

'Dog lovers': a city menace?

Patrick D. Hahn

The other day I was strolling down Roland Avenue and I struck up a conversation with an elderly gentleman who was the proud owner of a lovely herb garden growing in his front yard. He told me once a woman brought her dog on a leash to urinate in his garden and he objected (more politely than I would have), saying “Madam, I eat the things that come out of there.”

Her reply: “Well, why would you plant a garden where my dog pees?”

I never cease to be amazed at the spectacular, planet-sized arrogance of some of this city’s dog owners. Aldous Huxley once said “To his dog, every man is Napoleon; hence the constant popularity of dogs.” That is all well and good, but when that Napoleon complex extends to non-consenting third parties, not so much.

I am referring to these folks who style themselves “dog lovers” and decide this requires them to purchase a huge “purebred” (read “inbred”) hound, or two or three of the same. They then feel entitled to allow their beasts to run wild in our city parks, off-leash — quite illegally I might add. They also expect passers-by to stop and try to appease their dog while it inspects them and decides if it is going to let them pass, and they seem genuinely surprised to encounter anyone who does not comply.

That last part is what I find most disturbing. Do people these days really have so little sense of their own honor and dignity as human beings that they are willing to drop whatever they are doing at a moment’s notice and let some random stranger’s dog invade their personal space?

And that is not even counting the dogs who come at me, growling, teeth bared, clearly intending to do me bodily harm. This is not an everyday occurrence, but it happens far too often. (And I am not the only one who encounters this problem: This city [now ranks](#) sixth in the nation for dog attacks on postal workers). I am a 200-pound weightlifter, and I can frighten off any dog that is not actually a trained attack dog — although it never seems to occur to the owners that I might not care to have my peregrinations interrupted in this fashion.

And what about people who are not 200-pound weightlifters — the very young, the old, the frail? Are they not welcome in our city’s parks? Sometimes it seems that way. The callous attitudes of some of this city’s dog owners bespeak a distressing estrangement both from one’s fellow human beings and from nature.

A few years ago, the city spent more than \$10 million on the restoration of Stony Run, one of my favorite places to walk. Am I grateful? Yes, I am. Was that the best use of funds in a cash-strapped city? I would be hard pressed to justify that to, say, a single mother who takes three buses just to get to her minimum-wage job — and even harder pressed to explain to her why a handful of folks are allowed to use the place as a giant toilet for their dogs.

A few years before that, Robert E. Lee Park (since renamed Lake Roland) was defiled by so many dogs doing their business the place was declared a toxic waste site by the Baltimore City Health Department. Baltimore County after leasing the park from Baltimore City actually had to dig up the soil and have it trucked to a landfill. And before they could do that, the taxpayers had to pay to replace a bridge to accommodate the weight of the trucks. Some people are going to look mighty silly if the same thing happens to Stony Run.

At this point, the dog owners will likely protest that if their dogs are not allowed to run amok in the city parks, they won’t have many options for them to play and exercise (Lake Roland opened a fenced dog area in 2011). But if the owners are not able to discharge their responsibilities without annoying others, do they have any business owning a dog at all?

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