

LEADER OF MY PACK
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Let me begin by assuring you that my dog is on the mend. Jeanette is a miniature beagle, bred to ride in the saddlebags of horses on the hunt. Her "saddlebag equivalent," she thinks, is the front passenger seat of my Subaru wagon.

When my kids and I drive away without her, her brain seizes with the compulsion to join the hunt. Jeanette has chewed through her crate and a fancy French door in her efforts to reach us. She digs under fences. She wriggles out of leads.

On a hot day recently, I didn't put Jeanette in her crate when we all left for the town pool. I knew she'd chew through it anyway so I left her outside. When she looked like she wanted to follow, I sternly said "No," put the pedal to the metal, and tried to outrun her with my car. Long after I thought we'd left her behind, we all felt a big bump. "What was that?" the kids asked when I slowed the car to a stop. With my eyes glued on the rear-view mirror, where I could see a small tri-color mass lying in the middle of the road, I blurted out, "I killed the dog". Well, not quite. I *almost* killed the dog. But with my pre-emptive announcement I *did* throw the children into a frenzy.

When I loaded Jeanette into my wayback, she was jerking her head, voiceless, an accusing jitter in her eyes. The children were not at all able to follow my suggestions that they not look and that they please quiet down and think wonderful thoughts to give Jeanette some peace. Kora, our 7-year-old friend, saved my sanity by suggesting that we all say, "Good girl, Jeanette." Ben, my 6-year-old sobbed the phrase like a mantra. Katie, my 10-year-old, wailed it angrily. The vet's office down the road was closed. I raced into

town, through a senseless traffic jam, and on, frantically searching for someone who could help.

And as I drove, I heard Kora tell Jeanette that her white light was getting brighter. And then Jeanette started to whimper. Softly. Then loudly. The dog that I thought had seconds to live had some animation by the time we reached a vet. She is now home from her week-long stay in an ICU. She has full control of the left side of her body and is gaining control of the right.

Everything happens for a reason, right? Well, no. But I am relieved to paraphrase Samuel Clemens. "The reports of Jeanette's death were greatly exaggerated." And I have learned a lesson, for which I am deeply grateful. As a parent, I am the leader of a small pack—the children (Katie and Ben), and Jeanette, our dog. Jeanette has taught me that a difficult pack member only gets more difficult if the leader gives up and fails to follow through on reasonable restrictions. Jeanette is now, quite literally, my constant and well-deserved burden (I carry her around in a baby sling) because she was never contained the way she needed to be contained. But if I've learned my lesson well enough, my sometimes difficult children will never suffer the consequences of my failing to say "No", mean "No", and enforce "No" ... no matter how strongly they rebel.

Because Jeanette escapes crates, fences, and leads, more than one friend has suggested that I rename her "Houdini." I won't. I may actually rename her "Consequences," though. "Consequences"—as in "We reap exactly what we, in our equivocations, sew". In flights of fancy I imagine myself standing on my back porch each night, gratefully calling my "Consequences" home.

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