

Village View by Andrea Leonard



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The first dog I met in my life was a black-and-white springer spaniel named Skid. He was a member of our family before I was and I remember him only vaguely.

Mostly I remember my mother telling me not to touch him while he was eating and never to touch a dog's tail. Mostly I remember wanting to hug him, sprawl on him, pat him, examine his eyes, ears, teeth, and being warned I must not.

Sometime between the time I learned to walk and started kindergarten, Skid disappeared. As he got older, he got crosser, and someone made the decision that four small children gave my mother enough to do.

At this time my grandfather kept two dogs, hunting hounds, called Jing and Towser who lived in their own doghouse-workshop in his yard. They were an aloof pair, kept for hunting, not as pets, and my grandparents saw to it I was separated from them as much as possible.

The next dog I remember was a beagle named Ginger who belonged to Jackie Baker, next door. Ginger was a loving and loveable dog. No one in the world loved him more than I.

Ginger had a sweet tooth. His favorite goody was molasses kisses. A pocketful shared with Ginger provided much hilarity for he always got his jaws glued together with the sticky mass. We'd feed them to him just to watch his comical expression as he joyfully struggled to chew. Some dogs don't like being laughed at, but Ginger didn't mind; he never learned to suck candy.

Ginger chased cars and one day was run over. He died, and I cried and carried on 'til I made myself sick. If there had been such things in those days, I'd have been given a tranquilizer.

Not much later I met another dog, Pal, who belonged to the Whiteley family, also neighbors. Pal was a dog of indeterminate lineage, with some obvious German shepherd ancestry. His legs were short and stubby, but he knew himself to be a lion of a dog.

Pal was devoted to all the neighborhood children and we to him.

There have been other dogs I've known and loved. There was Peter, the German shepherd belonging to the Carroll Fullers, who spent his days in their cellar except when I came to let him out for a romp after school.

There was another Peter, an English setter, a member of the Ames family. In later years, the McCarthy's had a collie, Duke, a fine animal.

Each one was a dog I loved. Right now there are a dozen or more dogs I consider friends. I may not know their names, but I know the dog, and the dog knows me.

You can tell a dog-friend because he leans on you when you're near, and there's a loving look in his face when you speak to him. Dogs are some of the nicest people I know.

When Skid was part of our family, Osterville had a population of about four hundred people. There were no laws requiring people to keep their dogs tied up at home or on a leash.

It wasn't really necessary. There was plenty of room for dogs to roam. Trouble with dogs was a rare occurrence.

While growing up, I always wanted a dog of my own. It was not to be. The care and feeding, I was told, would ultimately be my mother's responsibility and she had all she could do without worrying about a dog.

Dogs, I was told, were a nuisance, needed to go out when the weather was terrible, might bite or frighten someone, might jump on a child and knock him down. No, we couldn't have a dog. So was had cats, one at a time.

"When I grow up," I promised myself, "I'll have a dog." When I

grew up I lived in a city. Even I knew a city was no place for a dog. Dogs need space to run and wander and romp and play.

"When I get out of this city," I told myself, "I'll get a dog,". When I moved to a suburb it became even more impractical. I worked all day. Dogs need care and attention just as children do. If you go off and leave them all day, every day, they become neurotic and uncontrollable. If left in the house, they create havoc.

"When I move back to the Cape," I thought to myself, "I'll have a dog." When I moved back to the Cape, I found the Cape had changed and was just as crowded with people as the suburb I'd left. I was still working every day. There was still no place in my life for a dog.

Now I tell myself, "When I retire....."

Why not just get a dog right now and have it? Because it's not fair to the dog if I can't give the care it deserves, not fair to the neighbors who have a right to peace and quiet.

Taking a dog to work with me is impractical. Leaving a dog home in the house is unkind to the animal and dangerous to the furnishings. Leaving a dog tied outside imposes unreasonable disturbance on the neighbors and shows a lack of consideration for the dog.

Letting the dog run loose puts him in danger of being hurt, run over, poisoned, and creates a nuisance. Lonely dogs, tied up, bark. Dogs who can, break loose and run away. They dig up other people's gardens, follow children or attack them, and chase postmen.

When the time comes for me to have a dog, the dog and I will spend our time together. The dog will obey when I speak. He will come when I call him, sit when I tell him to, and stay put when I don't feel like taking him around the block.

When it rains or snows, I'll be present to let him into the house. When he's hungry, I'll be there to feed him. If he barks I'll investigate. When I go off in the car, he'll come along with me. He will not be a nuisance to anyone, except possibly me.

A recent letter from a reader of this column complains of "those sentimental boobs called animal lovers who either chain their dogs outside at night or allow them to roam the village, barking at anything that moves."

I advised him to get a can of spray paint and mark the dog, so he can identify them in daylight, in the company of the dog officer. Failing this, I suggested he might shoot these dogs running loose.

In the first place, it's against the law to allow your dog to roam. In the second place, if you're a dog-owner, you've a responsibility to keep your dog to yourself, to see it's no trouble to your neighbors, stays off their property, and makes no racket to disturb them in any way.

The only time your dog should make a lot of noise is when he's warning you of the arrival of company.

My correspondent would appreciate the dogs in his neighborhood (and their owners) if they'd observe their responsibilities and obligations, both to their animal and other people.

So, I may truthfully say, would I.

And if I ever fulfill my deep desire to own a dog, I'll take seriously my responsibilities and obligations to neighbors and to dog.

If you're a dog-lover and a dog-owner, please exercise the same consideration for others that you'd like shown you.