

In July of this past year my daughter embarked on a focused relentless campaign of coercion. That sounds bad doesn't it - it wasn't - she wanted a dog. We had a dog for many years but 3 years ago we had to make that fateful decision and let him move on to the next phase of existence. And so we had been dog less for a while.

I sometimes can complain that my children lack focus and stick-to-it-tiveness. She proved me wrong this time. She started downloading cute photos of dogs, she showed me funny videos of dogs, she pointed out dogs when we were out and about. She told me how she would take of a dog, and how a dog would be good for her - so soft so cuddly so calming. It would teach her to be more responsible she said. She even talked about the queen and her corgis. She actually had a five point plan to quote her it was:

- 1) Cry at pictures of little corgi and pug puppies in the car
- 2) Create a slideshow and present it on my birthday
- 3) Be more responsible-ish
- 4) Slip pictures of adorable little dogs under pillows, in books, on doorknobs
- 5) Threaten to get a cat but not the cute kind the mean kind that hates humans and smashes plates

And then there was the power point presentation. She researched dog breeds and found out the ones that would fit well with our family. She researched how dogs positively impacted human mental health. It was a good 10 minutes of focused relentless coercion. She started trolling the local dog shelter sites looking at photos of dogs, poor poor dogs that needed a home. We said we would take it under advisement.

Truth be told it wasn't such a hard sell, at least to me. I missed our dog and the idea of having a warm and loving animal companion again was attractive. But there were other considerations. My husband and I are this close to having an empty nest - it might be nice to be able to travel without worrying about who is taking care of the dog.

Finally one day she texted her father and I a photo of a cute Wheaton terrier who was at the SPCA. And I texted him back "This is a really cute dog". That photo is on the front of the Order of Service - it is even cuter in color.

And so that is how on that day October 22, 2016 we found ourselves going to the SPCA to get this dog. There were many dogs to look at we walked up and down the kennels. They all wanted to go home with us. But there was Buckwheat this soft haired Wheaton Terrier. We asked to meet him. They brought him into a room with us. He was friendly, and had these big lovable eyes that were a bit hard to resist. And he had a story. It was a hard story - he had had a hard life. He was 9 and had belonged to a breeder who had mistreated him - badly. The trainer said that he had been put through his paces and he seemed to be a pretty even-tempered dog. And so we thought it seems like a good fit. And that is how we came to have Bucky as part of our family.

Our last dog was a beagle, and this dog is a terrier - lets say there has been a learning curve.

But you know this sermon is not about dogs or our dog. It is really about what I have learned along the way. Perhaps the SPCA was going us a soft sell, perhaps they did not know all the details. But not long after Bucky came to our house it became apparent to us that his hard life had been harder than maybe even the SPCA knew.

Getting a rescue dog is a good thing. An animal a life is saved and that is good. But getting a rescue dog also is taking in a dog who comes with baggage.

We tried putting Bucky in a crate at night because other dogs we had had found being in a crate a calming experience - because it is a small enclosed defined space. Not our Bucky. We had to learn that because some of his abuse involved a crate he could not tolerate it. We wanted to give him a home base that he felt safe in and whoops we totally miscalculated that one, so then next went up some baby gates, and our laundry room became his safe place. He is a dog that has been traumatized; he lives with PTSD clearly. He's getting better but it is such a process.

When we first had him he still had some behaviors that were so clearly from being abandoned to his crate - he would start turning circles and could not stop, he would start to scratch something and could not stop. I would have to yell his name and startle him out of perseveration.

He doesn't really play. By that I mean he doesn't know how to retrieve a ball - I am hoping maybe I can teach him that later. And he is kind all on or off. Either he is laying down having a snooze - or he is in someone's face usually mine trying to lick it. Not my favorite.

He doesn't like men much either. And blessings on my husband who was the least enthusiastic about getting a dog. Bucky has snarled at him a couple of times, early on, and often will simply skitter out of the way and hide under the kitchen table.

Also I cannot vacuum when he is in the house or there is a huge mess to clean up. We are learning that he is pretty skittish - We all have taken to saying as we are getting out of a chair - "It's OK Bucky just getting up."

He is my daughter's dog and he loves her but I am his alpha dog. He bows to me when I come down in the morning and he always makes sure he knows where I am. And pretty much follows me everywhere. And I found out something really important he listens to me. It has taken me awhile to understand that and to recognize the power in that.

For a while he was barking at 4 in the morning - I think he just wanted to know we were around. He sleeps downstairs we sleep upstairs. The first few times I lay in bed wondering should I go down, does he need attention. One morning, I was really tired, I went down and firmly and somewhat loudly but not too loud, and not meanly I said stop and then left the room. There were a couple more mornings of that and then he stopped. I realized that if I spoke firmly to him when he got into the spinning circles I could get him to stop. I also learned one time when I yelled at one of the kids that he does not like me yelling - he ran off and hid and it took a bit of coaxing to get him to trust me again. Firm is OK but yelling is not.

He is learning to trust us, He is learning that we mean well. And we are learning about him and what he needs. And I am learning patience. This will not be a quick fix. 6 months at least I am told and possibly more and part of the brokenness that is part of Bucky may always be there.

It is not just patience I have learned with this dog. It has been an interesting process to get such a reactive dog right when the world around me seems so reactive. When everyday I open the news and hear another story that makes

me want to yell. When so much of what I hear makes me angry - really angry. When what I hear makes me want to scream and shout all the time.

And so many people around me are twitchy and scared and reactionary.

There was a moment with the dog when he had poo-ed in the house yet one more time. A moment when I wanted to yell at him because gross. And yet I did not. I was able even at that wee hour in the morning to think well he's only a dog he doesn't know any better and we are not sure what he has been through.

And then I wondered why do I have such a hard time with people why do I struggle so to see how they might also be hurt and healing.

So here are my suggestions for dealing with traumatized dogs

First I need to distinguish between the dogs that are dangerous and the ones who are traumatized but can heal.

All dogs need love traumatized dogs need more love

All dogs need firm boundaries traumatized dogs even more so

Yelling at a dog doesn't teach it to not do the thing it only teaches the dog that I am the enemy.

Food helps - a lot

Dogs learn more from praise than criticism praise the dog when he does something I want him to do

Withdraw my attention when there is behavior I do not want

The Dog has known trauma that's his vision it is my responsibility to offer him a different vision one where people love him

These are troubled times in our country there are a lot of upset people.

And I need to remind myself something over and over and over again

People don't have a change of heart because they have changed their minds; they change their minds because they have had a change of heart. Let me say that again: People don't have a change of heart because they have changed their minds; they change their mind because they have had a change of heart. If I had not learned that before I learned that from my dog.

I am called and I think all of us are called to live out our faith, our UU values. But we have a belief, as UUs that if we only explain our rational well thought out argument well enough surely our opponent will come to understand. And friends that is not how we will affect change at this point in history.

My UU values are calling me to take action in an intentional thoughtful way.

This week the Senate voted to repeal parts of the Affordable Care Act. People I love and care about could be at risk of losing their health insurance. This is an important issue. I could just yell at everyone who voted for this agenda this but there is a better way

If I am going to get angry let me get angry with elected officials, let me not fall in line with what is happening. Let me have my voice and use it for the common good, by repeatedly contacting elected officials, by signing petitions, by participating in gatherings and demonstrations that are protected by our 1st Amendment. I have a voice let me use it

But when I meet someone who I believe is wrongheaded in their political, social, or economic views let me not yell at them, let me not liberalsplain at them. Let me listen to them and after I have listened let me instead speak from my heart. Let me be vulnerable enough to show them what I am feeling about these very important issues. Let me listen to their pain. I do not have to agree with someone to hear their pain. Let me offer them a vision that is grounded in love.

The piece I read "And how is it with the children" does not actually factually represent the Masai greeting ritual. The question "How is it with the children" is part of that ritual as are other questions. But the truth of what McNeill wrote is still true. What if we met each other and asked how is it with the children?, how is it with the aged, how is it with those who are ill, how is it with the most marginalized . It would reframe our conversations from who is winning to how are we caring for others and for ourselves.

That is where we need to begin.

