

One Less Chair

Man arrives with child in tow – his expression bodes bad news, or rather he is about to say something I'd rather not hear. Guilt is written all over his face. He wants me to take his dog. Reason? Wife is pregnant and doctor says something about having dog is likely to be detrimental to the foetus she is carrying. How I despise doctors who make these glib statements and how I hate even more their gullible patients who believe every thing they are told. Dogs and cats have been domesticated for aeons and there is no evidence to suggest that keeping a pet is detrimental to the health of pregnant or non-pregnant humans.

Dog is only a year old (female, so if they don't spay her quickly they may have 7 or more dogs in total to cope with in the near future). Why, assuming they were going to keep to the national average and have two kids, did they get a puppy in the first place? Man is silent on this point, though I've guessed the answer – cute puppy bought on impulse for the child to play with. Now no longer cute, quite big in fact according to his description, also it barks too much at night. This is an additional reason for wanting to get rid of the dog which he slips in, since he fears I might not accept the first one. Further enquiries reveal why dog barks. Dog is now permanently chained and since feeble wife is no longer able to exercise it, it is clearly suffering from stress. Stress from being under-exercised, neglected and chained. Dog's only way to let off steam is to bark.

If this man had arrived a year before I would have strongly recommended, insisted in fact, that his family shouldn't contemplate keeping a dog. But since this problem has already become a reality, I have

to offer some kind of concrete solution. If I take the dog, sight unseen, I am committing myself to a responsibility of 15 years, plus all the costs and more that go with it. The chance of re-homing is slim given the thrown-away numbers we are dealing with. This also lets him off the hook and a year later they'll get another puppy and repeat the same cycle. Child (children) will grow up thinking dogs are disposable objects like most children in Japan do.

Take a risk and offer alternative solution. First and foremost neuter this dog so that their problems do not increase six or seven fold. Second, exercise is beneficial to pregnant women, beneficial to dog too so buy harness for dog rather than a collar (dog pulls due to lack of early training) and suggest wife takes dog for walks. If it is really beyond her, then husband can get up 30 minutes earlier in the morning and walk the dog instead. Third, either let the dog in the house so that it feels part of the family (as is right and normal), or build a fence in the garden so that it is free to wander around in its little territory and is less likely to feel stressed.

After all, pregnancy is not a chronic or terminal illness, there is an end in sight. But it is unfortunately an all too common excuse for throwing away a pet, aided and abetted by the medical profession. Are you pregnant? Or are you likely to become pregnant? May seem a pretty personal approach to a young couple coming in the hope of adopting a pet. If the answer is in the affirmative we just don't let them have one. This may seem a severe judgment but it's the only way to safeguard the future of animals we give away.

It's tempting given all the appealing canines we have here to want to adopt them into the 'family', i.e. into the inner circle of the house dogs. This isn't just a problem of space as one might think, although practical limits have to be taken into consideration. Regular guests entering the house by instinct know that they have to move with alacrity to secure themselves a seat or else face dislodging a disgruntled canine. Prime

seats, especially those by the stove are nearly always occupied. No, the biggest obstacle is the territorial mindedness and character of the dogs themselves. Once dogs have formed a group, they resent a new dog coming in which is why it's difficult to keep more than 3 dogs unless they form a natural family group, i.e. parents and puppies, or unless they are pack animals like hounds, Japanese dogs are worse than western dogs in this respect.

Recently I decided we could perhaps squeeze in one more, bringing the house tally to 9. Momo Two is a small pointer cross who spent her puppyhood creeping around a housing complex in search of love and food. Mostly what she got was a kick up the backside and missile hurled in her direction. She was an easy target for children to tease being so trusting. One day a blossoming middle school thug, cheered on by his macho dad, grabbed hold of her and snapped one of her front legs. This scene was witnessed by a housewife high up in the block who rushed down to rescue the mutilated pup. Although she had immediate surgery she will always walk with a limp. A disabled neighbour of her rescuer wanted her but his wife ridiculed him saying "you'd took stupid with a crippled dog". So she came to ARK. She is appealing to people until you mention her deformity and then their interest quickly fades.

Unlike humans dogs don't harbour discriminatory hang-ups. After a few warning growls she latched onto the canine rules of the house and has now found her own cozy spot. That means one less chair for guests.

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