

Benjamin Rabbit: I am different and I roar!

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Recently I was reminded of something Benjamin, a New Zealand white rabbit, had expressed when he was 1-1/2 years old. What he conveyed was so extraordinary that I went back to my files and found the transcript. And there it was in bold, capital letters:

...“I like being DIFFERENT! I AM VERY DIFFERENT!”

“I am dominant, I am dominant, I am dominant”. “That’s what makes me different. I am a bunny that ROARS...roar...roar...roar...”

Benjamin was adopted from the Oceanside Shelter (now the North Campus of the San Diego Humane Society) where he had spent three months. His potential adopter, Allison, consulted with the San Diego House Rabbit Society (SDHRS) for guidance before making the decision. His affectionate personality and behavior fit the calm and easy going criteria Allison desired and he wasn't afraid of friendly dogs. Benjamin seemed like a perfect fit and settled into his forever home as part of Allison's family. It went so well with the two golden retrievers, Allison thought adopting another rabbit would be fun and would give him a companion of his own species.

Anyone familiar with rabbits knows putting two strangers together can be fraught with difficulties and result in serious injuries. Likes and dislikes are strong, and immediate harmonious connections are in the minority. Allison did her homework and again consulted with the San Diego House Rabbit Society for a suitable companion. Chloe, a two-year-old New Zealand White in foster care, seemed a suitable candidate. Both rabbits were introduced to each other in neutral

territory at the SDHRS Adoption Center. They appeared to accept each other, so Allison took Chloe home. There she took all the appropriate steps to facilitate a successful bonding. After four days of relative success, their behavior took a negative turn and Benjamin made it clear he wanted nothing to do with Chloe.

Allison relates: "While intervening in their first major scuffle, I got bit by Benjamin, who was in a high state of excitement. Initially, Benjamin would lie by me but when Chloe would attempt to approach him to get acquainted he would run behind me or chase her away. When I contacted the House Rabbit Society for their take on how it was going, they surmised, since often female rabbits are more assertive than males, that Benjamin might be nervous or scared of her. This didn't seem fit the situation, so I thought I better get clarification from you."

Indeed, Benjamin shared his well-founded reasons for his behavior.

This is the transcript of our time together in my office 5/4/2006:

BN: Hello Benjamin,

BN: Allison loves you very much and has brought you here so we can listen and learn more about you.

Benjamin in italics:

Please let Allison know I am Number One of Everyone. I am "Number One BUNNY."

I am DOMINANT

I am STRONG

I am MASSIVE

I am #1

I am, I am, I am.

I am so dominant I could bite the dogs. I could, I could, I could.

BN: What have you come in to do?

I have come to be well taken care of and, in return, I am ETERNALLY grateful. Please let Allison know I like being A-L-O-N-E.

I LIKE ALL, ALL, ALL the attention. I like being DIFFERENT. I AM VERY DIFFERENT.

BN: In what way? Please explain.

I am DOMINANT

I am DOMINANT

I am DOMINANT.

That's what makes me DIFFERENT. I am a BUNNY that ROARS

roar

roar

BN: You are funny too.

I don't mean to be funny, but if that is the case, I'm funny too.

What are you teaching?

SMART BUNNY

I am very S-M-A-R-T.

BN: What do we need to know about you and Chloe?

I don't care for FEMALES THAT QUESTION MY DOMINANCE. CHLOE IS NOT COMPLIANT ENOUGH.

BN: I see, so you don't think you can get along with her at home?

DON'T NEED HER. ALL I NEED IS ALLISON. She is very COMPLIANT.

BN: What does Allison need to know she doesn't already know?

I ADORE ALLISON—SHE IS MINE, MINE, MINE. Even the dogs know she is MINE.

BN: How do you feel inside?

Inside I feel great. Inside I roar, inside I MOUNT. I mount, I mount, I mount.

BN: What else would you like to share?

I like it here. It is comfortable and I love communicating like this.

BN: Would you like to have a bunny companion at all?

No, not really. I'm fine the way I am. I ROAR.

It is understood that Benjamin expresses a state of mind. He feels strong and powerful, therefore, he figuratively roars. Although he never did actually vocalize a roar in my office or at home, when I communicated with him I could clearly sense the feeling he was projecting of a mighty male rabbit roaring like a lion and expressing his dominance by evoking mounting.

Rabbits are known to make all kinds of noises. A knowledgeable rabbit person sent me the following quotes about rabbit vocalizations from Carolyn Crampton's "RABBIT LANGUAGE ~ Or are you going to eat that?" "A humorous guide to communicating with your pet rabbit". (You can find it on Amazon.com). This rabbit person added that her many rabbits

have grunted (for emphasis preceding or following a thump), growled, honked, whimpered and even snored/snorted, in addition to the more common buzzing-humming.

Carolyn Crampton mentions the following rabbit noises:

“Grunting ~ This is usually a noise of sexual arousal made while running around the prospective mate. May include thumping and wild tail waving.

Humming and Buzzing ~ Humming while running around, usually referred to as grunting, is a sound of sexual arousal. It apparently drives female rabbits bonzo. It is usually heard when your rabbit is running around you in circles or right before your rabbit starts biting your feet. It may also mean general excitement such as it’s time for breakfast. I never heard buzzing til I got a dwarf but it’s definitely the same behavior.

Roar ~ One rabbit is to have roared like a tiny lion. “When he is chasing your feet or if you piss him off. Often he will run in circles around our feet roaring like this.”

CHLOE’S STORY ~

Chloe was a lovely, cuddly, companion rabbit in her own right. And even for rabbits, there is always another side to a story. Here is Chloe’s perspective on the situation with Benjamin:

BN: Hello Chloe, it is your turn. Would like to share with me?

I would love to be # 1. I am #1. I am. I am so pretty, so cute, so adorable, so cuddly but UNAPPRECIATED

I feel so unappreciated.

BN: Well, we are here to fix that situation, Chloe.

BN: What have you come in to do?

To be ADORABLE. I do ADORABLE very well. I do.

BN: What are you teaching?

Very cute, lovable rabbit COMPANION. I am a COMPANION RABBIT.

BN: Do you mean of a person or another rabbit?

Both, I can be both.

BN: And what happens with Benjamin?

He is so bossy

He is so arrogant

He is too much. Too much. Too much.

I can't get my way with Benjamin. He is unaccommodating to me. We are not compatible.

BN: What does Allison need to know she doesn't already know?

I need a new home. Can't stay with Benjamin. Can't.

BN: Can you live separately from Benjamin in the same house with Allison?

Maybe? That's up to Allison. We would need to be in SEPARATE ROOMS. I want my own room.

BN: How do you feel inside?

Inside I'm confused. I'm confused.

BN: Do your pads in the back legs burn or have pain in any way?

A little, they are too sensitive. I need very SOFT bedding. Very.

BN: How do you feel about the dogs, Ginger and Sitara?

Dogs are harmless, they are.

(Chloe had been in a foster home before going to Allison's house with Benjamin)

BN: Did you like a rabbit in the foster home?

I'm very flexible. I find friends everywhere I go, except here.

BN: Chloe, Allison is going to find another more appropriate home for you. A loving and appreciative home. She wants you to be happy.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. (Heard in a "bunny" voice.)

The incompatibility of Benjamin and Chloe made keeping two rabbits totally separate and safe from each other a lot of work and was not the fun Allison had envisioned. But, by this time Chloe had found her way to Allison's heart. The problem bonding was a great disappointment to her. After Benjamin's session she knew with certainty it would never take place. It helped to know the House Rabbit Society was an amazing place and they would find a suitable home for Chloe but at the same time, Allison felt badly that returning her would burden an already over-crowded foster care system. The SDHRS honored their commitment to the welfare of all their bunnies and graciously took her back into foster care. In a fortunate turn of events, Chloe pretty quickly found another family and a companion rabbit. In line with his nature and wishes, Benjamin got to be the "only rabbit" and enjoyed Allison's love and attention to the end of his very successful life.

In late April 2014, Allison and I had a final communication with Benjamin who was now an ailing senior bunny. He had successfully overcome health issues with a few surgical

procedures in the past year, but now a large mass on his shoulder was getting the better of him. We asked how he was feeling, and if, when, and how he wanted to cross over. Benjamin expressed his gratitude to Allison for her care and her love and clearly stated his need to go. He conveyed that he was in great pain all the time and didn't want to linger. That gave Allison the confirmation she needed to go forward with the euthanasia process. The next day, April 22, 2014, with the assistance of a veterinarian, Benjamin, the bunny that felt "different" and that "roared" left this life at the ripe old age of 9-1/2.

Many thanks to Allison for letting me share her story and to Phyllis for her vast rabbit knowledge and assistance in proof reading and story flow.

For over 20 years, San Diego House Rabbit Society has supported our community through education about responsible rabbit care, spay/neuter, and adoption. They are a 501(c)(3) volunteer-driven nonprofit organization.

For more information and donations:

<http://www.sandiegorabbits.org/>