

Surprise in the Grass

Ethan Chappell

Two weeks ago my home and serenity was forever changed by the adoption of a new puppy. Our half boxer, half golden retriever, "Martha," is now the center of my universe. My spare time is now occupied with staying one step ahead of those puppy teeth. In addition to dealing with the constant threat of random object destruction, I am working to develop the near sixth sense that lets a puppy owner know when its potty time. Living in a townhouse (townhome association) and potty training a new puppy is not without its challenges.

Growing up in rural central Texas, the dogs of my childhood lived on the porch and in the dog house. They came in the house every 5 years or so when we got a bad winter storm or every couple of years when one would get bitten by a snake. Once the storm broke or the wound healed it was back outside for the canine members of the family. Things are much different in the city. Martha will spend most of her days in the house waiting for us to come home. In fact, she will have to be leashed every time she leaves the house. After all, it is the law. Also, in keeping with the law and the rules of our Association, Martha's owners will have to pick up after her whenever nature calls or risk incurring a steep financial penalty. If only she understood what we do for her, perhaps she (and her teeth) would go easier on our sneakers.



As a country boy whose dogs always roamed free and took care to do their business far from the house, these legalities are admittedly a bit foreign to me. While at first I was upset by the notion of running around behind my pooch like so many of the stick figures in my neighborhood signs, I do not appreciate it when my shoe finds a surprise left behind by a less than responsible urban dog owner. This is not even, however distasteful, the biggest problem. The biggest or *smallest* problems, as the case may be, come in the form of the tiny microbes that can be present in the substance now attached to our favorite slippers - microbes that are "free to move about the country." Obviously, we are the transportation for these microbes as we unwittingly track up the carpet or the floor board of the truck. After a ground deposit from one of our precious pets, one good rain can make those little hitch hikers mobile. Carried by water, they go where all water goes... downhill. In no time, rain and irrigation water can carry fecal contaminants to our storm water ponds, creeks and streams, lakes and yes, even our drinking water reservoirs.

Last week, my beloved puppy was diagnosed with *Giardiasis*, “an infection of the intestines caused by the parasite *Giardia lamblia*. If you have spent any time in the back country or a foreign country you may know this often water born menace. According to the Division of Parasitic Disease at the Centers for Disease Control, *Giardia intestinalis* or *lamblia*, has become commonly recognized during the past 20 years as a cause of water born disease in the United States. It is found in every region of the country and throughout the world. Symptoms include upset stomach, cramps, nausea, diarrhea, and a host of additional complications that can last up to 6 weeks. *Giardia*, like *E. coli* and other fecal coliforms are most suited to the intestines of mammals, but can survive quite well in other environments for some time. This is, of course, how they are transmitted and how Martha was infected.

Known as “beaver fever” in some circles, giardia can be present in both wild populations and domestic animals. In many cases giardia does not present symptoms. This makes it very difficult to control. The best prevention techniques for humans are water filtration with a filter specifically approved for giardia, like the Lifesaver products (featured on our website, www.virginialakemanagement.com), or boiling water before drinking it. Care must be taken to wash vegetables and good hand washing techniques can also prevent contamination. In addition to these practices, cleaning up pet waste at home and in public places is the best way to minimize our individual impacts.

With threats like giardia lurking in our neighborhoods, it is imperative that we do the right thing. Picking up after our pets is not just some pleasant way to share the spaces we all love. It is a civic responsibility. We must do all we can to protect our four legged and bipedal friends from the spread of parasitic organisms. While puppies may never stop chewing our sneakers we can stop the unwanted surprises stuck to the bottom of them. I am reminded of a poster from a recent water quality conference...

“If you don’t like picking up dog poop... Try drinking it!”

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