

The Backyard Puppy

I was sitting at my kitchen table having a hot cup of tea first thing this morning, probably about 7 am. As I was glancing at the potential weather condition wondering what the day's attire would be, I noticed my next door neighbor putting her dog out in her backyard for the day. At the time it wasn't particularly concerning because it was something that she has done everyday for the last month.

This day however was gearing up to be slightly different than the other. The sun was preparing to send down rays of exorbitant amounts of heat. Today the temperature would reach 101 degrees. The unfortunate thing was that the neighbor had no idea that this was going to be the case, although common sense would have indicated such as it was indeed the beginning of summer.

As the day progressed I watched as the 8 month old puppy act completely frantic with fear., fear of being alone, fear of loud noises, fear of anything that moved. It was painful to watch a young puppy become so stimulated that the only thing to do to appease this innate need for companionship was to create self destructive behaviours. These self destructive behaviours were what the puppy needed to reduce and relieve the stress that he was feeling.

First I watched as the puppy sat in the back yard and howled, barked, whined and howled some more. This went on for about an hour full stop. No breaks in between, and like a small child that gets himself into hysterics, the puppy eventually wore himself out and lay down for a nap. The nap did not last long however as the children on the backside of my neighbors property came home for lunch. Unfortunately these were not the most angelic of children and they do not like the noise that the puppy makes while outside. The children, not having been taught to respect animals and as children do, started playing and screaming in their

back yard. Puppy was confused and thought this was both scary and fun so felt the need to be both defensive and playful. He began barking and running the fence. The children found this to be entertaining as well. They began to chase the dog, throw sticks over the fence, yell and who only knows what else happened when no one was looking. As the days prior to this were all the same, puppy was slowly developing a very serious dislike and hyper "attachment" to children. The neighbor couldn't understand why the puppy was becoming increasingly more difficult to walk and why the puppy had started lunging on his leash every time he saw a child.

As this particular day progressed from lunch to mid afternoon the sun was getting very hot and puppy had drank all the water in his dish within the first 2 hours of being outside. What he didn't drink he had knocked over, so now at 1pm he was out of water and still had 5 hours to go. When I looked out at 2pm he was in a distressed state and frantic. He had dug craters all throughout the yard in an attempt to escape from the direct sunlight. He had also chewed the legs off the rattan patio furniture from sheer stress.

At 3pm the high school kids came home and as the puppy was so desperate for company that he decided to try and make friends. He started barking with the hopes of eliciting some response to these almost adults. He was ignored at first but the noise was unbearable. The teenagers were eating chicken wings and thought there would be no harm in throwing a few bones over the fence to the puppy. After all poor puppy must be starving! Well by the time 4 teenagers were done eating 30 some wings between them, puppy had had about as much as his little body could tolerate. Luckily none got lodged in his throat but in 24 hours he would have the worst case of acute pancreatitis a puppy could have. Threatening to end his short precious life.

The Backyard Puppy (continued)

But before that is to happen, the teenagers decide that perhaps since the puppy was lonely, they would come and let him out of the yard. They borrow a leash from their house and attempt to take puppy for a walk.

Puppy was super excited so he pulled and jumped while on the leash. At one quick as lightening moment the puppy pulled loose of his collar an bolted down the street. After much chasing and stress the puppy escaped, not to be seen again!

So by the time my neighbor comes home from work after a mere 8 hour absence, she is presented with a missing puppy - He is nowhere to be found. Panicked she calls her neighbors, the police, the local vet and animal control. Luckily for puppy, animal control called several hours later saying they had her dog. She paid a hefty fine and brought him back home.

When the neighbor takes in all that has happened, she doesn't automatically hit herself over the head for being so irresponsible and inconsiderate. She instead blames the puppy for being a handful and unmanageable. He is rushed to the vet and given care and medication for the injuries incurred but has to remain in the hospital for a few days to help with the pancreatitis and bee sting, as well as the poison that was ingested from the deadly nightshade.

Total bill including replacing the patio furniture, repairing the fence, and fixing the landscape -

Nearly \$2000.00!

As you can probably imagine this is a fictitious story BUT the points made are not untrue. This can and does happen all the time.

You can avoid any of the potential scenarios mentioned above by securing puppy in a safe place such as a crate, behind a barrier and/or hiring a dog walker for an afternoon potty break.

Before you question the cost of a dog walker perhaps you should ask yourself that if you cannot offer this to your puppy because of cost restraints or other financial obligations, maybe now is not a good time for a dog.

It is never a safe option to leave you dog unsupervised at anytime, you just never know what could happen.

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A student of Animal Behavior/Nutrition and Alternative Medicine since 1990. She has studied at Guelph University in Canada, Glasgow University in Scotland and attended the British institute of Homeopathy. Erika has bred, raised and competed with many breeds of dogs in all aspects of dog sport. She currently consults on Animal Nutrition, Animal Behaviour and Alternative Health , including herbs and homeopathy and owns The Controversial Canine. She currently resides in Ontario, Canada.