

GRANDPA GOT A DOG... OH, NO!

BY EMILY YOFFE

Say it with me: "I'm an Adult Child of a Dog Lover." Don't worry: You're not alone. When we ACDLs were growing up, our parents were just like all moms and dads in the '60s or '70s. That is, they neglected us. If we had a fever, they told us to "shake it off." They left us with baby sitters—a lot. Then we grew up and had their grandchildren, and they got a dog. Our parents realized that their laissez-faire attitude toward raising us would never do for Fifi, who is so sensitive. And, sure, the grandchildren were nice enough, but they didn't have the distinguished bloodlines of Babycake.

In *Me Talk Pretty One Day*, David Sedaris sums up the experience of all ACDLs when he describes returning home for a visit and finding his parents had gotten a Great Dane they named Melina: "They loved this dog in proportion to its size, and soon their hearts had no room for anyone else. In terms of mutual respect and admiration, their six children had been nothing more than a failed

experiment. Melina was the real thing."

Holidays are particularly trying times for ACDLs, as we try to get our parents to leave the dog for a couple of days and come see us. Our parents are largely unconvinced by our assurances that the local kennel is no worse than the summer camp they sent us to. This has been the situation of my friend, Laura, whose father, Larry, is obsessed with his German shepherd, Princess. (She is one in a long line of Princesses, making their family history sound like a Gabriel García Márquez novel as retold by a German shepherd.) For years Larry's routine was to fly from Michigan to Washington, D.C., the night before Thanksgiving, have the meal with his three grandchildren, then be back at the airport Friday morning flying standby, because he couldn't bear to leave Princess to the callous kennel employees who wouldn't understand her pancreatic condition.

One year Larry did go on a ski trip with his grandchildren, but only because his wife agreed to stay home and baby-sit Princess. Then Laura's husband, Jon, accomplished the near impossible and got both grandparents to join them for a short family holiday cruise. Larry had a great time and wanted to do another one, though he asked Jon to find a ship that accepted dogs. Talk about a poop deck.

Another friend's parents left their son's wedding reception early—never to return—because they had to get back to their hotel to walk their dachshund, Argyle. (At least the hotel allowed dogs. Otherwise they probably wouldn't have made it to the wedding at all.) My friend reports that her father spends hours throwing sticks for Argyle but can't recall him ever playing catch with her brothers. (Argyle's name and breed have been changed—to protect the spoiled.)

I am the oldest of four children and when we were growing up we had a German shepherd named Brandy. My mother's fondness for him was mitigated by the fact that he was yet another small being underfoot who wanted constant food and attention. Eventually we left home, Brandy died, and my mother, now single, got her own dog, an Akita she named Yojimbo. My

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