

One Impulsive decision

We all have moments when we make an impulsive decision, that on reflection, we realise was made in too much haste. The day we decided to get a dog was one such decision. We had never had a dog. Over the years, the pleading of my children and I to have one had largely been ignored until finally my husband said 'I won't have anything to do with it'. As far as my children and I were concerned, this was a resounding 'yes', so two weeks later, we found ourselves at the dogs' home for abandoned and stray animals.

The dog's home is for abandoned and stray animals and where dogs wait for their new forever home. Each animal is kept in a small concrete cell with a bowl of water and something to lie on. Prospective owners parade up and down the cells, checking out each dog one by one. On the day of our visit, there was a large, intimidating dog that had a reputation for jumping high fences. There were elderly dogs that could no longer be cared for by their owners and there were small dogs that were yappy and annoying. We paused at a cell where there was a shaggy ball of white wiry hair racing back and forth in his cell. We knew the minute we saw him that he was ours. He was a mongrel - neglected and scrawny with a squashed face.

Nigel, as he had been named by the workers at the dog's home, had been found wandering the streets. He had been bred to herd cattle and sheep, but we were assured he would make a great addition to our family. Our experience with pets was rather limited, but how hard could it be? We had pet chickens that we had reared inside our house. We kept them in a cardboard box to protect them from the harsh Tasmanian winter, letting them wander around our living room when we were home. But now, fully grown and just starting to lay eggs, they lived in a chicken coop constructed from odd bits of wood and chicken wire.

We arrived home with our new family member, Nigel, taking him inside. However, it wasn't long before chaos descended on our house. Free from the confines of his cell, Nigel pelted around our home, darting into different rooms and sniffing every nook and cranny. It wasn't long before he turned his attention to our furniture and before we had a chance to stop him, our couch was peppered with tooth marks!

Nigel was banished outside to the yard where he continued to sprint at lightning speed, forcing his way through shrubs and charging through garden beds. We left our mini tornado to explore the rest of the garden, enabling us to enjoy a few quiet moments inside, without having to worry about our furniture being chewed to pieces. An hour later, I checked on our new family member. Our chicken coop was mangled and our yard was littered with feathers and blood. Tears welled up in my children's eyes. Then the full-blown screaming began. They were hysterical. I tried to bury the dead birds, but our dog kept digging them up. I tried consoling my children,

but failed miserably. I tried to help the one remaining traumatised chicken, but it hid deep in a bush where it resided for an entire week.

After the day's shenanigans, we were all looking forward to a calmer evening. However, it then became apparent that there were some serious gaps in the training (if any) Nigel had received in his past life. As I was serving dinner, Nigel leaped onto the table and greedily helped himself to the fresh pat of butter, and before I could retrieve it, he had feasted on my son's dinner.

Nigel was exiled to the laundry that night. We figured this was the best place for him. He couldn't be trusted with our furniture and I wasn't sure what mischief he would get up to outside. By midnight, I gave into his incessant whimpering and scratching at the door. Not trusting that he would behave if left unsupervised while we were sleeping. I tied Nigel to the dining room table using his new leash. Quiet returned to our house and I managed a few hours' sleep, until I was woken by havoc in our lounge room. Nigel had eaten through his leash. Chaos had returned.

A week later, our home was returning to some normalcy, until frantic squawking roused our attention and I raced outside. The last remaining pet chicken that had spent the last week perched in a bush, had summoned up the courage to come out - perhaps in search of food. Our dog, who had been waiting for this moment, now had a mouthful of chicken. I raced outside, chasing the dog around the yard with no plan of how I would get him to release the petrified bird from his grip. Unfortunately, this debacle didn't have a happy ending for the chicken. Our dog seemed to be completely oblivious to the fact that he was in disgrace.

While our home is in the suburbs, beyond our back fence is a bush reserve. People frequently walk through the reserve, enjoying the serenity away from the hustle and bustle of the city. This reserve is also home to a large number of wallabies. During the day, they sleep among the safety of the trees. At night, they hop down a laneway next to our house to feast on people's lawns.

It was about this time that we discovered that Nigel loved to chase anything that moved. As far as Nigel was concerned, the wallabies were moving targets. As they undertook their evening migration past our house, He would charge full speed up and down our yard, yapping at the wallabies who were safe on the other side of the fence and didn't care about the frenzy occurring in our yard.

It was during this nightly routine that Nigel perfected the art of parkour. In his excitement at seeing wallabies that were just out of his reach, he would sprint towards our back fence, gaining sufficient momentum to run along its back corner, almost reaching the top of the fence in the process. Late one night, alerted to sounds of commotion outside, we discovered that Nigel's parkour practice had paid off. He had succeeded in launching himself over the fence. His timing was impeccable and as

he catapulted over the fence, he brought down a poor, unsuspecting wallaby in the process. Already in my pyjamas, I raced outside to find what looked like a dead wallaby on the other side of the fence and Nigel was nowhere to be seen. I grabbed a torch and raced around the bush, desperate to find our dog, who was very likely causing mayhem with the multitude of moving targets. Eventually, I located him. He was panting and exhausted and looking rather pleased with himself. As we approached the spot where Nigel had made his escape, it seemed a miraculous resurrection of a wallaby had occurred. There was no trace of the animal that had been lying limp among the grass less than an hour ago. It seems that our dog must have only knocked the poor animal unconscious as he hurtled over the fence

For a while, life with our dog was uneventful. He stopped escaping from our yard. There had been no mishaps involving wallabies and he learnt that our dining room table was out of bounds. There were no problems until one day our neighbours got chickens.

I think our next pet will be a rabbit