



Norman – 9 weeks

Raising a Jewish Dog in Boynton Beach

By William Rabinowitz

A very old man had a dog, his only company for almost of 15 years. Regrettably one day, the dog died. He loved his dog like a son, for that reason he went to see his Rabbi and asked the Rabbi if he would say Kaddish (a prayer for the dead) for the dog.

The Rabbi told him: - Mr. Bernbaum, you know that we are a very Orthodox Congregation; Kaddish is only for the humans, definitely not for animals. The Rabbi -suggested - that there was a new congregation of Reformist, two streets down. Go and request them to say Kaddish for your dog. You know... this new congregation is very liberal, they may say Kaddish for your dog.

The old man thanked the Rabbi, and in the farewell he added: - Sorry Rabbi, before going there, I make you an extra question, I don't know them and I don't want to offend them. Do you believe that they will accept my donation of \$25,000 for their Congregation in memory of my small and dear Moshe??

- WHAAAATTTT!!!!... screamed the Rabbi ...You never mentioned that your dog Moshe was Jewish !!

<http://www.jewishmag.com/62mag/humor/humor.htm>

Let it be said, no, let it be proclaimed from the highest vantage point on Mt. Sample¹ that in the autumn days of life there are Boynton Beach Jews who do not avoid risk but face it cheek to jowl. These are the Jews who dare to venture into the unknown. These are the Jews who decided they need a life-changing event. They refuse to accept the inevitable decline of retired life, golf, boredom, mah-jongg, card playing, kvetching, early birding, arthritis, and synagogue hopping for the best free Shabbat morning *kiddush*. With their loins girded for battle, their faces crimson with holding deep breaths of what in the hell are we doing; off they go to Sheldon's Puppy Palace on Boynton Beach Blvd. to buy a dog. An entire industry exists in Boynton Beach around custom bred small dogs to keep the *alte-leute* (old people) living.

Some no longer clearly remember what they had for dinner last night. Perhaps they are rationalizing that when they take the dog out for a walk the dog will help them find their way home. They do remember the thrill, the excitement of that trip with the kids to pick out the family pup at the puppy store so many years ago. What they forgot was that the pup threw up on their daughter's lap from carsickness half way home.

Many of the "active adult" communities for people over 55 are gated – hopefully to keep unwanted people out more than to keep the residents in. The communities share a common feature - house after house that all look exactly alike uniform with identical designs approved and controlled by the resident Gestapo, the community's architectural control committee. An Alzheimer service dog may be a good thing. It is more than once that a confused senior tried to use their door key in the wrong house.

A dog does change your life. A dog is a pain. A dog is a bother. It needs to be walked, played with, watched over so as not to chomp the electric cords. A dog is a pooping, chewing machine designed to destroy your best carpets and flower beds. A dog is a loving, loyal companion and that focuses on living. My mother in law is 84 years old. She has congestive heart failure and can hardly take care of herself. Yet all she talks about is life. She wants to redo her bedroom. She wants to change the color on her house trim but the architectural control committee said no. She wants a dog. She wants to think of tomorrow with adventure and with an open-ended future. She is also a realist and understands that her husband who is also 87 and can barely bend over little less pick up after the dog has shredded the Sun-Sentinel newspaper into a gazillion little pieces, is not really a good thing for her or the dog. Their finances are very very tight and they can't afford the extra expense of a dog. She insisted instead that we get a dog that she can visit, play with and make sweaters for when it gets cold. The winter cold in Boynton Beach is the rare wintry night that the temperature drops below 50. Besides, who would let a nice Jewish dog be outside on such a night anyway?

Maybe we were feeling our blood turn into Florida blood – thinning and lacking in extra zest. We were reluctant at first but we agreed. The dog will be ... well a dog and we will have to focus on the future not just retiring.

Perhaps that is why I have taken on this project of recording our own trials and tribulations when we made that insane courageous decision to get ourselves a pup. We raised our children to be good Jews, successful individuals who visit us regularly for a week in December right after winter vacation begins for the grandchildren. Now we have to figure out once again how to raise Norman, the wife named him Norman, to bring us *naches* as a good Jewish doggy from a good Jewish home should.

Jewish tradition is very confused about dogs. On the one hand Cain was reputed to have had a guard dog. We know of the many times that IDF dogs have given their lives so that Jewish soldiers might live. Yet on the other hand the Talmud prohibits the keeping of vicious dogs in the house or on long leashes. Amongst the Hassidic community dogs are seen as unclean, even evil. For the rest of us, there are good dogs and bad dogs.

Midrashic tradition holds that God granted a special dispensation to dogs in Jewish households.

"The Torah states that just before imposing the Tenth Plague upon the Egyptians (killing of the first born), God told Moses that while there would be loud wailing throughout Egypt, but that where the Hebrews lived, not even a dog would bark.

The Midrash states that just before the Angel of Death descended, God instructed the dogs living amongst the Hebrews to be silent. The dogs complied with loving obedience. God was so impressed that He told them that because they had obeyed with such love, He would reward them. He would instruct the Jewish people that hereafter they should give their non-kosher food to the dogs."²

Norman is a mix. Some people would have called him a mutt but he is a custom designed breed recognized by the American Kennel Club as a Cock-a Tzu.- sounds like a rooster sneezing. He was born Feb. 17, 2008. His father was a Shih Tzu and his mother a Cocker Spaniel. Dogs are not racially biased to mixing. He is going to be a small dog- they say about 15-20lbs. Max. We did not want a large dog nor a tiny tiny dog. We once saw a full-grown dog at the Pannera Sandwich shop in Boca Raton that was so tiny it fit in a coffee cup. We first thought a large hairless mouse got loose and fell into his cup. The owner said it was a Japanese something or other. Amazing how those Japanese can miniaturize things. You have to be careful that something that small does not get sucked up in a vacuum cleaner by accident.

Norman, all five pounds of him, who consisted principally of fluffy puppy fur came to his new home. He came home to a home that instantly loved him intensely. The wife picked him out because he had a personality from the moment she held him in the puppy store, licking, nosing and squirming. He arrived home and promptly had an accident on the tiled floors. Being a male we could have said he was marking his territory. The first accident was one of many to come but to any adoring Jewish parent; their child can do no wrong.

New Jewish parents are focused on two ends of a new baby. What goes in one side and of course the other end. Food is important, only the best for baby. The wife promptly sent me out to Pet's Mart to get special formulated puppy food, chew toys and other supplies. They actually have doggie diapers but I could not go that far even for Norman. There are at least 150 varieties of dog

food. There are at 400 forms of chew things, brightly colored, soft, rubbery, and in all sorts of creative shapes – dragons are my favorite. There are three varieties of specially formulated chew things for dog with halitosis, or reeking bad doggie breath. A few guys in my office could certainly benefit from a halitosis chew toy.

Finding doggie training treats, or doggie chew toys that are not made with pork or from China is a real challenge. Mexico is bad enough but what good, self respecting Jew can buy doggie chew things that are desiccated pigs ears, pig skins, bacon flavored or smeared in pig fat? It is not that Jews are prohibited from touching or using pork products – only eating them. I, personally, could not bring that into the house. Try as I did, I could not find a single bag of dried, puppy kibble with a *hechshir* certifying that it was kosher.

Fortunately I remembered a challenge to Kashrut that my Rabbi told me about. Is Jell-O Kosher – it is made from animal hoofs and bones not necessarily kosherly processed. The first thought is no. The correct answer I was given is more convoluted. Since the ground up primary component of Jell-O is gelatin that has been derived by making the bones and the hooves into something that the Rabbi said resembled the inedible earth then it was became o.k. It was no longer a true animal product. He said think of it as eating the dust of the earth. Without the sugary sweetened flavors Jell-O would be like eating the dust of the earth with water added. So, I reasoned, all the specially formulated dry puppy food had chicken or beef or some animal product mixed with ground up cereal products but no pork worked into the kibble then it must be like eating the dust of the earth. It had to be dog kosher. Secondly, we were not eating it, the dog was. It was as kosher as I could make it.

The issue of meat and milk flashed through my mind and dog dishes. Keeping kosher means not to mix meat and milk. Clearly I was never going to give him a bowl of milk. Milk is bad for dogs; they lack an essential enzyme to digest milk products. But what about those times that a piece of cheese falls from the table and the dog eats it? Should I have a separate set of dishes for him, meat and cheese? How do I wash the dishes? Can I put his dog dish in the dishwasher with our things after I rinsed it off first. I tried taking a bucket of soapy water outside and washing his dishes separately. That effort only lasted a few times before it went by the wayside. We thought about getting him his own Yom Tov or Shabbat doggie bowls but have not done it yet.

Thank God it is not Passover. The Rabbis have said that it is o.k. to give your dog non- Kosher food but not on Passover.

Norman has been part of our lives for two months now. He has doubled his weight to ten pounds and is quite a bit bigger than when he first moved in. It would have been great to have a nice doggie scale like they do at his Veterinarian. I have to be much more creative. I pick Normie up and then get on the scale to check our combined weights. Then I put Norman down and get on by myself. Getting on the scale by myself and checking my own weight is something I have avoided for some time. It is almost traumatic. I prefer to think the washing machine is shrinking my pants. Getting on the scale to verify it is something I just don't do with any regularity. But for Norman I did it. I subtract the weight, that lying talking bathroom scale said was my weight, from our combined weights to get his. I am sure of Norman's weight but I am still convinced mine is wrong. We can't imagine life without *Normie*. He is so much fun.

One of the first things he learned to do was jump up and grab the end of the toilet paper roll. He takes off at a full run with the end of the toilet paper roll in his teeth and the rest unraveling after him. Within a few minutes the pup had toilet papered the house. With a flash of exuberance and youthful energy he proceeded to shred every last inch of the paper unless we can get to it first.

From across the house I hear the wife yelling, lovingly of course, "Normie No!" It is a cry that we both love to hear. We keep all the toilet paper awkwardly high above the commode now.

We never knew that the tiles by the shower were loose. Norman found out for us and chewed up the wallboard quickly.

Closet doors have to be kept closed. Shoes are forever missing. They appear attached to Normie's mouth as new chew toys that he throws in the air and catches and throws and catches and then bangs on the floor.

Puppy potty training is progressing slowly. With every month of age they say a dog can hold it for one hour longer than his age. I wonder if they meant that when a dog gets to be three years old they can hold themselves for thirty six hours without having an accident in the house. Heck, it is hard for me to hold myself for two hours without having an accident.

Cage training was recommended from the start. Sheldon, at the puppy palace, recommended a beautiful cage that only cost \$69.95. By the time we left the store we purchased the cage, multiple doggie toys, special dog dishes, a retractable lead, a blue lead, collar, a car cage and a book on dog training, *Puppies for Dummies*. Sheldon threw in a small bag of puppy food for us.

Dutifully I watched the free video, cage training your pup. The premise is simple – a dog will not mess where it sleeps. Wrong, if you have to go and go bad enough, you go -so do pups. Norman is better now.

How nice it would be to stay in bed and try and sleep, the wife's snoring kept waking me up during the night, this was a truly sleep deprived bad night. But it was 6:07 and I was late. I have a responsibility. I have a new baby and the baby needs to get out of his cage. He has been real good. He holds himself for the entire night and when he can't cross his eyes or his legs any tighter I don't want him to have an accident in his cage. That being said, having accidents outside his cage in the foyer, the family room, the den, the office, on the deck and anywhere else does not seem to count. The only thing possible is active, aggressive owner training. Get up early, no matter what, and have my owner take me out for a walk. So, the first thing that I do is drag myself out of bed and stumble into the den where the cage is with the towel covering it to help let Norman know it is time to go to sleep. I pulled the towel off and guess who was still sleeping. A great big yawn greeted me shortly. The tail began wagging slowly, then with a furious pace as I struggled to get the tiny clasp on to his collar so we could go out for the morning business. Out the door we went for a number 1 but no number 2 no matter how much I paced back and forth. *Kvetching* I bent over and picked up the morning newspaper on the driveway, the Sun Sentinel nicely wrapped in a nice bright orange plastic sleeve to protect it from the rain. The Sentinel just oozes with the finest news they can print glorifying any Democrat politico of the day. Today it was dripping with Obama stories and how the Cuban Americans have forgiven Castro and love

Obama. Yesterday it was slobbering how Minister Farakhan and Pastor Wright, both stated non-lovers of America and Jews, will not be spending the night as guests in the Lincoln bedroom of a President Obama. The story was crafted to reassure the massively uncomfortable Jewish vote. Most of the Jews in Boynton Beach have never voted for anyone but a Democrat since Franklin Roosevelt. This time might be different.

Recently we installed a gate to close off our small front yard. No matter how tired I might be I get up every morning at 6 AM., let him out of his cage to go outside to do his business. I have a technique worked out. I take off the towel that covers his cage for the night and open the cage door. Then we both bolt for the front door to let him out into the yard before there is an accident. The front yard is not much of a yard just a small grassed area behind a low privacy wall. We had to have a \$850 gate made to keep Norman in; a custom made garden gate that had to be approved by the community's architectural control committee. If they had not approved the gate I had every intension of walking Norman, very slowly, back and forth in front of their houses every morning to do his business. The gate was approved. As we both race for the front door, I fumble with the keys to unlock the door and Norman dances around the foyer trying not to do what he knows he should not do. I open the door at last. He zooms out to do his business. He then zooms back into the house to finish his business. Well, at least we are making progress...

Like any growing child, Norman needs exercise. The wife insisted that I need the exercise even more than Normie. That was hard to disagree with. It always looked funny to me to see some big guy walking his little dog on a sixteen-foot retractable leash. He should be walking a St. Bernard with a beer cask around his neck, or a Labrador retriever or something with a manly look to it. But there I am, a six-foot, 215 lbs guy with a belly being led by this little fur ball of a dog straining ahead of me on a 16-foot retractable leash. My discount Wal-Mart \$10.00 tennis shoes with the red flashing led lights in the heels and the toes that light up every time I take a step try to keep up. Norman and I love our walks together.

Our morning walks are never too creative as most of Boynton Beach is laid out in boring grid patterns, ½ mile down Pipers Glenn, ¾ mile up El Claire, ½ mile across Flavor Pic, ¾ miles back along Jog Rd. and to close the square ½ mile along Piper's Glenn and back into our community. Etiquette is to never let Norman do his business on a neighbor's lawn or walk way. If he does I clean up after him. My rainproof plastic sleeves from the Sun Sentinel come into good use. For some reason Norman has a favorite rest room stop, the corner of Majestic Isles. I don't know where he learned to read but as soon as he sees the Majestic Isle sign, he knows what to do there. His face takes on a strange look and he does what he does with a grin majestically.

Two old women passed us on the street fanning themselves, complaining loudly about the heat, their children never calling and how wonderfully smart their grandchildren are. There I am, bent over invisible to them, cleaning up after Norman. A *Yiddishe kopf* told me to take some paper towels along to help clean the sidewalk. Only now what do I do with the Sun Sentinel sleeve, paper towels and Normans gift to Majestic Isles. There is no trash can anywhere. I needed one hand for the leash and periodically needed to switch hands as he changed from side to side while walking. I did not want to get him tangled under my feet. So I did what any self-respecting manly American dog walker does. I tied the poop baggy to my belt with an extra turn and

continued sauntering down the sidewalk passing more walkers than ever before, the baggy bouncing on my side. No one commented on my belt talisman.

Considering this was Shabbat I found myself wondering about the eruv. Realizing I was outside of the *eruv* and carrying a dog leash became a *halachic* question. Was I really carrying it as it was attached to my hand? Was it a violation of Sabbath laws because if I did not walk the dog it would be cruelty to the animal and to the wife having to clean up in the family room, dining room, kitchen, den or wherever. Should we move to an area that does have an eruv so I can carry the leash? But doesn't the dog carry the leash and what about the poop bag. Maybe that does not count as it was attached, swinging and bouncing from my belt loop. I should ask the Jell-O Rabbi the next time I see him.

I took him to a public garden the other day. I even purchased a small baby carrier strapped to my chest, just like a real baby. Norman faced out to the world, his little doggie paws hanging out in front. The guard at the gate looked at him and me and said no dogs permitted. I explained he wasn't a dog. He was a cute, very hairy baby. Dejected and feeling resentful that the woman refused to see how nice a baby pup he was we went home to play in our own yard. The garden gate guard must have been anti-Semitic.

As Norman grew we began to think about his future and education. Thoughts of saving for his college did cross our minds but only for a moment. We had to comply with the mandated Jewish parental responsibility -teaching your child to swim. We have a pool in the back under the screened in birdcage. Our fear was that Norman might fall into the pool and, GOD FORBID, drown. We had to teach him how to swim. The wife and I first set up the temperature on the pool heater. It should be comfortable for Norman's first dip. We both got into the water next to the step and slowly tried to coax Norman into the water. He did not want to go in. We tried everything to get him to come in including bringing his favorite toy a large yellow winged dinosaur chew toy into the water with us. He would not come in. As any advanced thinking father does, I went out and picked him and carried him into the water with me. After awhile he became used to the water enough to be let go but with my hands under his belly for emergency support as he dog paddled to the steps and got out. Norman knew how to swim naturally. Upon emerging from the pool he shook himself vigorously and gave us such a look....

Education does not stop with swimming or house training. We enrolled Norman in Puppy school. We take him for classes once a week at 9:00am on Thursday. There are two other pups in the class. One is an over energized sheltie whose owner was a young guy living in an apartment that wanted a dog to run with him in the morning. His name was Cooper. The other dog, more a rat, with a rats disposition and look than a dog. She was a black and tan Chihuahua that belonged to a beak faced oriental lady. Shagra was shlepped to class in a pink oversized pocketbook. Shagra is nasty always snapping, barking, lunging at Norman and Cooper. The owner seemed smug that her nasty little biter was cowering all the other pups. Norman is very good natured and laid back. He is not an aggressive dog. If strangers come into the house he does lung for them. He lunges to jump up on their leg, wagging his tail furiously, tongue licking the proffered hand and then peeing on their shoes. Perhaps it was one snap too much, or one lung too much but little Normie had had enough. Suddenly he faced Shagra and snarled a loud bark with teeth. Shagra zoomed back to hide under her owner's feet, shaking with fear. The oriental lady's smirk vanished.

Norman just as quickly lay back down quietly. Our boy did good, a real Jewish fighter. We were so proud.

Next week is graduation from puppy school. Over the weeks, Norman has learned many useful things, good sit, good look, good walk, and an assortment of tricks that his parents can never get correct. Cooper is getting huge, Norman's short legs are still short and Shagra hides under her owner's feet as nasty and rat like as ever. There will be a graduation party with cap and gown next Thursday. We will take lots of pictures and they will be up on You Tube. He has his own web page.

New York Jews are thick as fleas on a red neck's hound's back legs in Boynton Beach. The season of the Hadj brings them down by the thousands between Thanksgiving and Passover. Disabled parking spaces instantly vanish when they arrive as all of them have disabled placards from their nephews or nieces who are doctors back up North. They bring with them some strange new New York Jewish customs. Sometimes it would be best if they and their customs stayed in New York. The latest New York Jewish rite of life passage is the Bark-Mitzvah – a bar mitzvah and party for the family dog. These New Yorkers dog lovers take this very seriously. No doubt the family pooch has found it very offensive to go the *Cheder* for all those years instead of romping, chewing and pooping in its owner's house. They even put the event on the internet to share with the world.³ Norman will never have a bark mitzvah. We are not entirely sure his mother was Jewish. Though he likes to swim, a mikvah is not in his future. The wife insists that when he is seven months old he has to have a bris. He has to be neutered. We have not told him about those plans yet.⁴

The pup flew with us to Washington to be introduced to the kids last night. The plan was simple he is small enough to fit in a doggie travel bag under the seat in front of us. We struggled with anxiety – would he fly well, will he get airsick? Will he bark and bark from stress? Should we get him drugs to settle down? Everything is drugs now. Even my newly arrived grandson was drugged at his bris by his mohel, a physician, who told my nervous son and anxious daughter in law the baby will never feel a thing; that is the new Jewish American way. We never did drug Normie. He did fine. My drugged out grandson did fine as well.

Arriving at Palm Beach International airport, U.S. Airways said the Irish Wolf Hound, *I corrected the clerk he is a Jewish Cock-a-Tzu*, would have to buy a \$200 round trip ticket to ride in his bag under the seat in front of us. They just raised the fare. Norman needed an airline ticket. I was flabbergasted. "He only weighs ten pounds. Does he get a seat at least?" I asked how much for him to fly below. Oh, they do not fly animals below anymore except if they are going from Washington to Boston. Why Boston? Senator Ted Kennedy likes to fly his dog back to Boston with him. Being a member of the elite privileged class does have it benefits.

We got Norman his very own frequent flyer number on U.S. Airlines. His user name is Arf –Arf.

Being a frequent flyer has its privileges. The wife always enjoys my upgrades when she flies with me. I know what is in my best interest. My seat was upgraded to first class. The wife and Norman quickly settled into the elite location, I went to the back of the plane with the rest of the

cattle. The wife and Norman had a lovely flight and shared a couple of Bailey's Irish creams. I got a warm diet cola. They were out of ice.

Jewish dogs are smarter than the average dog. When Norman and I go for our morning walk to his favorite rest room spot at Majestic Isles, the sprinklers are *spritzing* the grass along the ways. Invariably Norman walks to my side but when the sprinkles are *spritzing* he puts me between the water spray and himself so I can be a shield. If it is raining and he needs to go out, he won't leave the dry garage while I stand in the rain trying to coax him. It was bright and hot yesterday. Again, I needed to let him out to do what he does. I stood in the hot searing sun *shvitzing*, he sauntered over to a shady spot and laid down.

We like to play ball together. I throw the ball and wait for Norman to retrieve it so I can throw it again. It is a fun game. As we sat in my son's family room throwing the ball for Norman to retrieve I happened upon a great way to exercise him. The door to the basement was directly off of the room. I opened the basement door, turned on the lights and sat back on the couch with the ball. With a deadly accurate throw the ball sailed through the basement door and down the steps. "Norman get the ball." Norman promptly ran to the open basement door, looked down the steps and clearly could see the ball. He would not move. I went over to Norman, who was excitedly wagging his tail and said, "Norman, ball, get the ball." He looked at me, looked at my pointing hand, looked down the steps into the basement and would not move. I ended going down the steps into the basement and throwing the ball back up to the dog. Norman chewed it and then rolled the ball back down the steps for me to retrieve. Why should he run down the stairs when he can get me to do it for him?

Jewish dogs are smart. Norman is smart most of the time. He did very well during the visit to our son. The entire house has hard wood flooring except for the living room, which is a thick white-carpeted area. Perhaps it was my fault. As soon as we all walked into my son's new home, I exclaimed, "Look Norman – carpeting." That is exactly where he promptly decided to do his business. My son says we can bring Norman again but only if none of his four-legged friends show up.

We lit the Shabbat candles. I held Norman and gave him a little taste of the sweet wine from my fingertip.

¹ Mt. Sample, a public landfill, is reputed to be the highest point in Palm Beach Co., Florida. Palm Beach County is the home of the infamous hanging chad of the 2000 Presidential election and of the old Jews who, ostensibly, could not see, understand or follow directions to vote correctly.

² <http://www.jewfaq.org/animals.htm>

³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vK-z1fvqBno&NR=1>

⁴ I have been energetically arguing with the wife about Torah law. I told her it is a violation of Jewish law to neuter a pet, even citing (Lev. 22:24). Prohibiting castrating of any species is not dissuading her and the veterinarian from their intended plan. My fear is for Norman first and for my own safety second.

http://www.jewishmag.com/125mag/jewish_dog/jewish_dog.htm