

# Dogs



It's pretty clear they own him – and it stinks like a week old litter box. I'm talking about Democrat feature writer Mark Hinson and the feline lobby. He shamelessly promotes cats in his weekly column, slyly trying to endear us to these creepy creatures. I'm calling you out Mark. What's the deal? Those lobbyists feeding your catnip problem? Giving you free tickets to the Pussy Cat Dolls concert? We're onto you, you otherwise talented furball.

Every dog has its day my friend and that day's today. It's all about fair play.

You see, dogs know all about play. Cats? Not likely. Ever hear someone say “I'm going outside to play with the cat?”

Unlike cats, dogs are really versatile: You've got your house dogs and your yard dogs; huntin' dogs and sock-gatherer dogs; Lap dogs and bed-hoggers; little dogs that ride in Paris and Brittany's purses (probably cats in disguise) and real dogs like the soldier dogs serving in Iraq or K-9 dogs protecting us here at home and the beagles who work in the Miami airport bravely sniffing out contraband fruit and vegetables for our safety.

For me, dogs are an adult acquired habit; my wife, a former psychiatric nurse, says I suffer from dog deprived childhood syndrome. Like so many other victims, it's not my fault. You see, as a child my father was a mailman – back when they rode those slow, one-gear, one ton bikes. Pure dog bait. I had to settle for Lassie and Rin-Tin-Tin. For the longest time I thought dogs only came in black and white.

Let's go back to the matter of play. Now living with three labs, I've learned, to a dog, everything's a toy and, when they're home alone – its playtime. Imagine the fun of unstuffing the couch; the challenge of gnawing the leg off a dining room table or turning that tiny, upturned corner of wall paper in to a naked kitchen wall. Dogs enjoy equal opportunity fun: the new Cole-Haans just as engaging as your old Nikes. And you know she's been having a heck of a good time when she greets you at the door - dripping with syrup and covered in flower - after a fun filled afternoon pantry raid. Get that kind of entertainment *Felis catus*. No way. Dogs really know how to have fun.

Now talk about self assurance. What says social graces be damned more than a creature lying spread eagle on his back, a drooling tongue hanging out of his mouth, paws peddling the air, chasing a cat – or maybe my father -- in doggy dreamland.

You've got to admire a dog's agility and determination. Just the other day I was playing catch with our yellow lab Zoey. Tennis ball in mouth, happily scampering back, she deftly scoops up another ball -- barely breaking her stride - than skids to a dead stop. Intensely, she turns her head

from side to side, studing yet a third tennis ball hidden under a bush. Every lab owner (and I use the term “owner “loosely) knows what she’s thinking: “Sure my mouth is bulging with balls. But I can do this. It’s just one more. No big deal. No problem.”

But not all dogs are destructive – or exceptionally agile. Take Buddy, the dog formerly known as Prince (his name until we liberated him from big dog rescue.) At two, Buddy’s a sweet, loveable 80 lb black lab who’s well, not exactly a candidate for Mensa. He must have missed ball-catching day at lab school, “Buddy, it’s not supposed to bounce off your head. You’re supposed to catch the ball.” But offer him a treat and he’ll recite multiplication tables. And, puppy that he is, when it thunders, this big palooka slinks up to the top of the bed so he can wrap his lanky body around the safety of your head.

Growing up dogless has its benefits. I was spared the terrible sadness of knowing I’d outlive my friend. Sally, our third lab and the sweetest dog ever born is 14. She can no longer jump on the bed, which she accepts with dignity – while it tears at my heart.

I absolutely hate the expression “putting a dog down.” You put down a coffee cup or a newspaper, not a friend who’s given so much. “Putting your dog to sleep” might be a naïve expression, but it slightly lessens the awful pain of leaving the vets office, after you stood there, rubbing her head, as I did for our yellow lab Abby, as she sweetly drifted away. Yes, being there at the end breaks your heart, but at the very least she deserves it and together you find closure, knowing you’re a better person for having had her in your live.

Besides, all dogs go to heaven and before long, when you’re ready, another little ball of fur will come scampering into your life.

Because as a dog lover knows: there’s nothing softer than a dog’s ear, colder than a canine nose, toaster than a fur bearing foot warmer or wetter than a, “I’m up, you need get up so we can play,” lick . A cat? I don’t think so.