

The September Suzie

14 Sept 2015

Suzie and the Dinosaurs

When the movie *Jurassic Park* first came out years ago, I went to see it with a friend at one of the really big theatres in the city, to get maximum effect. I was not disappointed! My friend afterward said it was more entertaining to watch my reactions than the actual movie.

What I discovered watching that movie was that there was some ancestral instinct that in me that was activated by seeing dinosaurs. It was a disturbing tingling in the lower part of my spine that I believe to be a residue from my ancestral tree, when mammals were small furry things who fled from the dominant reptile species – dinosaurs, until the asteroid struck that killed anything too big to burrow.



Suzie likes to have encounters through the bars of the back deck. A human hand makes an interesting object slid under or between the bars. It might grab her leg to be licked or attacked.

One of the points made in the movie that really struck home, was the idea of birds being modern descendants of dinosaurs. To me it explained why I have always been rather cool toward birds, even while I thought them harmless. The other surviving reptiles, the killing machines such as crocodiles and snakes, I have always had an abiding horror of, and I always sympathize with the mammals on which they prey, even be it a mouse. No doubt this is a hold-over ancestral loyalty to my kind.

(One of my favorite YouTube videos is of a South American big cat of some sort hunting and taking out a crocodile type creature, bigger than itself, by leaping on it as the reptile lay on a sandy bank of the river and grabbing the small cranial bone in its jaws.)

What does all this have to do with Suzie?

I will tell you.

One sunny morning this past August I took Suzie for a walk in the TTC park, and then by leash to another park, which has a bathing pool for kids and requires dogs be on leash. Since no one was there, I let her off-leash – it was such a nice morning. Several minutes later a woman came out of nowhere, running toward me. She said: “You might want to put your dog on a leash. There’s a big hawk sitting in the tree right above you.”

I looked up and, to my horror, was the biggest hawk I’d ever seen. I hurriedly put Suzie on the leash and got out of there. Back at the TTC park where I encountered several other dog walkers, I asked about hawks. They told me stories, one about a puppy that was apparently carried off by a hawk. I won’t recount the details. The consensus seemed to be that Suzie was small enough for such an attack.

The thing was, before this, there hadn’t been hawks around, and I hadn’t paid them much attention. But now they appeared regularly. Evidently a mating couple and their young were somewhere adjacent the wading-pool park. I even saw them over the TTC park.

And with these developments, I began my journey into the personal darkness of worry.



A Hawk resting on the street light right above the watering bowl near the door of the TTC building adjacent the TTC park.

Susie really loved her off-leash runs in the TTC park, playing with the other dogs, chasing squirrels, or just running and running and running. But could she still do this in safety?

I went on-line and did a search on the subject. There was much discussion of how big of a small dog might be carried off or just attacked, and opinions differed. I hoped Suzie was too big for that, but gradually it became apparent that my wonderful, delicate, *fairly small and slim* puppy, was *not* safely out of the target size.

The darkness deepened.

I bought a 30-foot leash and vowed to keep her on-leash all the time. And, since the horror stories about small dogs being attacked by hawks included incidents in back yards, I worried about Suzie being off-leash there as well. And, to cap it all, I saw hawks flying over the backyard, which is a number of blocks from the parks! *Damn!*

I talked with Harold about this, and we decided on a compromise – that Suzie would not be allowed outside if someone wasn't out there with her.

This new constraint was a sore blow to Suzie the running wonder streak. Why was the back screen door kept closed now when it had been left open during the day since the beginning of summer?

And, even with someone in the yard with her, my rather vivid imagination still saw the possibility of a swoop and lift. The idea of what would happen to Suzie then absolutely sickened me.

Damn those dinosaurs!

Previously, I had had to deal with the idea of a fox or coyote, which were known to be around the TTC yard (Harold and I even saw a coyote one day – which cleverly went underneath the chain-link fence to escape a big dog who went nuts smelling its scent (and then the coyote *stood there*, staring at us). With respect to Simon and Alistair I had decided I could get to either of them in case of an attack. Min pins are not passive dogs, and would defend themselves. But a hawk, which attacks from above, which can lift and fly away before you can even reach it – that was another matter! (*Oh the caninity! The horror, the horror!*)



Suzie sits next to Harold in the backyard, with a careful watch on the back fence for squirrels.

But a family protects its family members. Harold and I did what had to be done, and so Suzie spent (at first) all her time at the park on her long leash. And we all made the best of it. But for me it was a painful time. In my anxiety, I even phoned the breeder, Pat, seeking information (and reassurance). I didn't get reassurance, but I got good advice. Facts are often like that, and so I was left to cogitate on what to do. Myself being a human, a highly intelligent ape, I knew my brain was my best weapon – so I thought about what I might do.

I considered a lead-lined coat for Suzie, or a balloon coat that made her look really big, or even an electrified metal ecto-skeleton whose bristling tines would be fully charged. But then there was the possibility that a coat of this sort might slow Suzie down – making her *more* of a target. And then there was the issue of what her opinion on such an imposition might be. She doesn't even like her halter! Thoughts of carrying sticks, a bee-bee-gun, or a slingshot passed through my mind.

In the Park – with the Thirty-foot Leash



Suzie copes, rather with ill grace, with the leash – while Harold looks on.

It proved most difficult to insist on Suzie staying on leash. We began, for brief periods to allow her off-leash time. And this because I had reached a final “solution” in my own mind. The solution was two-pronged.

In terms of the *response to predator*, I reminded myself that we apes, being omnivorous, are predators as well.

“Okay,” I growled to myself, “I’m going to be on guard. I’m going to use my keen ape sight, my awareness, and my intelligence, keeping on top of the situation whenever Suzie is off-leash, in or out of the yard. And you *just try* anything, hawk – and I’ll be there and prepared to do whatever it takes.”



Suzie, momentarily distracted from the Burden of the leash.

But were these just bold words on my part? Were they the prelude to disaster? Or could I ensure any measure of effectiveness?

So I thought about the stories of attacks, picturing them in my mind. I came realize that, really, a hawk doesn't come *literally* out of nowhere. So, if you keep an eye out at all times when the pup is off-leash, then you will have *some* warning in the worst-case scenario.

And so I have adopted the plan of scanning the trees, tree-tops and sky when Suzie is off-leash, even when she is playing and running with other dogs (though I hope the presence of several people and dogs reduces her vulnerability).

So, tentatively, carefully, Suzie has been getting more off-leash time in the TTC park. This has been helped by the fact that *no further sightings* of hawks have been made (if one appears – on the leash she goes, immediately).

And so Suzie continues to meet new friends, almost at every trip to the park.



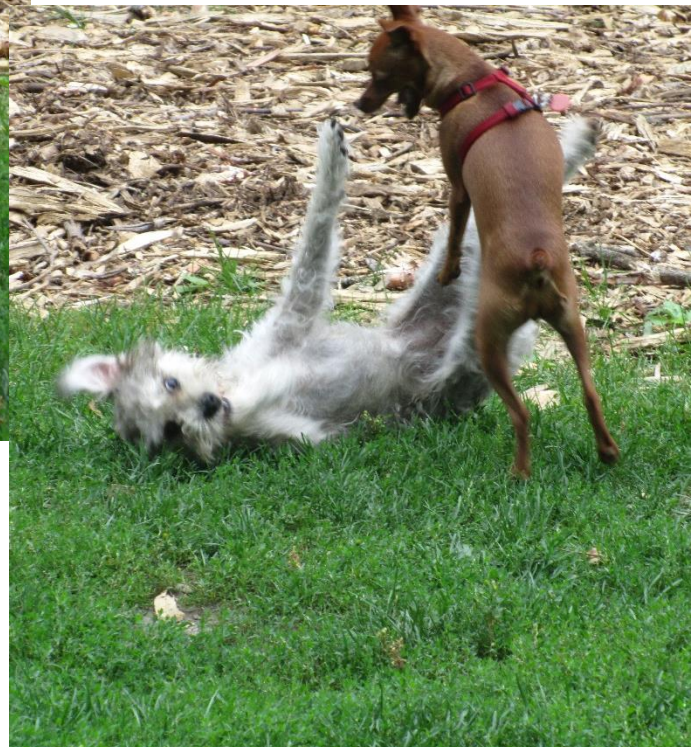
“Hello! My name’s Suzie. What’s yours? Will you be my friend?”



“Hey! She *bit* me!” (Suzie commences the attack.)



All-out war...



Desperate struggle continues...

The battle rages on.
Combatants showing
lots of teeth.



And finally, a
breather.
(Hostilities to be
reignited at a
moment's notice
though.)



Suzie made another friend, a little bigger than her, and therefore evenly matched.

And so, as August closed and September arrived, I began to recover my equilibrium, and Suzie as a result has more freedom, though I am always with the watch – watching her and watching the sky and surrounds.

And, as I continued to listen to more comments from other dog walkers, I realized that it was only one story they were all talking about – which meant it wasn't that common. I decided I only needed to be conscientious, watchful, cautious, and anticipatory – and the danger is greatly reduced.

But even then I hesitated to write a *Sunday Suzie* on this topic, though I knew that I couldn't write about anything else. I worried that it might not be pleasant reading. Then Harold told me that I should write it, that someone might find it instructive.



Suzie arrives, *avec laisse*, home and the backyard – about to be (literally) unleashed. She still chews on the leash, not content to go quietly “in chains.”

September is now passing. The number of hawk sightings has gone down greatly. We are settling into a routine with Suzie that everyone is okay with. In the TTC park, I put Suzie on leash whenever I see a hawk or just plain feel uncomfortable (A minute after, having had such a feeling, putting Suzie on her leash, a hawk flew out of the trees a hundred yards in front us, just above head height! Freaky!)

I make a point of being alert, ready to take action, to protect my little bundle of energy and joy. She is the center of the family, the heart of the home – and will be protected.

So I say: Notice to all dinosaur descendants: “Fly away, birdie! Fly away! Or else (at least in spirit), *blam!*”

