

We Don't Need No Stinking Leashes!

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
September 2014

Seriously, loose dogs are no joke



It totally caught me by surprise. One moment I'm taking in the neighborhood sights on a nice walk with my dog Queenie. The next moment -- *wham!* -- I'm flailing a Totes umbrella at an aggressive shepherd mix, fending off his attempts with one arm while awkwardly stretching out to its limits my other, pulling Queenie's leash as far away as I could from his determined teeth.

I could hear high-pitched squeals coming out of me -- "*No! No!*" -- more like those of a schoolgirl dodging the boy with cooties than a woman in real trouble.

I looked and sounded like an idiot, but somehow my undignified defense strategy worked. As I walked backward from the scene with Queenie in my arms, I kept a fixed gaze on that bad boy. I watched him cross the front lawn of the house at the end of the block. He looked defeated, head hanging, gagging on his own gurgling barks, and I wondered how the heck did we get out of that situation unscathed? Rattled, maybe, but not shredded.

Turns out he lives at that house, and he reacted to us entering his turf, his territory, his street. Problem is, he was loose, with nothing to restrain him from doing what he perceived was his duty. Practically speaking, he was a loaded gun ready to go off. Why was he running loose?

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The following day, a neighbor told me that this very dog sometimes gets out of the backyard and has gone after children playing on the block. His complaints had been voiced, but nothing changed until two days after my own close call, when a crew fixed the fencing. Maybe the dog owner was tired of playing Russian roulette, but I give him credit for making repairs.

Sadly, a dog running loose is not unusual in my Miami Shores neighborhood. I don't mean a stray or lost dog. I'm talking about an owned dog that's intentionally or unintentionally off the leash and not on the owner's property.

It's a rare day when I don't see a local dog padding around, and it's often the same dogs again and again. Even now, as I'm writing this, there's a loose dog on my street. I'll notice one as I'm backing my car out of the driveway. I'll notice one when my own pack dashes to the front window and barks up a hailstorm. One usually shows up on my daily constitutionals. Not lost, not stray, not abandoned -- just loose. Why?

Most people say their dog "somehow gets out." The excuses: broken fencing; holes dug underneath; climbing or jumping over; gates left open by meter readers and lawn services. These dogs are usually left unsupervised in the backyards, left to their own devices of escape.

Other people say their pet darts out the front door or back gate, slipping past them as it's being opened. Kids leave doors open, so out goes the pooch. Some folks don't even bother to go looking for Fido anymore, defending their decision by saying, "He always comes back home on his own."

Well, the truth is he *doesn't* always come back home. Sometimes a dog is hit by a car. Sometimes he's attacked by another loose dog on the street. He might be taken in by a good citizen, picked up by Animal Services, or simply wander too far to find his own way back.

Responsible people want to solve the problem of dogs getting out. They devote time and money toward ending this behavior, and for many, training and repairs don't come easy, but they're sincere in their efforts.

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Then there are other dog owners who think they have good off-leash control when they allow their dogs to have bathroom breaks or just hang around as they do yardwork, tinker with the car, or host garage sales. This works great until they're proved wrong.

Which brings me to those folks who live by the philosophy that a dog should run free at all times, on his own. My theory is that this stems from a "no fences" upbringing. These folks ignore leash laws, oblivious to dangers in the street. They don't even consider this behavior a problem.

Several years ago on my block, a stray was "hanging out" on the pontoons of a boat docked in the canal that runs behind our houses. After some detective work, I learned the dog's owners live a half-mile away. Their dog was left to roam, "but never ran away before," and yet he was gone for months. I returned the dog to his family and was reimbursed for a vet bill, but I noticed it wasn't two hot weeks before that dog was back running the streets.

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