**Paragraph: Cosmo: My Unorthodox Dog and His Lessons of Love and Second Chances**

Cosmo has the personality of a frat house brother who's big on Greek life. As a member of say, Alpha Delta Phi, he'd wear sunglasses at night, sport a toga and at the end of the night, he'd be the one smashing the beer can against his forehead. As the life of the party and true to his exuberant spirit, his entire body would wiggle and shimmer and oscillate. Cosmo is one entertaining pooch.

On a hot June day on Manhattan's Upper West Side, Cosmo and I were making our way home from our veterinarian and his routine annual physical. Instead of us planning the next frat party, I was distressed and scared.

Our vet found a nodule on Cosmo's spleen. I learned that splenic nodule aren't good for two reasons. First, they could be malignant, and splenic cancer in dogs can be highly metastatic. And second, even if they're benign, they could rupture and cause the dog to quickly die from an internal hemorrhage.

So, we decided it best to operate and remove the spleen. While this organ does provide some helpful services to the body, dogs can live perfectly well without it. All of this conversation reminds me that I'd never make it as a vet. I'm more interested in being a good mother and an astute thought leader; I'd rather write big checks to my vet to keep m dog healthy.

While explaining to my kids the rationale behind Cosmo's need for surgery, I couldn't help but reflect on this dog and his interesting, unique personality. Aside from being comical, he has many quirks that can be annoying and some just plain sad.

As for the annoying, he gleefully destroys every last sock in my entire home. And what's worse, he can be highly obnoxious on-leash. New York City is home to something like 1.5 million dogs, although it seemed there are as many canines on the streets as people. I've decided there's a universal secret code -- a data processing of sorts -- that goes on in the brain of dogs. This must be how they decide how they'll respond to one dog vs. another.

Sometimes Cosmo is fascinated with other dogs, usually the smaller ones. He smells them to gather critical data while waging his tail in delight. But with larger dogs, his data capture might transmit a non­ positive result and he can become a bit aggressive. This is my fault; he isn't well trained on-leash.

This common behavioral problem is known as leash aggression. It's when well-behaved friendly dogs when on-leash, can switch from calm to Cujo in an instant. Their lunging, snarling, barking displays are often bluffs; leash-aggressive dogs rarely follow through with a bite.

Nevertheless, it can be embarrassing and annoying to deal with. But he's old, and I'm not a dog whisperer, and well -- I just deal with it. I still love him. And heck, I sometimes get aggressive too; negotiating the masses of humanity on the crowded New York City streets is enough to make me want to take a bite out of someone on occasion. So, I can relate.

Another annoying tradition of this dog is that when you least expect it, he'll steal your bagel. Yep, he'll clip it right out of your hand, and he's lightning fast. He's even more pleased if his snatched bagel is laced with a tasty cream cheese spread. I profusely apologize of course, and people don't seem to get all that offended. I know, I'm one of those disgraceful dog owners. But, I love my dog. To me -- he's obnoxious, unorthodox, but lovable still.

Cosmo is afraid of everything. Thunder storms, packs of bicycles and the doormen on Central Park West that blow their whistles to hail cabs.

He's terrified of whistles. When I take him and Bijou (my 10-year-old Vizsla, Cosmo's life partner and a stunning supermodel female who shares none of his weirdness or unbecoming behavior) to Central Park, he's so terrified to walk toward the whistles on Central Park West that h literally tries to drag me back to our apartment. People see him doing this on the street and appear puzzled, wondering what in the hell is with this dog. And then, they likely ponder what in the hell is with the owner of said dog. I'm used to the looks. I pay no attention.

I've developed a few tricks to lure my pup toward Central Park and one he gets there, he's thrilled. Both dogs vault fences like deer; the passersby render their "Ohhhh's, Ahhhh's and Wooow's!" But eventually, the superstar stud Cosmo shrivels and shrinks again when it' time to leave the park to cross the dreaded Central Park West and head home. He pastes his tail down, stays low to the ground, and drags me home even while seemingly being choked to death by his collar.

At some point, I might describe my darling dog as a crotchety old urban dweller that doesn't want to leave his block. And eventually, he likely won't want to leave his apartment building. Just perhaps to pee. Cosmo spends a lot of time worrying, but I'm not sure he knows what he's worried about. But, he is who he is. He's complex and funny and I love him dearly. "He's my guy, for better or for worse," says the naughty do owner. And yes, Cosmo and I -- we're the perfect duo for a series of dates with Cesar Millan.

I picked up Cosmo the day following his splenectomy and was aghast a the size of his incision. He had been vertically cut across his shaved belly by 7-inches. I guess to access the spleen in a dog, there are a few other organs that are in the way, hence the grand scale of the incision.

Upsetting. Apart from the horror of this massive incision, I noticed one end of the stitches was opening, albeit *ever* so slightly (note: intuition check followed by mistake #1 which I'll come back to later).

He came home on pain meds in post-surgery mode on that Thursday afternoon, with the unfashionable eCollar orbiting his head. Cosmo was very unhappy. I was determined to be his personal bedside vet tech and mommy-of-the-year, committed to nursing my dear hound back to health.

With the best of intentions and highest of hopes, things didn't progress well. By midnight Friday he was groaning, crying and wincing in pain. called the ER at the animal hospital here in Manhattan. It was two o'clock in the morning. The vet on call instructed me to increase his pain meds to try to get him to sleep. I did that, but it hardly worked. He bellowed and wailed all night. I was a frazzled wreck.

First thing the next morning I called our vet and brought him in. His wound was oozy, angry and coming apart. My dog was a mess. Cosmo was quickly admitted back into the hospital and in short-order was prepped for immediate surgery. I was advised that his 7-inch incision would need to be fully re-opened; there was a nasty infection blazing through his insides.

Cosmo had a staph infection that was raging through his subcutaneous all the way into his abdominal cavity into his pancreas, which was angered and inflamed. It was serious. Bacteria like this needs to be cultured and identified to determine proper antibiotic treatment. The doctor tried as best she could to clean him up inside, sample the bacteria, and sew him up again. We'd start two broad range antibiotics intravenously, await the results of the culture and go from there.

I wasn't doing so well by this point. True, things become exacerbated with no sleep, but I was terrified that I might loose my dog. I was filled with the "what if s". What if the antibiotics of choice aren't sensitive to this infection? What if this unknown bacteria viscerally ravages my 55- pound dog while I sit home, helpless? My kids consoled me as I cried.

All I could think of was how much I love this guy. I love him for all the

joy he brings to my family and me, and I especially love him for all of his quirks, his fears and even his shenanigans.

Heavily medicated, Cosmo spent five days in the hospital. I visited hi daily and brought him his favorite food; he cried and whined the whole time. One miserable pooch he was. But slowly he came along, and with that, so did our huge relief and thanksgiving.

My dog is home now, and after a couple of minor setbacks he's almost back to his old self. I haven't stopped telling him how much I love him, and how much he means to me and to our family, even given his idiosyncrasies -- stolen bagels, whistle fears and all. I believe all this love has helped him heal.

I've learned a lot about love from both of my dogs. And they've enriched the lives of my kids wholeheartedly. It's a magical and unique experience to cherish our pets; they can teach us a great deal.

We value a mate to such a great extent, in vivid technicolor, when we're faced with the real possibility of loosing them. Their quirks become even more lovable when that affection is true. Love becomes crystal clear and ever-present in moments of grave anticipation; love should never be taken for granted nor should it go unexpressed.

A few morals to this story:

**"Ignore your intuition at your own peril."** *-Star Wars: The Clone Wars*

Have you ever ignored that tiny voice that's whispering in your ear,

waving a red flag, urging you to ask a question, or to take a different path? When I originally picked up my dog at the hospital I noticed something *ever* so slightly curious on his incision. I chose to say nothing. He was being discharged, I *assumed* he must be good to go. Well, it turns out he wasn't. What I noticed was the very early signs of what was brewing. Things might have turned out very differently had I raised my hand at that moment.

When was the last time you stopped what you were doing and expressed to someone held dear exactly how you felt about them, a if it were your last chance?

Life tends to be too busy, too noisy. We get caught up in things that don't *really* matter, and as a result we miss precious opportunities to express our feelings. Second chances are a gift; a luxury we aren't always granted. Express your love to those held dear. Be specific. Make it known.

Cosmo and me? We're resting now, and then we're headed out for a bagel ...

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