some errands and suggested he shovel out a spot just inside the corner of the fence. When I returned, I found Kell had dug the grave outside the fence and asked why. “I couldn’t do that to him,” he told me. “All his life, Brit never wanted to be fenced in, so I just couldn’t put him inside a fence in death.” —*Alice Bixler*, alicejb@att.net