

Advice on dogs, life and love



ask dog lady

your dear pet is named after children's book author, Dr. Seuss. "Hey, Seuss" is merely your way of getting your dog's attention. "Zeus" or "Toots" would also work with the requisite forename "hey."

Dear Dog Lady,

How come other dog owners are so age-obsessed? I have an old dog. She's a golden retriever who's 12. She still walks vigorously, eats voraciously and enjoys life. She has a bit of a limp, but I take her regularly to the vet who has told me the problem is manageable. I adore my dog. I am scared about her dying. That's why it makes me crazy when I am asked how old my dog is. I don't answer. I simply hold up my hand to silence the questioner.

—Teresa

Teresa, has it ever occurred to you that other dog devotees similarly struggle with their pets' mortality? This must be the reason we fixate on ages. It seems to be the first query whenever we meet another rover—even before inquiring about name, gender, or temperament. If the dog is older than ours, we are somehow assured. If the dog is younger, we worry a little. You're perfectly entitled not to answer the question—as you may be reticent to share your own age. However, Dog Lady encourages you not to become a cranky lady. Be maturely light-hearted about warding off the ageists. Think of a friendly retort. We must stay calm and centered about our dogs' swift senescence.

Dear Dog Lady,

I just bought a Cairn terrier, Deco, two weeks ago. He is very cute and seems healthy. He is 12 weeks old. I bought him at the Pik-A-Pup kennel. They gave me papers that verify that he is registered in the ADR. My concern is that I have since heard this place is a dog mill. Could you please tell me if you know anything about this place? What could happen to my dog?

—Roberto

Roberto, Dog Lady understands your concern. Any puppy sales kennel is suspect. For the record, Dog Lady knows nothing about this place.

As long as your Cairn is vaccinated and totally checked out by a veterinarian, don't look back. Let's assume you didn't know any better. People buy dogs all the time from pet stores and puppy mills despite the warnings. Dog Lady will not wag her finger about this because she believes it's a happy event however a dog comes into your life. Often, a sane, healthy home can overcome a bad breeding background.

Don't worry about pedigree and take no stock in the ADR—American Dog Registry—certification, which is like a diploma from a matchbook university. Do pay attention to Deco's training, temperament, and physical welfare. Enjoy your dog. Even if the place was a puppy mill, you rescued him.

Visit www.askdoglady.com to ask a question.

Dear Dog Lady,

How does my Shar-Pei Wilma select where to go to the bathroom? What criteria must be present? I don't understand why she is so picky about where she goes.

—Nisreen

Nisreen, you address one of the cosmic issues of the canine culture. Basically, they want to go where other dogs have gone, or where the earthy smells are most redolent.

Imagine your dog uses her pee the way a graffiti artist uses a spray paint can—to mark up the earth with signs: "Wilma was here." Dogs also want to put down their scent where another dog has gone and to cover over the other dog's essence. It's a very precise process, which only their noses know.

Dear Dog Lady,

I'm a rabbi who loves dogs. Oh, I love people too. But dogs have always had a special place in my flock. My wife and I had a golden retriever who died a few months ago. We were crushed after Molly passed, but we have decided to adopt another dog from a shelter that works with the Save a Sato Foundation in Puerto Rico. We have been through many interviews and passed muster. Our sato (slang for "street dog") will be arriving shortly and we are thrilled. There is one problem: As part of our agreement with the shelter, we must promise to keep the dog's name (they say changing it might cause undue stress as the dog adapts to a new home). His name is Jesus. I don't know how this will sit with members of my temple or with me, a nice Jewish boy from way back. Any advice?

—Bob

Bob, this has all the makings of a Jesus-and-a-rabbi-walk-into-a-bar joke. You must chuckle at the zany ecumenism of the situation. Remember, dog is god spelled backward.

The first name "Jesus"—commonly assigned to boys in Latino culture—is pronounced "hay-soos." If any of your congregants question the mutt's Christian moniker, you might explain (with a twinkle) that