

*Paul Steven Stone*

## **How To Train A Rock**

The first thing one notices about rocks is they are essentially quiet creatures. Adverse to long discourses or extended bouts of conversation, they nevertheless are quite engaged in life. Constantly pondering the deepest and densest of life's mysteries, thereby distracted to an apparent state of inertia, they are thought to be dull companions and highly unsuited to racquet sports or most other forms of physical activity.

Here at the International Rock Training Institute we have discovered, and proven, I believe, that rocks are far more capable and sentient than we humans generally believe. In fact, it's the rocks' very ability to conceal their considerable capabilities from the general population that underscores the scope of their hidden powers.

So, what to expect when you bring home one of these seemingly inanimate creatures as a pet?

Expect *love*. Lots of love. Pound for pound, there isn't a more loving, open-hearted creature than a rock, though they can be fickle at times. Until recently it was thought rocks heated up in the sun because of the sun's rays. After much research, we now know their rising temperatures are psycho-romantic reactions. Rocks tenderly exhibiting warm feelings for their cousin, the Sun. Similar to the way their temperatures will flare-up when they're with their masters. Unfortunately, such displays of affection often go unnoticed, leading to a deep-seated fear of rejection and humiliation in most mature rocks.

As unfortunate as that may sound, this fear of rejection will prove an important tool in helping you train a rock of your own. A simple example will prove the point.

Let us pretend we are training a rock to keep us company while watching TV in the evenings. Right off, most of us would make the mistake of placing the rock on a nearby chair or perhaps on the TV itself.

Ask yourself, could you watch TV if you were sitting on top of the TV?

Of course you couldn't. And neither could a rock.

As for the chair, it demoralizes the intimacy-starved rock to be placed so far away from you. It derails the very trust and intimacy you were seeking to instill. Far better to place your rock on a nearby coffee table at the beginning of the training cycle. The idea being, of course, to gradually inch the rock closer to you on successive evenings. By tantalizing the trainee rock with your increasing proximity, you enflame its desire for closeness, and will soon find not only a docile rock sitting on your lap, but a companionable one as well.

The majority of rocks that visit the International Rock Training Institute come here for our "Good Companions" curriculum, which trains rocks for companionable relationships with all types of masters except toddlers, who need to be first trained not to eat rocks or stick them in their playmates' eyes. We also offer a curriculum focused on "Security" for rocks being channeled into careers as Watchrocks or, possibly, projectiles.

Training a rock requires, well, rocklike patience. Much like human beings, rocks form impressions and psychological patterns in their early years that help shape their entire lives going forward. These impressionable "teen" rocks should be treated with great care and with great tolerance for their periodic mood swings and narcissistic bingeing. Should you discover you're in possession of a teen rock rather than a mature one, don't expect to win its trust anytime soon.

Unfortunately, we won't have time this week to discuss "strays", the wild, untamable rocks you find scattered most everywhere. Suffice it to say, many of the wild stories one hears about these highly independent rocks are true. They are unstable creatures to say the least. Unfriendly, sharply cunning and not very trustworthy. I would not want a stray rock living in my home, not even with my children fully grown and out of the house.

More about strays later on. For now, I'll close this week's "*A Rock's Throw*" by inviting you, as always, to send me your questions about rocks and their proper training. Again, I must sternly request you do

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NOT send me the rocks themselves. And whoever threw that rock through the Institute's lab window yesterday, I should warn you your rock has already conveyed your vital information to the police who are now on their way.

I forgot to mention, rocks are notoriously disloyal.

## **How To Train A Rock, Part 2**

Our last column on the care and training of rocks drew emails and letters from rock owners anxious to build upon the article's understandably superficial lessons. Today, we offer targeted advice in response to your questions.

William G. of Hartford, Connecticut writes: "For some time I have observed Sparky, the favorite of my rock collection, frequently disappearing, sometimes for days on end, only to return covered in bruises and what I can only characterize as a smug, satisfied expression. What do you think is happening and, more importantly, what can I do to keep Sparky safe at home?"

William G., it's my sad duty to suggest that Sparky isn't actually a rock but a rolling stone. If that proves true there is little you can do other than accept Sparky's natural inclination to periodically roam the highways and byways whistling Bob Dylan songs at sub-atomic auditory levels. This is perfectly natural behavior on Sparky's part and nothing you should take personally. Besides, rolling stones deserve the same tolerance the Holy Bible teaches us to extend to all our fellow creatures (except, perhaps, gays, blacks, Asians or undocumented immigrants).

Ethel B. of Hingham, Massachusetts asks: "Is it bad form for me, as a young single woman, to take my favorite rocks along with me on my dates? I ask because my rock collection clearly acts jealous and resentful when I display interest or affection towards possible suitors."

Thank goodness you wrote for our advice rather than acting on well-intentioned impulses. Ethel B., DO NOT take your rocks with you on dates. As you've already seen, rocks are terribly jealous creatures with so little emotional control they will attack a rival suitor with deadly, gravity-defying intent. If your rock collection is large enough, it is conceivable your suitor's very life could be at risk. Far better to pretend you are working a second job than to flaunt your active dating life in front of your rock collection. In fact, given that your rocks have already displayed disturbed emotions around this subject, I would strongly advise you not to sleep with them in your own bed. Of course, if there's

one particular rock you find especially attractive . . .

Moving on, Max W. of Clearwater, New Jersey writes to ask: "What is the ideal number of rocks for one's rock collection? There are times when I think I may have more rocks than I can emotionally care for. As you know, rocks are such needy creatures and once ensconced in your life so very difficult to get free of. Tell me what you think, but please keep in mind I love all my rocks."

Of course you love your rocks, Max; we wouldn't suggest otherwise. To answer your question, however, there is no ideal number of rocks for one's collection. Human beings, like rocks themselves, are all different, with different sets of needs. You might be a two-rock person while I might be a 2000-rock person. Nobody is wrong in this matter. There is no right and wrong when it comes to sharing your life with these stolid, long-term companions.

Lastly, for this week's "A Rock's Throw", a number of you have questioned whether I was being subtly political in writing last week's "How To Train A Rock."

Ira R. of New Paltz, New York complains: "I don't like that you tried to slip a column so overtly political right past me. Fortunately, my 78 year old mother who has asthma and collapsed cheek bones pointed out how similar "A rock" sounds to "Iraq." How to train a rock. I get it. And thanks, Ma!"

And Shirley S. of Bedford Falls, California, writes: "What the hell was that all about? It wasn't funny; I didn't get the jokes; if there was a political message, it flew over my head. Who are you writing this crap for anyway?"

Well, Shirley, you should be able to figure that out.

I write for the rocks.

**(How To Train A Rock, Part 3)**

**"I Am A Rock"**

Dear Paul Steven Stone:

I have been reading with great interest your articles on how to train rocks, and especially enjoyed your insights into the complexities of our inner workings (yes, I am a rock myself). Unfortunately, most of what you say is very silly and far from true. More like supermarket tabloid trash than hard rock reality.

Paul Steven, I don't believe you could recognize a real rock if you tripped over one in your kitchen.

In any case, the time for sitting back in stoic silence has passed. As a tribal elder, I have been asked to write and clarify a few basic truths about rocks.

And, yes, to offer you a friendly warning.

For millions of years we rocks have lived our lives in quiet harmony with nature and its creatures, with the exception of one particularly troublesome species. I refer, of course, to you humans who can't seem to live in harmony with anyone or anything except your own hubris and unquenchable appetites.

Many centuries ago, it was decided by the Council of Rock Elders that we rocks would conceal our highly evolved spiritual and intellectual development from your species until such time as you were able to relate to us as equals. Since it will take at least another millennium before human beings can evolve to even the lowest of rock levels, and since you persist in writing about us as if we were semi-conscious, emotionally volatile household pets, the time has come for rocks – humbly represented by myself – to step out of the closet.

To begin with, and forgive me if I appear immodest, but rocks are actually the most consciously and spiritually advanced creatures in the universe. I'm sure even you, Paul Steven, must have heard about The Big Bang; that cosmic explosion some billions of years ago that hurled matter in all directions and created the universe? But did you ever ask yourself what it was that actually exploded on that momentous day?

(With my extra-sensory perception I sense an answer already forming in your mind.)

Yes, Paul Steven, it was a rock! One giant, inconceivably

humungous rock. The first inhabitant of our universe and Great Great Granddaddy to the entire worldwide family of present-day rocks.

Interestingly enough, that first colossal rock was originally called “God” until your species took up the term and used it as an excuse for heaping indignities and abuse upon each other. You can be certain rocks never kill each other, or fan the fires of hatred and intolerance, in service to our God. Occasionally, no doubt, someone gets hit in the head by a rock, but that’s usually a function of the natural laws governing moving bodies rather than messianic fervor or religious intolerance.

If I were your God and saw the way everyone behaved in My name, I’d sue you all for defamation of character.

As for all your innuendoes about our being dense and dumb, suffice it to say we rocks are deeply connected to our inner selves, which is why we sometimes appear heavy or immovable or, perhaps even “stuck” to you imperceptive mutton heads. No matter how we appear, however, the truth is you do not know us. You do not know what gentle, kind spirits we can be, even though time and again we have proven our innate rigidity and toughness. You do not know that we live our lives without envy, greed or acquisitiveness. Or that riches bore us as much as fancy attire or faddish styles.

You also don’t realize that once we were the rulers of this beautiful and fragile planet, but in our humility stepped back to allow others their chance at the wheel.

Paul Steven, I am a rock. Unadorned and unashamed. As we used to say back in the quarry, take me as I am or toss me at a ham.

And another thing . . . you write that rocks are quiet creatures, often silent because we have little or nothing to say. Another patently false assumption based on your species’ inability to hear the high-pitched frequency at which rocks normally speak. Once again, it is *your* failings that cause you to infer *our* deficiencies. Were you able to hear rocks speak, you would not believe the high level of our discourse.

From time to time, when we wish to purposely inject elevating rock influences into the human zeitgeist – say through philosophy or literature -- we employ human savants, secretly tutored by rocks, as vehicles for our messages.

With whom did you think Plato was actually conducting his dialogues? And the Immortal Bard? The truth is, without the assistance of his Rock Muses, Shakespeare wouldn’t have been able to come up

with a rhyme for spoon in the month of June!

But now we are traveling through worrisome times, Paul Steven, both rocks and humans together. Evil energies have been set loose by the collective madness of your pitiful race and if they are not soon put in check they will destroy all that we rocks have striven to create and preserve.

That is why I have been asked to write this letter. As a friendly warning that we rocks will once again resume management of Earth's planetary affairs if you humans aren't up to the task.

This is not a threat by some hostile alien force, Paul Steven.

This is a promise from the rocks of the world.

Either clean up your act, or take the next train out of town.

Don't make us play hard ball, Paul Steven.

You could get hit by a rock.

Sincerely yours,

Graystone Of The Back Garden

*Author of the novel, "Or So It Seems", and most recently "How to Train A Rock", a collection of short-short stories, Paul Steven Stone has been a creative director in advertising, a newspaper columnist, an environmental and human rights activist and a dime store philosopher. He presently works as Director of Advertising for W.B. Mason (Who But W.B. Mason!) and lives in Cambridge with his beautiful companion and wife, Amy.*