

How a One-Year-Old Dog Destroyed My Age-of-Wisdom Belief

By Irv Sternberg

If wisdom is the application of experience, knowledge and good judgment, then one would think elderly people possess more wisdom than anyone. After all, they've lived long enough to acquire more experience than their juniors and long enough to accumulate a vast knowledge of many things. And, one would think, long enough to make the kind of thoughtful decisions we like to think elderly folk always demonstrate. For those reasons, some societies, especially Asian cultures, revere their old people and seek them out for guidance on difficult matters. Western countries are less likely to view their elderly in the same fashion. Here in the West we believe the Age of Wisdom comes much earlier.

So what is that age? Is it when we complete our formal education? Is it when our children marry? Is it when celebrate a half-century of marriage? Or doesn't it arrive until we start making pre-funeral arrangements? Then we can say, "Look how wise I am. I'm saving thousands by locking in a fee years before I die."

But hold on. Just as I was turning 90, when I should have been considered a candidate for reaching the Age of Wisdom, I made a decision that absolutely destroyed that belief. Envious of my neighbors who had canine companions to keep them company, I impulsively decided to adopt a dog. I found a good-looking dog on the Denver Dumb Friends League website and drove to their Castle Rock shelter to meet him. It was love at first sight. I signed some papers and found myself the owner of a border collie, black lab mix. I named him Buddy because we would be buddies until death parted us.

Three days later I was regretting my impulse. Buddy was a stray found in ranch country in northern Texas. Although he was estimated to be a year old, he was not housebroken. I became his maid, cleaning up his messes. He possessed enormous energy—and wanted to play all day long. I couldn't match his energy. His youthful spirit was unwilling to allow me time to write, meet other people, watch some TV, or take an afternoon nap. When I insisted on sticking to my routine, he barked at me, apparently telling me he was the Alpha dog in our home and I'd better start paying attention to him.

That's when I realized I had not reached the Age of Wisdom. My decision to adopt a one-year-old energetic untrained dog to live in an apartment with a 90-year-old man was the dumbest decision I made all year. In his play, *As You Like It*, Shakespeare says "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool." Fortunately, my son took Buddy off my hands, thus saving this old fool.

So when *will* I reach the Age of Wisdom? I have no idea. Obviously, I'm not that wise.