



Sept. 21, 2017

Like a quiet walk? Don't take your Irish wolfhound. Because people will come flocking and they'll ask the strangest things.

I *do* like quiet walks, but we make road trips with Oona and Oisin in the spring and fall. So we socialize them constantly. One does not want to be strapped to 300 pounds of wayward wolfhounds in a crowd. Plenty of our daily strolls are away from the maddening crowd. But then there are those others...

Stopping traffic and causing a sensation are old hat for many of

you. And, at least for a while, it's one of the fun things about living with wolfhounds. Heads turn and you leave a trail of gasps and shouts in your wake.

And why not? An Irish wolfhound is the largest dog most people will ever see. They'll tell you this. Constantly. Thank you. I had a lapse. I thought I was herding yaks....

Wolfhounds were for many years confined to the castles and estates. At some point, most wolfhound owners being to understand the gentry's reasoning.... Some conversations I've fallen into:

The Usual Suspects

- What *kind* of dog is that? *The big kind.*
- How much does it eat? ***She** eats as much as she wants.*
- Does it sleep on your bed? ***She** sleeps on **her** bed. Or the couch. Or, again, wherever she pleases.*
- You must have a HUGE house. *Not really. It's a cozy place. Verrrrry cozy.*
- Is it friendly? *I hope so. Pound on her side like that again and we'll see, eh?*
- He came from Ireland? *No, he came from Florida. We didn't think Floridian Wolfhound sounded as romantic.*

I got the T-shirt.

A few years ago we took our wolfhound, Finn, to visit friends in Tampa. After a couple of public walks, Jim said, "It's like this

every time, huh?" He sent me a T-shirt. You've probably seen one. It's for Irish wolfhound owners. It reads:

She's an Irish wolfhound.

Yes, she is friendly.

No, she doesn't have a saddle.

No, your kid cannot ride her.

Yes, you can pet her.

Yes, she is a house dog.

No, my house isn't huge.

No, she doesn't eat that much.

From Ireland.

Hunts wolves.

No, not just a clever breed name.

Does a horse have teeth like this?

I know they're lost for words. But they feel like they have to say something. So they usually go straight to the horse comments.

- Got a saddle for that thing?
- Why, that dog is as big as a horse!
- I didn't know they allowed horses in the park.
- Did you ride that thing to town?

- Look, the rodeo's in town!

I've learned to smile and nod. If they persist with the saddle comments, I say, "Go ahead, *you* try to saddle her."

She's not a cartoon character, really.

Some parents work with their children. Some do not. I truly appreciate the parents who hover and say, "Dakota, you be sure to ask first. And let the dog come to you."

It's a little frightening when other parents turn their kids loose and you're suddenly surrounded by a pack of shrill children on a sugar high. They shriek. They jump up and down. Their hands flap like butterflies on crack all over Oona and Oisin's faces. These are the times I'm proud to own a wolfhound. Mine may blink in surprise, but they take it in stride.

Me too. Because I've never figured a way to casually tell parents that when wolfhounds were war dogs in Bronze Age Ireland, they snipped the heads off enemy fighters. Snipped 'em. Right off... "Why no mam. They're gentle as a lamb." (And have the patience of Job) "They're *good* with children."

One little girl spotted Oona coming down the sidewalk, shrieked, and scampered right over, chattering the entire way. Then she reached up with both hands, gripped Oona's snout, and squeezed it. "Honk! Honk!" she said.

Wolfhounds are famously calm and collected. Fersure...

The Yukon is nice this time of year.

Walking Finn, a cream-colored wolfhound, on campus one winter night, we met a student whose jaw dropped and eyes got

bigger the closer we got. We came into the streetlight and he said, “Thank god, I thought you were walking your polar bear!”

Every walk with a wolfhound is pure adventure...