

The Problem with People and Dogs

By Dennis Knight

The problem with people is they are people, and the problem with dogs is they are dogs. How the two ever managed to coexist is perplexing, but it is an affiliation that first formed when early man found wolves to be the better hunters, and wolves found people to be the better killers. Wolves would round up the quarry and humans would go in for the slaughter, fulfilling the compact by leaving a little something behind for the wolves.

People declared mastery over canines some thirty thousand years ago. This is evidenced by DNA tests on the remains of a Paleolithic dog found in a cave in Central Asia. Domestication began with wolf pups taken at an early age to be reared and socialized by humans, and eventually, the fox was bred into the mix, bringing traits of tameness and friendliness toward humans. Over the millennia, dogs began to serve people as guards, companions and sources of food and fur. In exchange, humans provided food and shelter.

People to this day continue to muddle with the dog by breeding them for specific behaviors and roles. There are now hundreds of models, coming in a wide variety of color and pattern, and ranging in height from six inches to the withers in a Chihuahua to thirty inches in an Irish wolfhound. There is no evidence, by the way, that dogs have ever interfered in such a way with human evolution, but it seems quite possible, given the current state of human affairs.

Along about the eighteenth century, the condescending human race proclaimed dog to be man's best friend. The French philosopher Voltaire said it first in 1764, "Of all the animals it is the most faithful; it is the best friend man can have."

So now I will get to the point of this essay, namely the problem with people and dogs.

Enter my little pal, a two year old beagle-dachshund mix of unknown history who adopted me just a couple of months ago. Meeka is acutely aware of her surroundings, wagging at mutts her own size, snarling any who are bigger, and forever chasing things she can't possibly catch, like robins, rabbits and bicycles. She is a beagle, after all, and nature has charged her with those tasks and provided her with the DNA to do them. The problem is she behaves like a dog, and that is not acceptable in my society of people who prefer to be addressed with courtesy, or at least without out barking or baring of teeth.

I believe my new best friend sees our relationship from a different point of view; that the problem with me is I am a people, a lumbering mass of one to boot, and if she didn't have me on a leash, I would fall miles behind on every journey. If I have value, it lies in providing a soft bed she can burrow into, and that I can reach the handle of the refrigerator.

Together we are trying to mold each other into our own image. I don't bark in her presence, and when she does in mine, I admonish her gently. I don't chase bikes, either, and if she does, I tug her ear persuasively. I must be a good teacher, because Meeka is becoming a model of good behavior on our sojourns, although bunnies, squirrels and humans in caps might not yet concur.

In the meantime, she continues to diligently model the wondrous art of sniffing and tracking, nose to the ground, her rear end often outpacing her front. She hopes to bring me along as an apprentice, and I am paying attention, but I have yet to pick up the scent, and so far all I've accomplished is a whole new set of allergies.