

Perhaps, it's time to get a dog of their own

By Esther Baird

Wed Jan 30, 2008, 06:31 AM EST

Beverly, Mass. -

BEVERLY, MASS. - Both my husband and I come from dog families. As growing children we experienced all those great doggy benefits: Exercise, times outdoors, and the tried-and-true responsibility of caring for a living creature. But now we have two young children, and we're good on those fronts. Really.

That said, last Sunday we had a dog for about three hours. Not just any dog, but a huge, handsome Bernese mountain dog.

I was carrying our baby out of church — she had reached her nursery limit. My plan was to sit in the car and listen to NPR while she dozed. But nothing alters a plan quite like a gigantic dog staring at you from the sidewalk.

It happened that one of my husband's favorite boyhood pets had been a Bernese. So on behalf of his childhood, and because the dog's eyes said that it was lonely and perhaps a bit hungry, I reached down and gave it a scratch. That sealed the deal. It followed me to my car.

I buckled my baby into her car seat so that I could take a look at the dog's tags. The Bernese seemed amiable to me holding its collar, but indicated it would be even more upbeat about things if I'd share the teething biscuits and cheese stick it had spotted in my diaper bag.

While it snacked, I read the tags. They included a registration I.D., but no address or phone number. I looked at the dog. I'd fed it everything in my diaper bag and there were still a good 30 minutes 'til the end of church. There was only one clear option. I opened the front passenger-side door: "Hop in!"

It was obviously well trained, but even a good Bernese could be startling to a 10-month-old baby if said dog suddenly bounded into the back seat. To keep that from happening, I followed it into the passenger seat so that I could continually hold its collar. This meant that I then had to climb over the Bernese to reach the driver's seat. If you've not tried this yourself, let me be the first to tell you that a grown adult and a Bernese mountain dog do not easily co-occupy the front of a Honda Accord. Dog hair abounded.

Finally we were all in our own seats. I turned on NPR and rested my hand on the Bernese. I felt calm and relaxed. It is hard to worry when a big dog is smiling at you.

I did, however, wonder how on earth I was going to explain this situation to my husband and daughter when they came out of church. While our 3-year-old is not really scared of dogs, she also isn't used to them, especially giant ones that appear in her car after Sunday school.

When church ended, my husband and daughter approached the car from the back. The dog had fallen asleep and was lying down so that from the outside of the car it was not visible. Our baby had also fallen asleep leaving me to announce the presence of the massive dog as quietly as possible.

I lowered my window a few inches and began to make wild motions with my hand attempting to point my husband to the dog. He waved back. I began hissing, "There's a *dog* in the car."

"I see that she's asleep!!" My husband hissed back, assuming that I was gesturing about our baby. "No!" I threw myself into my whisper. "*There. Is. A. Dooooog. In. The. Caaaaaar.*"

"We're being quiet!" he replied, beginning to sound a bit exasperated.

I gave up the whisper. "DO YOU SEE THE GIGANTIC DOG IN . . ." Everything happened at once. My husband opened the driver's side rear door and my daughter absentmindedly began to climb in. The dog woke up and stuck its huge furry head into the back seat. Our 3-year-old jumped and screamed, our baby woke up, and my husband stood there staring.

"There's a dog in the car?!?"

Once all the hair had settled, we drove home – just another happy family with two kids and a dog. Later that morning my husband was able to reach animal control and they, in turn, were able to identify the dog's tag number. And so our dog ownership morning came to an end. But not before we first had some good family exercise romping with it in the living room, got some great fresh air standing around with it on our porch, and felt responsible, and therefore a little sad, when we had to say goodbye.

Esther Baird is a Beverly writer. Her column appears regularly in the Citizen. Please contact her with suggestions or comments about The Baird Facts at: esther@estherbaird.com, or visit her Web site at: www.estherbaird.com.

Comments (5)

Susan, Carlisle, MA

2008-01-31T01:26:37

I loved your story about the Bernese Mountain Dog. They are wonderful loving dogs. I have a newly 2 yr. old Berner named Sophie. She is a gentle giant and well-loved family member. I hope the owners of the dog appreciate your rescue efforts. Berners are known for wondering and sometimes getting lost. Do ask the owners to be more watchful of their dog. Otherwise they could lose their dog forever. A sad thought. I hope you get a Berner for your family. I think you would be wonderful Berner owners. Berners love small children. I have never had a bad experience with a BMD. All the best.

Amy Nielsen, Norfolk, VA

2008-01-31T02:14:08

I also have the pleasure of being the guardian of 2 Berners and am soon to be a new mom. Berners are wonderful dogs and very fond of children. I am very glad you were able to share even a short part of your day with this wonderful breed! Hopefully the owners were appreciative of your caring for and returning thier BMD. I can't think of a better way to spend a morning than with a berner, NPR and a *sleeping* newborn!

Brenda Saunders

2008-01-31T12:03:16

I sat at my desk in my office, with a hugh smile on my face as I read your story. There is no better family dog, our 6 year old Berner, Dudley, is 130lbs of love. He adores our son, (who is 9 now). He is gentle.. calm and a complete sook. I hope your family decides on a Berner. Regards, Brenda, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Elizabeth, Rockport, MA

2008-01-31T17:32:04

The Berner community at large is most appreciative of your decision to help a Berner find his way home! There are FIVE in my house at the moment -- three of my own (all girls) and two boarding while their mom is on vacation (one girl and one boy). My three year old pushes his way through the furry crowd to get where he wants to go and my five-year-old delights in dragging the boy (SO much bigger than all the girls) around the house by his collar. Check out www.bmdcnv.org for more information about Bernese Mountain Dogs and events where you can meet LOTS of them in your New England area... For instance, the Winter Walk -- just people and dogs going for a walk in the woods and then gathering around cups of hot beverages afterward -- will be on February 9 in Hingham, MA.

Karyn, Chicago, IL

2008-01-31T19:59:48

I couldn't help but smile as I was reading your column. With a 1-year-old little boy and a 3-year-old Berner myself, I could just envision the day you shared with your new found Berner friend and the joy he probably brought to your kids that day (after the initial scream of course). I'm sure your older daughter is now asking for one. They are sweet. They love kids and they certainly turn a lot heads.