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Blame It On The Dog

Sarah Banse

I hated the dog. I hated my husband John for bringing the dog into my house. I hated myself for saying yes to the dog and yes I think I may have even hated the kids for loving the big galoot. I know, hate is a very strong word. But it was what I was left with when I realized that Angus, the big brown dog, was part of my family forever.

I am not one of those women who agreed to get a dog to ready myself for motherhood. I am in the trenches with four children under the age of 11. When Claire was about 2-and-a-half and Jack was 5 I agreed to consider a dog. Two days later, the dog book arrived from Amazon.com. I agreed to the perfect breed - a spinone, an Italian hunting dog. There was not a puppy to be had in the Northeast for over two years. Before I could get that spinone puppy I had two more babies of my own. Tom, then Hugh 15 months later. When I called John to tell him I was pregnant with Hugh, his immediate reaction after shock was, "There goes my dog!"

Life was crazy, no one even dared mention the word. It did not go unnoticed however that the dog book quietly moved from John's to Jack's to Claire's bedside table. It was agreed that we would not speak of a dog until Hugh was out of diapers. Just my luck, the kid potty trained in a day well before his third birthday. As soon as the diapers were gone I started getting e-mails from animal rescue shelters. I said no. The e-mails kept coming. I was adamant - no, no, no, but I found myself taking time out of my busy day to look at the pathetic mutts. I started daydreaming of my many childhood hours spent with Oliver, a dumb, smelly, matted old English sheepdog. I'd bounce back to reality, but a little weaker in my resolve.

"Get a grip girl, be strong!" I'd think. But it was hard to be strong when you read your child's journal from first grade and day after day she writes about

the dog she doesn't have but the one that she would love with all her heart. Her teacher even asked me, "When are you going to get Claire a dog?"

Seeing another opening and a seal of approval from the public school system, John asked for my demands. I told him I would not even consider a water dog, one that shed, barked, or was not good with kids. I patted myself on the back thinking that I had dreamed up the ideal dog that does not exist. Two days later, the Rhodesian Ridgeback book arrived. Much to my horror, the breed seemed to meet all my demands and John had found a dog in Maine. I said no. We weren't ready, maybe next summer. John didn't push but quietly kept at it, hoping I might break down.

He picked up the dog in August while he had two weeks off from work. It wasn't so bad. Angus was a cute puppy. But then John went back to work and I was in charge of everything - dog, kids, house. I was a mad woman, ranting to anyone who would listen. How could I send him back? I couldn't even complain to my mother because she told me so.

I had to get a babysitter so I could walk the dog. I was stuck out in the woods every day with a dumb hound. After about a month it dawned on me. I am stuck out in the woods with a dumb hound. The forest was quiet. The dog didn't talk back or interrupt. He even came back when I called him. I was able to think. I found my voice. I stumbled upon unexpected peace in the woods.

The chore started to become a luxury. I looked forward to hearing my footsteps among the leaves, the pant of the dog, the silence of falling snow and the ice shifting on Farrar Pond as it melted. Like most mothers it took the needs of another to get me to act. In taking care of Angus I have taken care of myself. He still annoys me when he chews my shoes, or I step in dog poop in the yard but now I look forward to my daily reprieve. I have found myself and I have the dog to thank.

Sarah Banse is a writer and mother of four. She has been a Wayland resident for 10 years.