

Newly married, new house, new life, my dream coming true . . . wait. Something is missing. What could it be? A dog . . . yes, a dog. My own man's best friend. Well, it had to be a golden retriever. There was no doubt. How could you go wrong with such a gentle breed? Our Abby, my childhood golden, had been a dream, sweet, loving, loyal and faithful.

So new husband and I found our golden retriever. Rock it was. Rock and husband bonded. Rock and I – well, as he grew he took his place in our little pack . . . husband, Rock, me. Not good. Alpha dog always thought I needed a reminder of my place. Especially at mail retrieval time. I'd head down the long drive; he'd see me, run and tackle me. Really! Then he developed the love of a good car chase. Nothing stopped him. All the training, discipline, love. Nothing! Rock or me? I'd say to my new husband, Rock or Me? Never make a man choose between you and his dog. Rock stayed, I stayed.

Time found us moved into the city with kid number two on the way. Rock took to chasing down people with dogs, pushing through the screen door. He'd tell those he terrorized he was the new dog in town . . . watch out! Owners holding their precious pup, staring me down as I apologized over and over while dragging Rock back home. Then a snap at a neighbor snapped me. Rock or me? I did not ask this time. Not so newly married, but yes, still married, new house, kids yes -- two now. But wait; something is missing. After talking husband into another go at it, a chocolate lab was agreed upon. All the labs I knew were cool, beautiful, loyal, sweet, laid back. The kiddie pool swam with chocolate lab pups; there he was; the biggest, sweetest of them all. Zeke and husband bonded. Zeke and kids loved to play. Me? I was the trainer, I'd be in control. First training class, Zeke thought it was Driver Ed training as he attempted to take over the driver seat with me still in it. Move over, mom, I can do it. Safely we made it. Oh, boy. Out of the van, pee . . . o.k., o.k., to the door. Whoosh! In we went. Everyone stopped and stared. Breathlessly I asked, Training class, right?

So we graduated, kind of. All the money spent on training did not stop Zeke from sniffing every single tree we passed on walks. Neighbors called out, Zeke taking you for a walk again? Ha!

When alpha dog was home (husband), Zeke was beautiful, mild, well behaved. Let husband leave and the games of keep away began. Shoes, mittens, a scarf, paper, whatever I needed; he would jump with it from couch to chair to couch. Ha, lady, you can't catch me. When my pjs were on, it seemed to him the best time to push through the gate or door and streak through the neighborhood, with me chasing, calling Zeke, come! Cooking dinner, phone rings, I'd turn around, Zeke would be erect at stove eating the taco meat as it cooked.

I started lying in bed each morning giving myself pep talks. Today is the day you will be alpha dog. Than I'd beg please let today be the day. Squirt bottles, taped lines for visuals so he'd know not to cross into stove area, on and on it went. My only reprieve was when I left for work.

It was not meant to be, me and a dog. It was too much, the neighborhood romps, the dinners destroyed, the kid's friend being picked up from swim play dates and announcing to their mothers, "Mom, Zeke ate my underpants." There was no place to hide underwear or socks. He found them; he ate them. He'd celebrate company by running through the house with toilet paper streaming wildly behind him as it unfolded madly from its holder.

My sanity was starting to be questioned, husband never witness to the madness I endured. Enough! A call was made; a home with a girl lab in a rural area would be the perfect fit for Zeke. Yes, there were tears . . . of joy, relief and of course sadness. I had failed again. My husband was mad. The kids disappointed, but they got it, they too lived in the madness with me.

Married . . . yes, still. Newly remodeled house, kids still two. Something is missing. I researched, I envisioned, I made a list, researched online. Mild, lovable, huggable, cuddly, not too little, definitely not too tall, had to have character and be submissive-- Yes, to me. My dog, not a puppy this time, a dog that I knew, could see, would be my friend. Take walks, not pulls around the block. Would love me as much as the rest of the family. Would not be an eater of socks and underwear or tissue. A basset hound. I knew was for me.

On a drive downtown, what did my daughter and I see walking down Main Street? A basset. Quickly I parked; hurry up out of the car. Nonchalantly we rushed up to the woman and her basset. I gushed, I petted. I questioned her on the dog's temperament. Sleeps a lot, walks daily, sweet, lovable, huggable, cuddly. My dog. She had my dream dog. Breeder's number I received via e-mail several days later. The number found its way to my wallet. Several weeks later I called on a whim, a hope, a need to find my dream dog. She had two males left from the same litter as the one we chased down on Main Street. They were 10 months old, not a puppy, puppy.

Potty trained yes! One was barky, had lots of energy, and a bit dominant. Next! The other was quiet, real submissive, he slept a lot, needed a house where he'd be the only dog. He currently lived with his brother, mother and father. He did not get a lot of love. The deal was made; we met on Hwy 96 near Ikea at the gas station. It was love at first sight. The cash and leash were exchanged. We hopped back in the van and bonded instantly. Archie, my dog, has become a part of me. He walks with me gently, a bit too slow at times, but I will never complain. He sleeps near me, is always by me or the girls if one of us takes sick on the couch. He loves to hug and cuddle. He makes me smile each day, and everyone else he meets smiles too. I, yes, I can have a dog. He will never leave me and I will never let him go. I earned him, let me tell you. The other dogs? I learned and grew from each of them, but with my Archie I am at peace and able to grow in other ways now.

Still married, same house, same two kids, nothing is missing.

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