

Sunday Column – It's a Lifestyle Choice
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You know as soon as you walk through the front door that you are entering the home of “dog people”. The furniture is covered in blankets and the no longer needed fur coats of winter. You are welcome to sit down and make yourself comfortable among the beasts, both canine and human. That is, after the commotion of being greeted and deemed acceptable pending a thorough examination by their powerful little wet noses.

As I write this I'm relaxing on our sofa with our 100 pound English Mastiff lying beside me. Lucy is the newest addition to our home. She underwent a hernia repair earlier today and our vet took the opportunity to address a few other maintenance issues. She is an old girl and we want her last few years to be her happiest. Lucy is resting peacefully now and I have a much lighter pocket book. It is the price we pay to share our lives with these magnificent animals and I wouldn't have it any other way.

For both Dave and I our dogs are at the center of our lives. We make all sorts of decisions with them in mind. That includes choices about where we live, what kind of house we live in, when we take vacations, and the furniture we buy.

A substantial portion of almost any day off includes a trip to the dog park, the woods or the lake. It is sort of a phenomenon that watching them have fun gives us so much joy. Living with dogs causes us to do things we might not otherwise do. They keep us active and they keep us young.

Research indicates that growing up with dogs reduces the onset of allergies later in life. Our immune systems become stronger and we get sick less often. The simple act of petting a dog reduces stress hormones and blood pressure. Being out and about with our dogs increases our chances of meeting new people and decreases loneliness.

We don't really know how long humans and dogs have lived together. Wolves and dogs are believed to have split off into different species some 100,000 years ago. Evidence of co-habitation extends back as far as 12 – 14 thousand years ago. We have developed a powerful bond with these guys as they played an important role in our very survival by helping us hunt and herd, and by keeping our enemies at bay.

Having dogs is a commitment for sure, but one that pays off in ways that can't be valued in dollars and cents. The days are getting warmer and longer and it's time to enjoy the great outdoors. If you don't have a dog, maybe now is the time to consider if you have room in your life for a furry companion. Two dogs is always better than one. When you're away at work or on a trip they will have each other to look to for comfort and companionship until you return.

You will find dogs in every size, shape, color, coat type, and personality at your local shelter. Many shelters offer low adoption fees and provide pet ownership support after you leave the

building. Adopt from a shelter where you will save a life and you will find the companion of a lifetime.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.