

This is a true story...

During the COVID pandemic of 2020, I was out of work. The sports club where I worked had been forced shut by the government in late November, and as a result, I was jobless. That, in itself, wasn't a problem. I had enough money put aside that the bills would be paid, and Christmas could still be merry. The fact that I didn't know when things would open again was a bit concerning though.

At the same time, the same edict had forced my barbershop to close. That may sound trivial considering everybody was in the same boat, and nobody was going to be getting a haircut that month, but it was much more than that. I say "my barbershop" but I mean "the barbershop of which I am part owner." From that perspective, closing the doors now forced our seven employees into the same uncertainty I was dealing with, which wasn't a great feeling. And again, while we could afford to keep the bills paid for a month or two, if this lockdown went on any longer, we'd be in big trouble.

At the same time, I was trying to negotiate a multi-million dollar real estate deal on behalf of my condo corporation. I had recently been elected to the Board of Directors as an offer to buy our entire complex appeared. Thinking that the offer was great, almost every owner voted to accept. We just needed to finalize the terms, which involves lawyers, contracts, and a lot of back-and-forth. And it appeared we'd hit a stalemate on a few of the terms. So now, being one of the people in charge of making this deal happen wasn't a lovely position. Instead, I was dreading the thought of being the people in charge of botching our payday (however financially/legally wise it may have been).

At the same time, I had woken up on this rainy Monday morning from a very upsetting dream. Normally, I rarely remember my dreams and I don't normally have to manage the emotions caused by them. But I woke up frustrated and angry. I realized how silly this was - to be upset about a dream - but couldn't shake the feeling; probably because it related to my real-life unemployment. I tried to ignore it as I got dressed, and headed downstairs, but something still lingered.

I could hear Rosie, my six-month old husky, stirring in the kitchen unsupervised and that, historically, wasn't a good thing.

It had only been an hour or so since my wife had left for work. As a nurse in a hospital, her business was booming. Even though the front-line worker hero praise had faded, the work certainly hadn't. She was never going to be unemployed the way things were going. That, and 13 years of seniority in a union job, meant that she could cover the mortgage for a month or two, while I did a poor job of playing "house husband."

In short, the world was falling apart, but things in our house weren't that bad - aside from a bad dream.

I wandered downstairs into the kitchen, and Rosie up to greet me; ears back, tail-wagging. This is the best part of dog-ownership. If I leave the room for more than 10 minutes, I'm welcomed like I've just returned from the moon. Her sleepy blue eyes, super-soft fur, and her puppy kisses would cheer me up after even the worst nightmare. And for a moment, they did. We had a little cuddle as I squealed "good morning" in an obnoxiously high voice. On this occasion, I actually picked her up to hug her because... I needed it.

And then I saw it... the most disgusting pile of carnage you could imagine. Not only a mess of pieces and parts, but a visual representation of a trust-violated. This unhinged beast had destroyed our covenant, dismissed our pact, and torn my faith to shreds with her sharp little puppy teeth.

Obviously, that's all nonsense. But that's what it felt like. Seconds after getting an uplifting puppy welcome, I was screaming at her and ranting like a lunatic because she had found a broom and dustpan to chew on. A broom and a dustpan. How dare she?!

A puppy chewing on something she's not supposed to? Unheard of. At that moment, I was sure we had the only one in the world who would dare misbehave, and I let her know how unacceptable this was. As I violently cleaned up mangled bristles and chewed plastic chunks that used to be part of a dustpan, I held them in her face and shouted "No!" louder and angrier than I should have. She knew she was in trouble - which is probably why she was so sweet in the first place.

Training a puppy is a rollercoaster to begin with. Sometimes you think they've figured it all out, and then two days later you're back to square one. We knew that she would find something to chew on when left alone, so we were usually pretty careful to move anything of value out of her reach. Which is why we left the broom out; it literally came from the dollar store. It was propped up in the corner and forgotten about for days, until the adorable, little, hell-beast got a taste for blood... or bristles.

I tried to calm down, again catching myself descending into a mood. I am a very positive person, and am always very conscious of negativity and tension in my attitude. Again, I took a second to talk myself out of it. “It’s a broom from the fucking dollar store! It has no sentimental value. It has barely any financial value. It can be replaced. Rosie is a six-month old husky. Puppies chew on things.” I still couldn’t get a grip on why I was stewing about this so much. I hugged it out with Rosie, who tried to bite me. This usually meant she had to poop.

I texted Alicia and told her about the broom. She said we should have known, and shouldn’t have left it there. I agreed. I asked her if the girl had pooped. She had not.

When couples get a puppy, this is what they talk about pretty much all of the time. Did the dog poop? Does it look like she has to poop? When was the last time Rosie pooped? You’ve got to be on top of that shit.

At least at this point, we were basically past the mornings where we’d find the poop in the kitchen. It had been nearly two months since that was a regular occurrence. She had grown up very quickly, both in size and maturity, and thankfully, being able to hold her poops overnight eventually came with it.

Regardless, it was time for Rosie to poop. But of course, even that came with a headache.

What I’ve neglected to mention thus far is that during all this, Rosie had been hobbling around on three good legs and one giant cast. After breaking the pinky toe on her back right paw, she’d been dragging

around a splint the size of a football for the past several weeks. She had an appointment scheduled with the vet later in the afternoon to get the toe looked at and the splint re-wrapped, but at this point, we were still trying to get the day started. We'd worry about the toe later.

The injury meant that before we took her outside (especially on a rainy day), the splint had to be wrapped in plastic bags, a rubber glove, and a giant boot to ensure that it didn't get wet and muddy. This is a process that takes several minutes of wrangling a squirming puppy. And even if you do it well, it has to be adjusted several times during even a short walk, as she drags that leg due to the weight of the extra gear. Add one more straw to the camel's back... just see how it goes.

I put my boots on, grabbed my coat and an umbrella, and headed out into the cold November rain. Rosie, who is a fluffy mix of white and grey, wore a pink harness attached to a pink leash, as she bolted down the front step directly into the puddle that always pools there. Within five seconds, she was soaked and muddy. She was happy to be outside; she clearly didn't mind the weather. I was just hoping that my bag and boot job held up.

We walked down the street, toward the park. Usually, she gets quite excited when she sees the grass behind the church, as it is her prime pooping ground. She didn't pull, or run, or anything. She just sniffed around, and let go a little pee and continued on her way into the park.

Already, I was wishing I had brought along a coffee. That's usually the first thing on my morning routine, if not in the kitchen, but in a to-go mug to take out with Rosie. I was clearly out of sorts. But the morning poop-walk usually only took five or ten minutes, so I figured I'd be

back inside and officially start my day before too long. After that, we'd go out for a longer walk in a few hours.

Rosie had other plans.

She walked to one corner of the park, sniffing around in the wet grass and mud. She started to circle, and waddle like she was going to pop a squat and do the deed. False alarm. We walked around the playground to a different spot, and she repeated the performance. Another false alarm. She stopped to eat some cigarette butts by a bench - something she is well aware she isn't supposed to do. My already-thin patience was getting tested.

There were a dozen other false alarms by every lamp post, tree, and trash can in the park. Each hesitation was a tease that the end of this cold, wet, walk was near, but the misery was prolonged. There was another incident where I had to convince her to drop the medical mask somebody had discarded in a pile of leaves. If there was something that seemed out of place in a park, she'd immediately try to eat it.

Thankfully, she'd already gotten fairly good at the "Drop it!" command. I don't know yet what she was thinking about the constant muttering of "For fuck's sake!" under my breath.

We hung out in the rain for 45 minutes, with each little inconvenience pushing me further toward a meltdown. She'd try to eat some garbage, I'd yank on the leash and get pissed off. She'd catch the scent of something and try to pull away toward the street. I'd snap at her and curse through my teeth. Worst of all, she just wouldn't poop, and each time she looked like she might, I'd get excited to go inside... then feel let down. I could feel it happening. I knew that I was not in a good

headspace, and as much as I tried to rationalize it or comfort myself, I couldn't get myself off the ledge.

There I was in the rain; a grown man in the middle of a park, walking the dog with tears of frustration starting to well in my eyes. I felt like I was losing it, a million things were weighing on me, and honestly I just wanted to scream out loud - but at the same time, nothing was specifically wrong at the moment...

Except the doggo wouldn't poop.