

# WHY, OH WHY, MUST YOU DO THAT?

*by Emily Clement*



Good livestock guardian dogs (LGDs) are indispensable herd management resources for our sheep and goats. Their usefulness in that regard is never in question. The questions that perplex many LGD owners have to do with their bullheaded, odd, destructive, frustrating (bordering on infuriating) and sometimes really funny behavior that is different from any other breed of dog they have ever worked with. I wanted to help bridge the understanding gap, so I invited a panel of LGDs to a (somewhat lively and colorful) conversation to get some answers for us.

The following is a transcript of a fictional panel discussion with seven livestock guardian dogs. Boudreaux, Chief, Eddie, Moose, and Hebert (pronounced: Aay-bear) are full-time working dogs. Clyde is retired after 14 years of service with goats, sheep, and chickens. Lastly, our only gentlelady on the panel, Weasie” is primarily a household companion on a hobby farm in the city. She has livestock as pets, because she is spoiled. Let’s get started, shall we?

**Emily:** Thank you all for being here today. I appreciate your willingness to come inside on this blustery day. I realize you would much prefer to be out in the elements. Your dedication to opening the dialogue between LGDs and their humans is noble. My hope is that this conversation will help us, the two-leggers who feed you, gain a better understanding of your behaviors that we do not understand— like the ones that nearly drive us crazy. I do not want to come off as accusatory or labeling your behaviors as “bad.” I simply want to hear from you so we can gain insight into your motivations and possibly improve our relationships with our own guardian dogs.

**Before we begin, a few housekeeping announcements and requests:**

Please refrain from using your outside voices (that can peel the paint off



the walls) and limit alert barking to if I give you an indication there is an actual problem.

I ask that we be respectful of each other, and allow only one panelist to speak at a time.

Lastly: Please do not knock the snack or water bowls over.

**Again, thank you for being here. First question:**

**What is your response to humans saying that you are hard to train, bull-headed, and defiant?**

\*Silence... All eyes look away, focused either to the side of my head, the ground, or at another dog. Like they didn't hear the question.\*

**Emily: Okay. Moving on.**

**Emily: Why do you bark incessantly, especially at night?**

\*General grumbling, one face palm, and some eye rolls.\*

*Eddie:* Such a common question. Because we work at night, ma'am. For hundreds of years, my people have kept livestock safe, at night, when their humans are sleeping. Like Santa Claus, predators know when you are sleeping, and they know when you are awake. We work when you are getting your beauty rest.

*Boudreaux:* Yes, I agree with Eddie.

Think about it like this: If the barking is enough to bother and want us away from you, it has the same effect on predators. We use the tools we have to ward off any seen, unseen, or perceived (imagined) threat. We are well equipped to keep our charges safe using only these gifts.

*Clyde:* You should be grateful.

**Emily: Anybody else have anything to add to this before moving on to the next question?**

*Moose:* Did you ever think that there might be something out there or thinking about being out there? Come look before your start your "shhhush-ing." Then, you can thank me for either doing my job, or assure me, kindly, there is nothing to worry about. Sheesh!

*Hebert:* Sometimes, we are out working solo in a field, and need to sound like a lot more than one dog. It only makes sense. You stick us out alone to protect a whole herd against a pack of who knows what. I mean, what self-respecting dog wouldn't do that?

**Emily: Okay, thank you for the insight. I will consider these things as I put my earplugs in at night. Next question:**

**Emily: Why won't you come inside?**

*Hebert:* Why should I come inside? What is there to do in there that I need?

*Eddie:* It is really hot and stuffy in there.

*Boudreaux:* Outside I have everything I need. Inside I have to ask your permission for everything and share space and stuff with all your other little critters.

*Chief:* You don't need me inside. I have work to do outside.

*Weasie:* I do. I love being inside with my person. Sometimes, when I am really chatty, I have to stay outside. \*All other dogs roll their eyes.\*

**Emily: Why must you dig holes the size of China in the field, the flowerbed, the yard, and even in the house?**

*Chief:* I will take this one. Ma'am, they are called bunkers, which even the military uses to protect people and supplies. We use them to dip down, be level with the ground and keep watch over our territory.

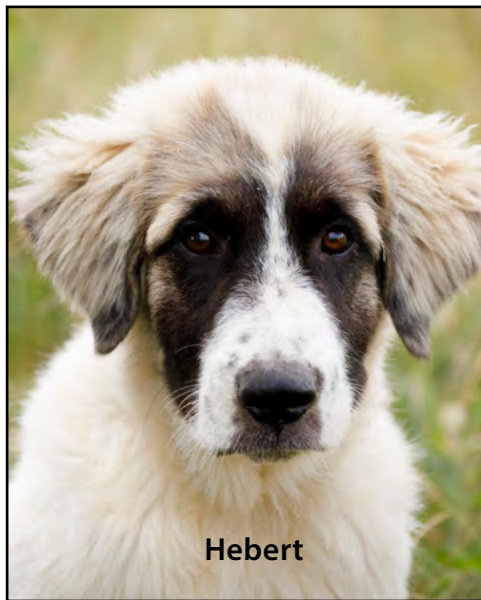
*Moose:* Hey guys... did you ever notice how cool and soft the ground is when you first excavate? But, I mean, yeah, we build them for safety! Safety, for sure.

*Weasie:* Sometimes, I just get overcome with this urge to just dig, dig, dig, dig, dig; and before you know it, I have my own cubby and lookout, all in one. Same for in the house, before I know it... oops, there is a hole (or three) in the couch.

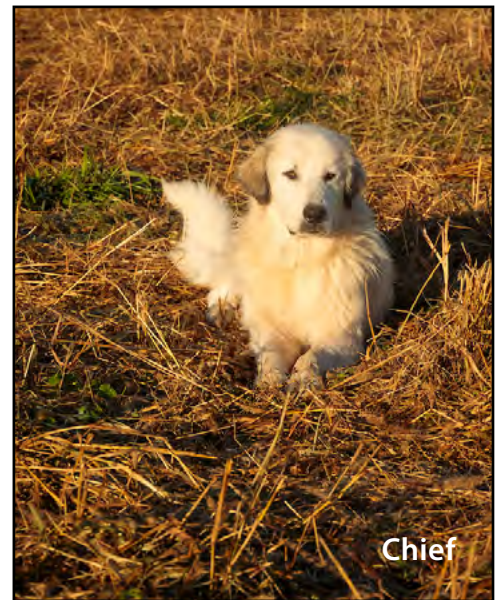
*Clyde:* It is more comfortable for my old bones. No, I don't want a bed. A waste of hard-earned money, in my opinion.



Weasie



Hebert



Chief

**Emily: What about leash walking makes you think it is okay to just lay down, like a 120 lb. sack of potatoes?**

*Eddie:* Not to state the obvious, but... we are not pets. If we wanted to be leash walked, we would lose our LGD card.

\*Nods all the way around.\*

**Emily: Why can't I train you with the same tactics I used to train my non-LGD dogs?**

\*Crickets and all eye contact avoided. Emily repeats the question.\*

*Boudreaux:* Honestly, ma'am, we wonder the same about you. Some days, we just throw our paws up, confused as to what you don't understand about our need for reliability and consistency in your feeding, watering, fence checking. I can only do so much to keep the herd safe and calm, but when you are willy nilly with your times, anxiety happens. We just don't understand.

**Emily: Why do you like to wear Eau de Skunk?**

*Boudreaux:* It is the warrior scent of our people. Catching a whiff of that on a dog lets you know they are strong and brave. They will not bow down, not even to the fiercest of striped animals.

*Chief:* I don't know that I necessarily like to wear it, but it is fun chasing the little buggers and making them so mad they

start stinking. Then, before you know it, you stink too.

*Clyde:* It smells like pine trees— you know, nature, where we like to be.

*Weasie:* Huh? I don't even know what you are talking about. Sometimes, when my blankets are fresh out of the dryer, they need to be taken outside and freshened up a little. I don't know anything about Eau du Skunk.

**Emily: Why does it seem that you are hearing impaired when I call for you, yet you can seemingly hear and go on an alert barking frenzy when a flea passes gas?**

*Chief:* I think about what you could possibly want, and if it is of any interest to me. If it is, I will look your way and maybe come. If I think you are just calling for no reason, I will ignore you. I am not your trick pony.

**Emily: Why must you dump your food bowl?**

*Boudreaux:* \*Looking around at others like they are crazy.\* I don't do that. Why would I do that?

*Eddie:* My whiskers are sensitive; smushing them in the bowl to rummage around for food is an overload of information for my brain. I choose to free my food from the confines of the bowl. It makes a more enjoyable meal.

*Hebert:* I like finding it later, when I want to eat. It is like my own game I can play with myself.

*Clyde:* I like to save some for later, kind of hide it. Just because it is a convenient time for you to give me food, does not mean I am hungry.

*Chief:* I don't like the way my collar bangs against the bowl. It is like trying to eat your meal with cymbals crashing in your ears. I dump the food; the problem is solved.

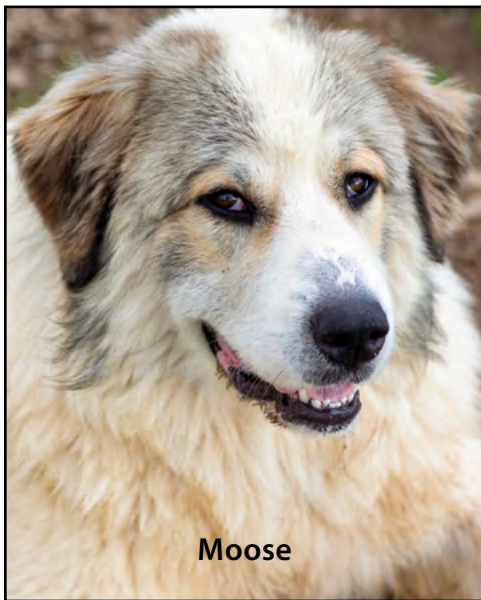
**Emily: Anybody else have anything to add?**

*Weasie:* Yes. I agree with Herbert. My two-legger sometimes puts my food in a toy so I have to work for it. He is right; finding food is fun!

**Emily: Why do you wander further than you know you are allowed to go?**

\*Crickets. Chief starts cleaning himself; Boudreaux gets up and stretches. No eye contact. Emily repeats the question.\*

*Clyde:* As the senior panelist, I will take this question to try and help you understand. You and I do not live by the same concept of boundaries. I set my boundaries based on predator threats. Okay, and maybe a girl in heat, on occasion. Your boundaries are based on things you see on a map. My people don't acknowledge the map.



Moose

*Hebert:* You mean outside the fences? Why do I go outside of the fences? Please, let me explain. If your fences were effective at keeping predators away, you wouldn't need me. You obviously need me. I am just doing my job. Why would I wait for the threat to come all the way to the fence before I act? Our people pride themselves on being prepared and proactive.

*Weasie:* I have to say I can't relate. I stay in my fenced yard. The only time I leave my yard is on a leash. I very rarely indulge my human with such willingness to take a stroll beside her like I am some Pomeranian.

*Boudreaux:* Ma'am, it is based on instinct and need. We are hired because of our instinct and independence. We are hard workers.

*Chief:* The guy the next road over leaves bowls of food out. Sometimes there are even cats there eating and you can chase and play with them. I take friends with me, occasionally. It is fun.

*Emily:* Why don't you play with dog toys?

\*Chuckles, giggles, a yip or two.\*

*Weasie:* I do. I love to chew on them and sling them around. I like to collect them in my bunker. Don't be confused; I am not going to retrieve a ball for you. My people don't do that.

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*Clyde:* I will chew on a bone any day. Do you have any?

*Eddie:* I prefer things that used to be alive. This is how our people pay homage to the deceased.

*Moose:* We are resourceful; we make our own toys. The ones people have just don't smell right. We not only get to chase and play with the live critter, but we also keep playing with it even when we have tired it out and it doesn't play back anymore.

*Emily:* And finally... gosh darn it, why don't you want to snuggle?

*Eddie:* These are just my thoughts on the matter, ma'am: When you pin me down, what you call "snuggling," I cannot do my job effectively. I appreciate and enjoy your company, but I am happy to either sit ON you, sit BY you, or lean ON you. No wrestling holds allowed. I love it when you rub on me. More of that, less squeezing.

*Moose:* I will snuggle with you all day long! Well, except when something catches my attention. I guess what I am

saying is, I like you, you can pet me, but I am out if duty calls.

*Boudreaux:* Belly rubs? Can you just be happy with rubbing my belly? I will let you rub all over my ears too, if you need to. I agree, though: no hugging and pinning down. That is asking for a wrestling match. I wouldn't want to hurt you.

*Emily:* I want to thank each of you for your willingness to share your insight with us two-leggers, to allow us to better understand just what exactly it is that is going through your mind. I know each of you are skilled and appreciated. You will find doggy bags with your scent on them, by the door. They have treats (that you probably won't eat) and a leash that you will probably refuse to use. Thank you for your time. Safe travels.

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*Emily Clement, MPA, LVT* is a licensed Veterinary Technician that has worked in the animal industry since 1994. Her experience spans from private veterinary practices, laboratories, shelters, to teaching veterinary technology. Emily holds a Bachelor of

*Science in Agriculture from Murray State University and a Master's of Science in Public Administration from South University. She lives in Louisville, Kentucky where she shares her hobby farm/ garden and home with goats, bees, chickens, an elderly potbellied-pig, and senior companion dogs. She currently works for Kentucky State University (KSU) with Dr. Ken Andries as a Small Ruminant Extension Associate and his Research Co-Investigator. The KSU Harold R. Benson Research and Demonstration farm houses the 200+ head meat goat herd that is utilized for gastrointestinal parasite research as well as grazing studies and extension demonstrations. Emily believes in the potential of education and enjoys empowering small farmers with the knowledge and resources needed to produce the highest quality and cost efficient product possible. She leads the Kentucky Small Ruminant Herd Assessment Program (KY-GHAP) which assesses the production goals of individual producers and their current situation to find resources and make written recommendations for better productivity and improved herd health. Her truth is: "if you take care of the animal, it will take care of you" regarding all animals; especially relating to production livestock. She can be reached at Emily.Clement@KYSU.edu.*

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