

VILLAGE VIEW

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It was one of those beautiful days in late October, the kind that makes us tell one another how good it is to be alive and living on Cape Cod. The blue bowl overhead was cloudless. It was a day for getting outside and raking leaves, picking up sticks and giving the shrubbery a final pruning before frosts come.

As I worked, warmed by sun and exercise, there appeared beside me, apparently from nowhere, a large and friendly dog. He announced his presence with his deep-breathing, panting his pleasure at finding another soul inspired by the weather to get a final workout in the woodlands.

We exchanged greetings; he proffered his paw which I shook gladly. He wanted his ears rubbed, so I did that for him. Then I patted him on the rump, suggested he run along home, and turned again to my labors. I expected he'd depart immediately since there was nothing happening to hold his attention. Nothing doing.

He followed from every far corner of the yard as I carried armfuls to the brush heap. He tried to help, grasping dangling limbs and twigs in his powerful jaws and tugging at them, often in directions at variance from where I was headed. Finding a short stick, I threw it for him to chase. Each time he brought it back and waited expectantly for another throw, his brown eyes begging for continuation of the game.

Lunchtime came. I knocked off, made the meal and ate. The dog lay on my doorstep, waiting, guarding the house. Lunch over, I rejoined him. He was a handsome animal; a golden retriever and thoroughbred. As I stood looking at him, wondering what to do with him, he leaned against me affectionately. I knew I could learn to love him, all too easily. I moved away at which he sat down on his haunches and lifted both forepaws, pleading for a bit of extra praise and petting. He got it.

The afternoon schedule was a full one and didn't include someone else's dog. Around his neck he wore a flea collar and a regular dog collar; the latter bore his license tag and a disk giving his owner's name and address. He sat still while I

read the information.

At the phone a minute later, I informed his mistress of his whereabouts. The lady said, "And do you have a lady dog in whom he may be interested?" Her tone implied it was somehow my fault her pet was making my home his own.

"No, I don't."

"Well, I'm sorry he's bothering you," she said.

"He's not bothering me. I love him. But I'm worried about him because I must leave shortly and if he were mine, I'd be afraid someone would steal him, or that might get run over. He's a lovely dog and so friendly; anyone could make off with him."

"I'll come right over and pick him up." And she did. We exchanged a few pleasantries. The dog went immediately to the car and climbed in. Obviously he knew where he belonged.

Thinking about it later, I wondered at the lady's attitude; why did she immediately assume I had somehow enticed her dog from his own home? Even if I did own a female in heat, the responsibility for her dog is still clearly her own. I've a right to keep a female dog, after all, just as she's a right to own a male one.

Dogs in the Town of Barnstable are supposed to be restrained. We've a year-round leash law. Don't dog-owners care enough about their animals to worry about them when they've been gone a couple of hours? When a person acquires a dog, doesn't he assume responsibility for keeping it under control?

There were options open to me. I could have "adopted" that animal. He'd have adjusted to a new home in a very short time. Or I could have called the dog officer and that handsome fellow would have been carted off to the pound where he'd probably have been given away to someone else unless, of course, she'd finally realized he was missing, searched him out, paid the fine, and carried him home again.

Or I could have just driven off, done my errands, and hoped he'd wander elsewhere in my absence. Perhaps he'd have made it home; perhaps not. Was it any concern of mine? I happen to like dogs; I couldn't just abandon him, even if he had arrived unannounced and uninvited. I'd have lost sleep worrying about him.

One of my neighbors has a pair of dogs. They make regular visits to my property; on an average, they come through the yard three times a day. First in the early morning, then around noon, again in the late afternoon or early evening; sometimes late at night I hear them barking. Perhaps they've flushed a rabbit, a skunk or a woodchuck. No longer do I get up to see. No longer do I call their master.

Whenever I've done so, they're back within a few hours' time. This pair, too, are valuable dogs, but they're not particularly friendly. They're aloof, for the most part; I don't feel they're in danger of being stolen; however, they could easily become victims of accident. Doesn't their master care?

As taxpayers, we employ a dog officer to enforce the leash law. His salary is paid by the town; that is, by us all. He's overworked, we're told, and I believe it. For him to respond to a complaint, the police must be called. It's unneighborly to initiate a police visit to the person down the street, or several blocks away. No one likes to bother the police (who have more important things to do than collaring domestic pets).

One solution might be for taxpayers to make ownership of a dog more expensive. Instead of dog licenses being available for a mere pittance, perhaps all the expenses of the dog officer(s) should be divided amongst those who keep dogs; perhaps if dog-owners paid their own way, there wouldn't be as great a need for dog officers.

Expensive things assume greater value in the eyes of most Americans. If it cost \$100, \$200 or \$300 to license a dog, one of several things might result. There might be fewer dogs, There might be fewer irresponsible dog-owners. Surely there'd be fewer loose dogs.

Another option might be to raise the charge people must pay if their dog is picked up by the dog officer. If it were considerably more costly to repossess the animals, people would make certain their dogs weren't free to be impounded.

Complaints about dogs are in no way directed toward the dogs. The dogs are innocent victims of careless dog-owners. The objection isn't to the dog, but rather to the irresponsible owner who permits his pet to wander.

People who have dogs that are not properly cared for and restrained impose financial burdens upon those of us who don't keep dogs. This inequity should be eliminated and the costs of the dog population of the Town of Barnstable should be borne by those who generate that necessity.

A still better solution would be for every dog-owner to take full responsibility for his animal so the services of a dog officer would be entirely unnecessary.

Pie in the sky.