

Dog Mental Health and Autonomy

*On building a dog-friendly environment
by Will Pflaum, founder of Glencadia Dog
Camp*

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- In response to this article in [Vox](#), the founder and operator of [Glencadia](#) Dog Camp opines on how rare a dog-centric environment can be. Kenny Torrella provocatively titled Against Pet Ownership (April 11, 2023, Vox) deserves a response. With 17 years in the dog care business, here is Will's response:



Dogs rarely have the freedom to interact freely

The Glencadia setting and philosophy may offer the antidote to the dog mental health issues noted in the article. If boredom is a plague for the modern dog, something like Glencadia may be a substantial part of the answer. Glencadia is not a space designed for humans, unlike almost the entire rest of the world where most of us actually spend time.

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There are two main animal responses to boredom. The first is drowsiness. The second is restlessness, even engaging in behaviors to help them stay awake.”

Charlotte Burn, biologist

WANDERING

For years I have watched dogs wander around our entire vast barn, go in and out of yards and rooms, find the places they want to spend time, or find the dogs with whom they prefer to play, selecting among many choices their companions. This time to roam and explore seems

normal or natural here, but thinking about it, for most dogs, this is an exceptional experience of autonomy and freedom. The few acres we have set up for social dog boarding may be among the very rare spaces in which dogs are able to experience the full range of dog mental and physical activities. And “romp” and “exploring” time is the majority of the time – long periods of dog socialization and autonomy.

When people think of abuse, neglect, or injury, this kind of boredom rarely comes to mind. A human prisoner who is denied access to something to read, or tools to do hand work with, or media to consume, would probably start “staring into space, yawning, or sighing” too – and a dog, as they cannot work with their hands or engage in any symbolic or abstract thinking – is just such a prisoner in a human home, perhaps, if the time goes on too long, or there is no one home to pay them any attention.



The building is designed for maximum dog freedom

SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM

People often mention that dogs can or “do” sleep 20 hours a day, or some such very high number. However, here at Glencadia, the number is far lower. And our customers report their dogs often come home exhausted. While some people are upset by these signs of being tired, other people realize that the dog has had an intense experience and should take some time to re-adjust.

Here is a passage that suggested something of Glencadia: We demand companionship with as little friction as possible, expecting our pets (especially dogs) to be docile and agreeable, and to adapt quickly to the human world, with its countless rules and norms that mean nothing to them. And then when they inevitably fail to do so at first, we deem their natural habits misbehavior in need of correction, or abandonment.

People often refer to their dogs (and cats although I obviously talk less about cats at work and in this article) as their “babies.” A little voice in my head often says, “They aren’t babies. Their adults – just animals.” Here, they get to do the mental, social, and physical activities in which adult dogs can engage.

After a week here, I do feel that we rarely find a dog that remains as fully “needy” as they often are when they arrive. If they can adjust to other dogs, and get used to the autonomy they have here, they are no longer as desperate for human company as not only a reassuring presence of a friend but as the only thing that relieves their boredom. Dogs here, without any doubt, are rarely bored.

The headline, “The case against pet ownership” is a bit of a misnomer, as the idea of banning pets is not considered as a realistic possibility in the article. The arguments about more or fewer pets (as per the subtitle) also did not particularly grab my attention, as I have no particular

expertise on that matter.

VETS, SUPPLY AND DEMAND

One caveat to the Vox article I might note: the author does not seem to consider how absolutely rough the life of a wild animal can be. If the alternative to domestication is living in the wild, the lack of annual vet care would not seem to factor into the equation. Otherwise, as in the article, the alternative to domestic existence seems to be non-existence, which is just sad. The author suggests the routine practice of pet ownership borders on abuse.

And, I'm not as judgemental about vet visits as is the author. The price of vet care means that many people can't afford to bring in pets as much as the author would like. It seems to me that many more vets could graduate every year without reducing the quality of the profession. While thousands of people can go out and get a dog, the number of vets can only increase very slowly, if at all. The problem identified in the article is really supply and demand: there aren't enough vets to go around. Blaming the pet owners seems like blaming the general population for obesity without considering the food industry... and also not the main point of the article, but a point worth mentioning nevertheless.

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