

janet's world

Golden moments with golden retrievers and friends

BY JANET GILBERT | Special to The Baltimore Sun

I have the typical family featured in dog food commercials: one spouse, a couple of children, one dog. Others have more than one pet; yet I do not view them as peculiar, nor do I view people who have more than one child as peculiar. But people who have more than one spouse are definitely peculiar.

Now that we've cleared that up ... I recently spent a week watching my brother-in-law's two golden retrievers and cat at his home, along with our dog. For the mathematically inclined, this is a total of four pets. You know you have exceeded the proper pet-to-person ratio when your major accomplishment for any given day is letting the dogs in and out. Nonetheless, at the end of each day I would fall into bed completely exhausted, only to be awakened by a cat on my face!

Excuse me while I revisit my memories of the week from the comfort of a padded room in a supervised facility.

Alas, such a respite is not covered by my insurance plan, whose tag line ought to be: "Did you get a referral for that massive head trauma?"

I digress. Here's how my week went as an indoor game warden:

I approached my role as "pack leader" with a calm

demeanor and the mantra of "dog whisperer" Cesar Millan: exercise, discipline, love. I thought it would be wise to get the whole gang into a routine early. Except for the cat, whose routine was "I'm not going to acknowledge you."

But the very first night, we discovered that the golden retrievers, Sophie and Max, liked to sleep on our bed. And they looked so darn cute curled up together at 11 p.m. By midnight, they were somewhat less charming. With every breath, Max snored; the sound like a Greyhound bus slowly accelerating. And he had digestive issues.

I had fitful dreams, all of them set in the Port Authority. At precisely 5:30 a.m., Sophie alerted me to the dawn by drooling on my ear. In a matter of minutes, all three dogs were up and at 'em. At us, actually.

My husband and I stumbled like zombies into the kitchen to let them out, in, and out again. In the meantime, we tried to grab a cup of coffee and orchestrate their morning meal. Try as we might, we could never outsmart the innate, hunger-driven intelligence of Max, who perceived every meal as the Last Supper. He managed to eat at least some of the other dogs' meals at every feeding; it was definitely an example of survival of the fattest. We even hid our dog's bowl in the master bathroom, but the minute

we left the door open, we heard the wet/dry Shop-Vac sound of Max sucking up an unscheduled snack. This explained his digestive issues.

After breakfast, it was time to take the dogs for a walk in the nearby woods surrounding a lake. This went swimmingly. Next, it was time to wash the muddy dogs. And wash the wash created by washing the dogs.

Afternoons were spent opening and closing the kitchen door, broken up by periods of opening and closing the kitchen door. In the evenings, it was time for the cat to take center stage. She would appear with her tantalizing "I couldn't care less about you" aura, tempting our dog into following her everywhere. This caused us to be vigilant in watching our dog watching their cat. It was like living in a tedious episode of the Discovery Channel.

In retrospect, I think the only thing that could have made the week more challenging was five loose ferrets. But I learned one lesson: A pack leader must be firm when it comes to getting her rest.

She must take an afternoon nap on the couch with the dogs.

To contact Janet Gilbert or hear podcasts, go to www.janetgilbert.net.