

Sleeping between Giants

Life, If You Could Call It That, With A Terrier

Book I: Budleigh, The Early Year

by

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Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author who is weak from hunger, infirm with age, and lacking in friends.

*To Denise who knows why,
Maureen Dowd, who probably doesn't,
and Oxford, who couldn't have cared less.*

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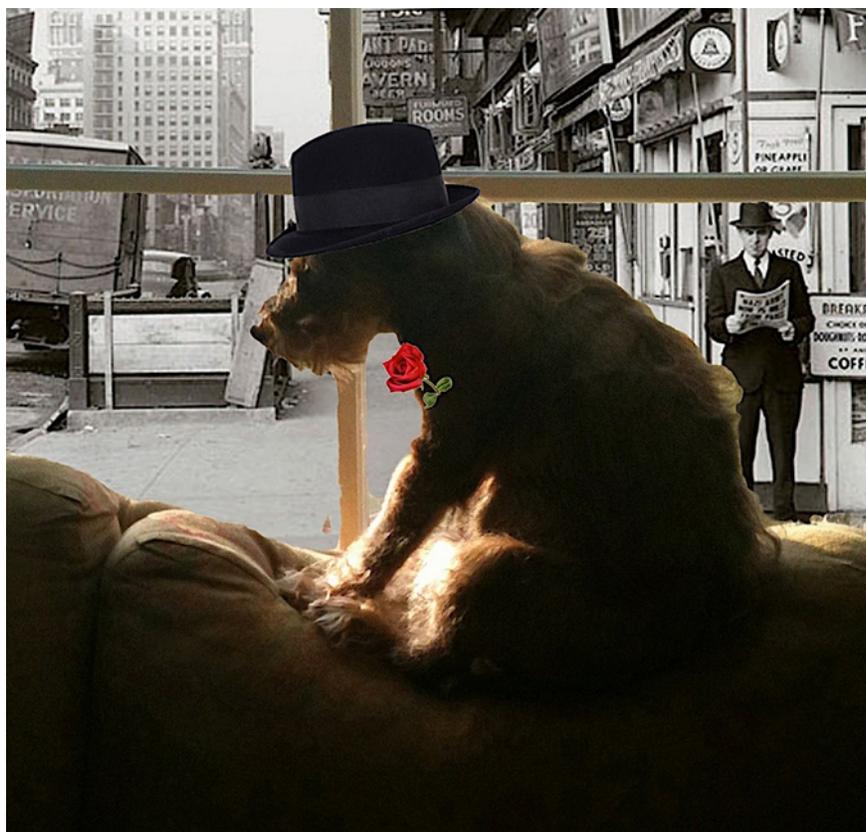
Introduction

Adopting a Dog: It Takes a Village. Also a Pooper Scooper

We rescued a terrier, although why anyone would is beyond me.

Terriers are what dingos strive to be – wild dogs semi-domesticated because there's something in it for them. Terriers are the The Joker of the animal kingdom.

Yet my wife and I chose a terrier. We felt obliged to our formerly alive terrier Oxford, a young thug who matured into a dignified, coldly ruthless mob leader lacking only a fedora and Miami tan. His rule was paternal and loyal but arrogant. He passed away to a kidney ailment although he'd have preferred withering under police machine gun fire in a Chicago alley.



Our formerly alive terrier Oxford left his indelible mark on all of us.

But mostly me as tooth-shaped scars.

He left behind his muscle, Brisby, a German schnauzer-French poodle mix ever at odds with himself. Now with no one to guide him except a couple of pet owners who just

didn't "get me", Brisby risked succumbing to a lifestyle of violence, drug addiction and madness.

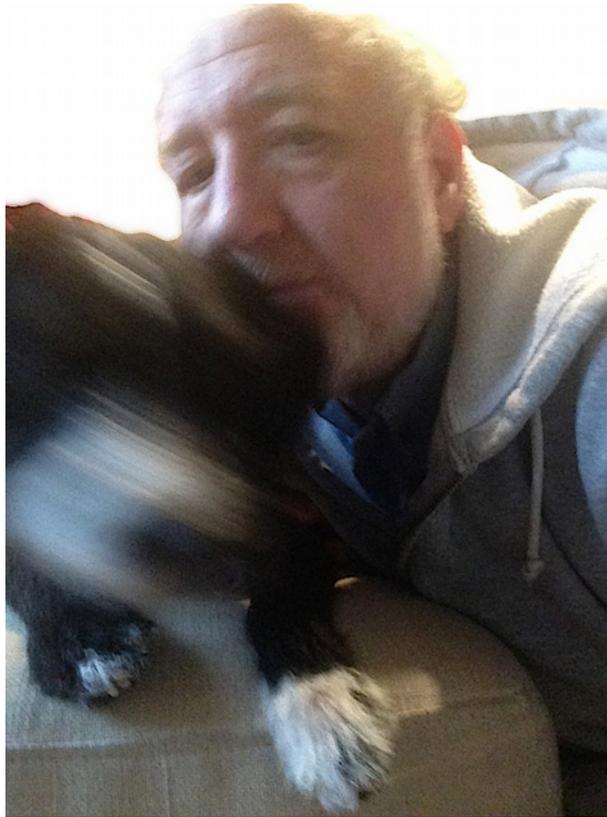
So we got him another little thug.



Displaying his fearsome, unbridled fury, look upon Brisby the Schnoodle and despair!

Choosing to adopt a homeless dog is not an easy decision, and frankly, Sarah McLachlan isn't helping. It's not that I don't want to rescue an abused animal that's pretty much just a snout, a collar and half a paw. I just don't have the emotional strength. I've always acquired my dogs from well-established, responsible breeders that I've never heard of except afterwards when they appear on the national news.

Going the shelter route was our way of giving back to the community without actually giving anything back. The dogs are bargain-priced to move. Our veterinarian offers a steep discount on the initial checkup. Friends and family treat us like heroic characters from a Dickens novel.



Terriers are energetic dogs that, with the proper diet and training, can vibrate through walls.

On April 30, National Adopt a Shelter Pet Day – a significant holiday that falls between Hairball Awareness Day and International Turtle Day – we located a very social, black-and-white, cow-eyed terrier, less than a year old. We bonded immediately, brought him into our fold, and within weeks he'd hacked our passwords and begun siphoning our accounts. But he was housebroken.

Young Budleigh has enriched all facets of our lives, with the exception of footwear. For those considering adopting a shelter dog, here are a few tips to make the transition easier:

1. All shelters name their dogs “Bandit”. No one knows why. It’s OK to change it.
2. Like Congress, not all shelter dogs are housebroken. This is easily managed with a pooper scooper and an educated, informed electorate.
3. There really *is* a Hairball Awareness Day.
4. Acquaint yourself with the many dog breeds so you know what to expect. Retrievers, for example, make excellent companions, but have become so popular that our nation is rapidly running out of things to retrieve.

5. Ensure an ideal match by carefully evaluating a shelter dog's behavior when you first meet. Is he wiggly and lickety or does he just hand you a business card? The former might be great with children, the latter a potential corporate investor.

Like many first-time adopters, my wife and I feared we'd be overwhelmed by the responsibility of raising a rescue dog. Yet Budleigh has proved no more a challenge than if we'd both pursued medical degrees.

All dogs want is to love their people and fit into the pack. Dog owners just need to commit a bit of time and patience and they'll be rewarded with a wiggly, lickety, devoted little buddy, or at very least a reliable corporate investor.

Chapter I:

The Acquisition

Happy Father's Day. Welcome to *My Pack!*

**In
the
Beginning
or
Shortly
After...**



Black Dogs: Danger...or Menace?

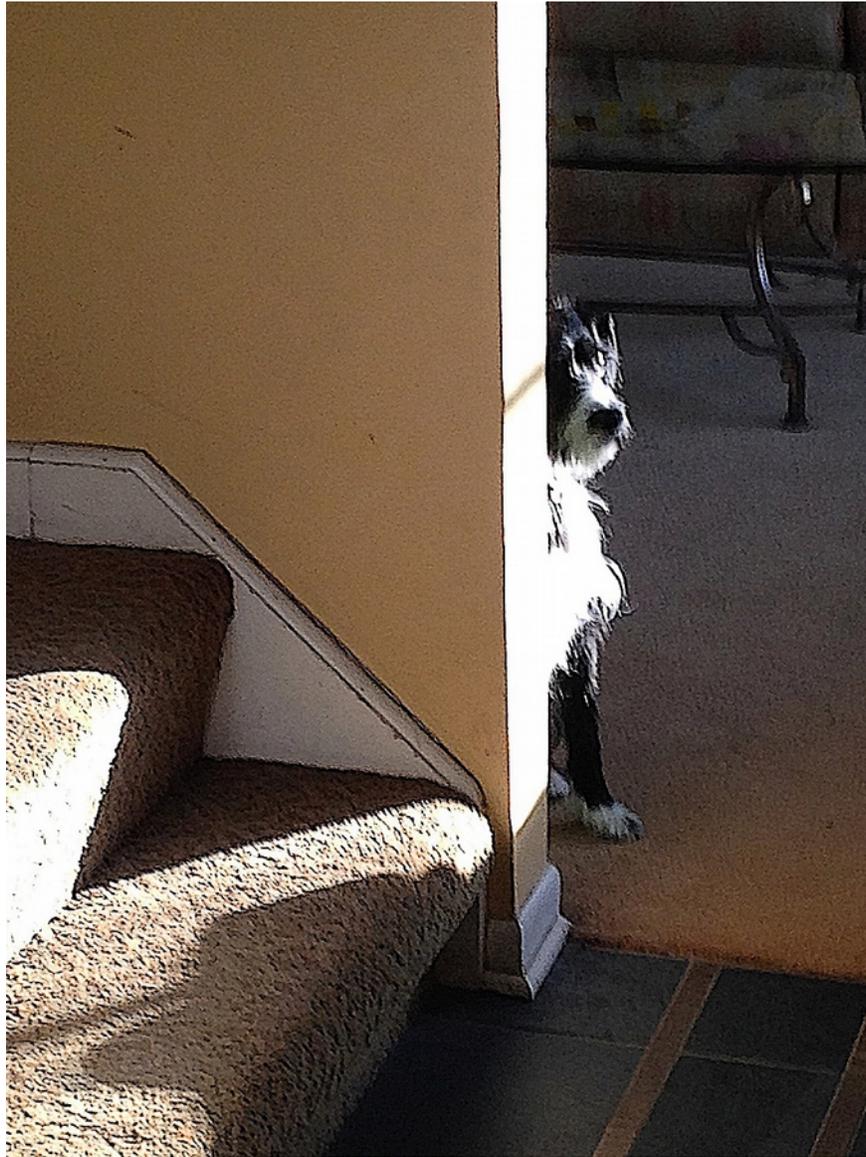
Black dogs tend to be passed over for adoption because they are associated with evil. Yet studies have proved that relatively few actively worship Satan.

This Black Dog Syndrome, as it's known to its advocates, would have black-furred shelter dogs adopted less quickly than lighter-colored ones. Despite strong anecdotal evidence from animal shelters that this stigma is real, Science has yet to be convinced.

"Controlled tests need to be conducted," insists Science in that high-pitched, nasal-y voice that makes you want to push Science's head in the toilet. "If it can't be measured, then I can't build an app and make money. And this research crap is killin' me! You know how old my car is?"

Yes sir, right down deep in the toilet!

At the root of this supposed phenomenon is a diversity of conflicting explanations: Black dogs are shunned by the superstitious. Films and television portray them as vicious. A black dog killed my parents.



Watching, waiting, plotting, Budleigh knows that eventually we have to sleep.

However, just as compelling is evidence that suggests coat color is only a minor consideration of dog adopters. Shelter dogs are adopted in nearly equal numbers whether their coats are black, light, brindle or, as in one study, transparent. This last came from a survey group that “thought it would be cool to watch blood circulate.” That group was hurriedly ushered from the test facility, and their names forwarded to the National Security Administration.

So how does one know if a black dog would be a good choice? To determine that, let us leave the realm of the analytic and focus our attention on an area of study I call “me”.

When we first met Budleigh, our vicious, Satan-worshipping, parent-killing terrier thing, I was unaware of the stigma surrounding black dogs. Kelly, the lovely lady who

runs the homeless animal shelter, praised this smart, social, high-energy little fellow while he vibrated around the room, occasionally phasing between dimensions.

During our conversation Kelly mentioned that dogs like Budleigh can be difficult to place. I asked why.

“Well first, because he’s black.”

“Ah HAH!” I snapped, nodding with Anderson Cooper clarity. “Isn’t that just typical of The Man?”

“Sorry?” said Kelly, puzzled.

“Well, it’s just like Ferguson. And Selma.”

“Oh...heh!” Cautiously, Kelly edged herself between me and Budleigh.

I felt the conversation coming unmoored and tried to clarify without actually explaining.

“I mean, you see it in the news, right? People protesting. And they should! Not just on CNN. I watch all the coverage, of course. Because I’m fair. Oh, and balanced! Very, very balanced.”

I was like a man at a dinner party who confidently leaps into a debate on gun control, or religious persecution, or why Donald Trump’s a dick only to realize, late, that the topic is Justin Bieber.

And from Kelly’s tight but polite smile I suspected that I wasn’t getting a dog of any color.

“Anyway, my point is that he’s a very, very talent singer, but troubled,” I concluded. “Soooo...back to dogs.”

“Yes,” she said. “I was saying that black dogs aren’t as popular as the light-colored ones. Also, this little guy’s a terrier. And they’re a handful.”

“A terrier?” I gushed. “I love terriers! Terriers are wonderful!”

Some of my best friends are terriers! For God’s sake, mouth, don’t say it! Don’t!

“I’ll take him, Kelly. Wrap ‘em up!”

There are many advantages of a black terrier, none of which benefit their owner.

Chief among a terrier’s assets is stealth, just after teeth, speed, cunning, intelligence, stubbornness, and what passes for “adorable”. So stealthy is this breed that, according

to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, every American is under constant covert scrutiny by as many as 17 terriers, all hoping their subject will turn into a rabbit.

Our formerly alive terrier Oxford, Budleigh's predecessor, used stealth the way a seascape painter works with blue. He would shimmer into a room, take on the color of his surroundings, and sit quietly for weeks until I set down my toast. Then he'd evaporate, along with the toast and my fingers up to the knuckle.

Budleigh's black fur renders him a far more effective operative. He's all but invisible in photographs. Shot against a black attaché, the viewer sees only a black attaché with delightful little white paws. With eyes closed, his head becomes a featureless black ovoid much like the acid-spewing Alien, only with more teeth. Walking him at night, I hold a leash attached to a murky darkness that pees a lot.



Natural selection favors Canines indistinguishable from laundry.

Budleigh is Dracula. And his Prince of Darkness shtick is really pissing off the townspeople.

GIANT TOWNSPERSON 1: "Hon, I can't find Budleigh. Have you seen him anywhere?"

BUDLEIGH: "Hi!"

GIANT TOWNSPERSON 2: “No, but I’ve been here folding laundry. Is he under the bed?”

GIANT TOWNSPERSON 1: “Hard to say. It’s dark as a Chilean mine. Budleigh! Budleigh boy!”

BUDLEIGH: “Am I under there?”

GIANT TOWNSPERSON 1: “I can’t see him. Torches! We need torches!”

GIANT TOWNSPERSON 2: “Or maybe just a flashlight and peanut butter?”

GIANT TOWNSPERSON 1: “And crosses!”

BUDLEIGH: “Can you see me? I can see you!”

GIANT TOWNSPERSON 1: “OK, he’s not under the bed. And he’s not outside and he’s not shut in any rooms. So where...?”

GIANT TOWNSPERSON 2: “Dave, is that pile of black yoga pants wagging?”

GIANT TOWNSPERSON 1: “Budleigh! Has he been lying here all this time?”

BUDLEIGH: “I could have taken your toast! Also your fingers up to the knuckle.”

Fake News About Shelter Dogs

Cautious to avoid red tape and complicated forms, prospective pet owners often steer clear of adopting shelter dogs. However, the process is no more difficult than purchasing a pair of last season's jeans that, without your intervention, would have been euthanized.

Budleigh is our first shelter dog. Previously, our dogs were factory-produced schnauzer/poodle mixes and, in one case, a complicated terrier thing that embarrassed the breeder. Budleigh is a composite of several kinds of terriers with maybe a border collie thrown in to run the controls. Three of his paws are white, as are patches of fur on his forehead, chest, and muzzle, and a ruffle around three-quarters of his neck.

The rest of his coat is a deep black so rich as to render him invisible to the most sophisticated night surveillance equipment. The Department of Defense has implored him to reveal this technology, but, you know, what's in it for him?

"He's a really social little guy. Smart, too," said Kelly, the shelter lady who introduced us.

"Where is he?" I asked.

"Sitting in front of you. Here, you'll need these special glasses."

"Nope! Still nothing."

"Look off to the side. In your peripheral vision."

"No...no. Wait! I see a hazy, pulsing darkness. With three white paws."

"That's him!"



**A drawback of shelter dogs: You never know how big they'll grow.
Some, of course, go the other way.**

Animal behaviorists warn that a shelter dog wielding a cloaking device can pose special challenges for its adoptive family. Also challenges for half a loaf of cornbread left on the table in a dark kitchen. But who could blame Budleigh? The streets taught him that talk is cheap, life is tough, and you don't get much cornbread.

Budleigh's adjustment to our family and we to him has been seamless, aside from the common misunderstandings about the value of shoes and the correct interpretation of "Get off the bed!"

Yet, because of misconceptions about shelter dogs, many perfectly acceptable canines are often overlooked, even though they can be a wonderful addition to any family that's not too attached to cornbread.

Myth #1: Dogs in shelters are criminals. Or illegal aliens. Maybe both.

Often unfairly labeled as “bad dogs”, few shelter animals have ever been convicted of a crime, with the exception of retrievers. And usually those are just tennis-ball-related misdemeanors. However, the stigma remains. Much of the public believe shelter dogs were seized in police raids, or ran in wild packs, or sought vigilante justice against the mobster who murdered their family.

Sorry! That last one was Batman.

Dogs that end up in shelters generally were given up by owners who could no longer house them, were not prepared for a large or energetic animal, or were just, you know, assholes.

Most dogs, then, are blameless, boasting spotless records and valid green cards, pending approval by the Department of Homeland Security.

Sadly, a few breeds are aggressive by nature and thus better suited to owners with advanced martial arts training. These include:

- Norwegian Klepto
- Bribe Hound
- Shorthaired Supremacist
- Irish Gunrunner
- Standard (or Miniature) Heist
- Portuguese Waterboard
- A bear

Myth #2: Shelter dogs are sickly and need lots of shots, and veterinary care, and grooming, and training, and a cage, and probably food.

Do you *really* want a dog? Maybe you're better off with a Roomba®.

When it comes to a dog's health, shelters routinely ensure that their animals are free of fleas, ticks and worms. As part of the adoption process, veterinarians often provide free spaying and neutering, and first-visit checkups. Also included can be vaccinations for rabies, kennel cough, heartworm, and DHPP, an acronym for North Atlantic Treaty Organization. A quick call to your local vet will reveal the best health plan to follow,

and why it's vastly superior to anything being considered by the majority Republican Congress.

Myth #3: With shelter dogs, you don't know what you're getting. Many are radioactive mutants, like in "X-Men".

True. And *cool!*

Myth #4: Other dogs will bully my shelter dog because he wears glasses and reads a lot.

Actually, canines at the dog park that can boast of a shelter background possess a certain caché, a swagger, a *je ne sais quoi* (French for "What's that in English?") that other dogs respect.

GOLDEN RETRIEVER: "You know, I retrieved some very interesting things this week."

PUG: "You've got to shut up! Just shut UP!"

LABRADOR RETRIEVER: "Shhhh! I want to hear this."

BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG: "Say, I once retrieved a—?"

STANDARD POODLE: "— a mountain!" Yeah, yeah, we've aaall heard it."

BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG: (*Quietly*) "I was gonna say 'ball'"

PUG: "Hey, you think the new guy's ever retrieved?"

STANDARD POODLE: "Don't know much about him. Keeps to himself. Once, I tried to pee on him. You know, kind of a 'How you doin'?' pee? But he just glared, kinda crazy-like. Brrrr!"

PUG: "Hey, new guy! C'mere!"

GOLDEN RETRIEVER: "Can I go get him?"

BUDLEIGH THE SHELTER TERRIER: "What'd'ya want?"

PUG: "You ever retrieve anything?"

BUDLEIGH: "Nah! Never had nothin' to retrieve. In...*the Shelter.*"

Dog chorus: "Oooooo!"

LABRADOR RETRIEVER: (*Aghast*) "Not even a shoe?"

BRISBY THE SCHNOODLE: “Or something with, I don’t know, peanut butter? I’m hungry!”

BUDLEIGH: “Nah! But I killed something, once.”

Dog chorus: “Oooooo!”

PUG: “What’jah kill?”

BUDLEIGH: “I don’t talk about it much. But it was *big*. And had fangs. And teeth.”

STANDARD POODLE: “Fangs *and* teeth?”

PUG: “Whoa!”

BUDLEIGH: “Oh, and wings. Also wheels.”

BRISBY: “And peanut butter?”

PUG: “Knock it off!”

BRISBY: “I’m *so* hungry!”

STANDARD POODLE: “Why did you kill it?”

BUDLEIGH: “Well, it didn’t give me any choice, did it?”

BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG: “It sure didn’t!”

LABRADOR RETRIEVER: “Bastards! They’re *all* like that, those big fang-and-toothed, wheel-winged, peanut butter...things.”

GOLDEN RETRIEVER: “Killing’s too good for them. They ought to be retrieved!”

BUDLEIGH: “Well, I’d like one to try to get near my new Giants! Next time, it won’t get off so easy as being killed!”

STANDARD POODLE: “Hey, can I pee with you?”

A Night in the Box: Crate Training the Convict Dog

How different the rules for crate training a dog would be had the Constitution of the United States been signed by Thomas Jefferson's hound, Monroe Doctrine.

JEFFERSON: "Good and reasonable gentlemen, with the signing of this treatise we forthrightly express the unity of Americans to cast off the oppressive collar that is the tyranny of Britain!"

FOUNDING FATHER PERSONS: "Hear-Hear!"

JEFFERSON: (*Stoops to affectionately cradle sleeping dog's head*) "And also cast off the oppressive collar that li'l Monnie's wearing. Who's a GOOD boy? You're not a tyrant! No, you're not! Oh, no you're not!"

BEN FRANKLIN: (*Quietly to John Adams*) "Has he had any sleep?"

ADAMS: "I'll get him more coffee."

JEFFERSON: "Ohhhh, Monnie's a GOOD American! Go fetch the quill! Can you get the quill?"

Crate training can be a very effective way to acclimate a new pet to your home. The method works better with dogs than, say, fish due to the porous nature of the bars. First-time puppy owners are sometimes reticent to crate train, thinking it cruel. However, dogs tend to take well to crates because by their natural instincts they are "den-dwelling" animals rather than "seed-bearing" or "conservative-leaning."