

ING A forum of public opinion on issues of the day

In dogged pursuit of the perfect vacation

By Page Hurley Shugrue

Good evening," said a uniformed gentleman, opening the ornate front door of the Army and Navy Club in downtown Washington, D.C.

"Hello," I replied, clutching at my bulging belly.

"Lovely evening," said the front desk clerk, with a grave nod.

"Yes, it is," I answered, as my coat began to wriggle and whimper. Running past pictures of austere-looking generals and admirals, I glanced around frantically for the elevator. "This isn't working," I whispered to my furry companion, as he slid beneath my coat.

And this isn't the way to travel with a dog.

A year ago we were dogless. Still missing our long, deceased cairn terrier Toto, my children and I plotted and planned to buy a new puppy. My husband warned us, "Who will walk him?" Of course 12-year-old Hillary volunteered for the job, a typical child's promise, broken within 24 hours.

"Who will train him?" he also asked.

"I will," I said, not too enthusiastically. Toto never did figure out about the proper place to relieve himself, as my porcelain blue rugs could testify.

"What about traveling?" he added. "Will he stay in a kennel for the entire month of August?" That was the cruelest question of all. Leave the puppy in a wire prison, begging to go out, missing his family?

"He'll come, too," I replied, suddenly realizing that I had made a commitment I might someday regret.

In early August, we packed the car and left Boston for Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. At this point, the brindle-colored puppy named Peppy was less than a year old and like his predecessor, definitely not trained. But he loved to ride in the car. Stashed between sleeping bags, tents and the cooler, our small dog panted and smiled. He was ready to go.

The first day seemed uneventful. After a pleasant, leisurely pic-

nic stop in Connecticut, we reached Pennsylvania by dusk. Hillary and her younger sisters, Molly and Rosie, argued incessantly about which motel to choose. Then they spotted a brand new Friendship Inn on the periphery of Route 81 in Scranton which also included a pool. Like the rest of us, Peppy wanted to stretch his limbs.

As we carried our bags inside the sparkling, clean room, Peppy walked over to the nearest bedspread and lifted his leg. I

type gadget which we had found in a pet store. By twisting it into the ground, this device gave Peppy the maximum space to move while the shaded tree kept him cool.

We found another excellent dining option in Phoenix called Something for Everybody. By selecting a decent motel adjacent to a quality restaurant, Peppy curled up next to the air conditioner, the girls ordered out pizza and my husband and I enjoyed an evening to ourselves next door.

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shrieked, the girls screamed and Peppy was dragged unceremoniously outside. We learned the first important lesson at the Friendship Inn: No leg-lifting inside. From that moment on, Peppy began to grasp this essential rule of the road and with all of us hovering around him, we successfully reinforced this standard. Suddenly, Peppy was trained.

Over the next few days, we also learned that the dog days of summer could be difficult for a panting pooch. At gas stops in Tennessee, fast food chains in Arkansas and rest areas in Oklahoma, the children took turns giving Peppy a slurp or two of water. For a quick meal of our own, we left the dog in the car with the windows partially opened. But the dry, dusty plains of Texas were more challenging, as we could never leave Peppy at all.

This became even more problematic when we arrived in Santa Fe. How could we satisfy our craving for northern New Mexican cuisine with Peppy along? We solved the Peppy problem in two ways. First, at Burritos and Company, my husband spotted a leafy tree directly in front of the restaurant window. There, he attached the dog's leash to a small, corkscrew-

Yet we weren't driving west to stay in motels every night. As the miles of dramatic scenery opened before us, we were excited about pitching our tents in the wilderness. The state and national parks actually welcomed Peppy's arrival. However, as a courtesy to other visitors, dogs must always be leashed, which Peppy didn't mind at all.

After several days in the rugged wilds, we were ready to return to hot showers and cable TV at the nearest motel. Here, I insisted on another important rule: Honesty. I always told our hosts that the dog was with us and was surprised that most establishments accepted him, too. We certainly didn't want to feel like criminals as we trotted Peppy out each morning. Then we discovered that AAA's regional guidebook will indicate which motels do or do not take dogs, saving us lots of time and hassle. Although some places add a fee for the extra cleaning, the cost is quite minimal.

In retrospect, I think we began to get a little cocky as our journey neared an end. On the last night, we decided to stay at the proper and traditional Army and Navy Club, which was an affiliate of our club back home. From the mo-

ment we walked through that glittery, brass-accented door, I knew we had made a mistake.

Sneaking Peppy across the lobby was only the first challenge. How would we ever walk him with the ever-attentive staff downstairs? We tried the basement. Scurrying into the bowels of the garage like trapped mice, zigzagging around cars, we heard the elevator door lock behind us. Although we finally found that elusive exit, we faced another trip through the shining lobby doors, bulging with Peppy.

Surprisingly, we weren't really discovered until we returned to the room. As Molly and Rosie romped with the dog and threw him a treat, he yipped and barked. Then there was a knock at the door. "Is everything all right?" the chambermaid asked, turning the key in the lock. She screamed.

The club didn't ask us to leave but they did make a suggestion when we checked out. "We would like you and your family to come again," said the front door clerk formally. "But next time, you can leave your dog at home."

"Leave without Peppy?" I wondered, glancing once more at the pictures of austere-looking generals and admirals. "Didn't you ever travel with your dog?" I asked those faces rhetorically. I thought I saw them giving me a wink.

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