

post-retirement

Now that I'm retired, I stay busier than before. My dogs have discovered the benefits of having me home all day. They plan my social life now, centered around things they like to do—long walks; investigating dead things, compost piles, and trash; barking at swirling leaves and neighbors they've known all of their lives; riding in the car; readying themselves to protect me and the rest of our family from other dogs; and other planned and unplanned activities.

They accompany me to my new workplace (the kitchen table), announce visitors (loudly and at an appropriate panic level), quietly converse among themselves when I'm on the phone, and practice their bullying techniques on each other, circling and making threatening growls until I'm finally forced to intervene.

They're particularly entertaining during our breaks. They all rush for the back door as if they've had to potty for two or three days, pushing and shoving to be the first one out. Tripping me is an added benefit. Surprisingly, snack time is their calmest time although they're quivering with anticipation . . . quietly. They crowd around me so they can hear their name when it's called. They always get their treats in the same order. That helps keep them from trying to grab the treat from the others, pushing each other out of the way to get to it, and the inevitable growling and snapping. They solemnly wait, get their treat, and then try to hide in an 8 by 10 room so the others don't know they have one.

Because I'm sure you're wondering—seven of the little darlings. How did that happen? In the 1980s, I bred cocker spaniels, which have fairly large litters—eight to twelve isn't uncommon, and I always sold every one of them. Papillons only have two to four in a litter, and between my husband and my granddaughter, we've kept two ("But he's Belle's first baby!" and "We can't sell that baby to a family with children!"), had one returned that I wasn't allowed to place in another home ("She's too traumatized."), and a rescue.



"Killer"

They all have their particular specialties. Weighing in at four pounds, Sophie is the legal arm of our group. She's a killer and particularly apt to attack . . . as long as I'm holding her. On the ground, she's relatively circumspect, but in my arms, she will attack anything no matter its size. She'll bark and bark and bark to announce the boundaries of her territory—anywhere she happens to be—and then, just to show how tough she is, she'll bite me.

Rocky is our enforcer. He's very good at telling the other dogs what they should and shouldn't do and is completely devoted to me, two very important talents as far as I'm concerned. Poppy oversees and schedules my work and



Poppy's opinion of my work

then judges its worth. Belle is the largest of the group, the pack leader, and the mother of Rocky, Lucy, and Poppy. Skylar is their father, the grand old man who can ignore everything until someone bothers him or he thinks they're thinking about bothering him. The others are still deciding what their specialty will be or have decided that their best bet is to pretend to keep looking. Their major duty across the spectrum is napping, and they're all pros at that.



Skylar in his show days

~ Catherine C