



Nov, 4, 2017

I'm out with my Irish wolfhound, Oona, and I'm getting the usual reaction about how whoppingly big she is. Then come the saddle comments. Then, "I'd hate to have your food bill!" Yes, you would.

Running down my mental checklist, I see everything's on track. It's just another stroll in public with my girl. But then comes the rare comments from someone who actually *sees* my wolfhound.

"Gosh, she's awfully well behaved." She is. Except that she's just investigated the pockets of everyone in the crowd. But Oona has a light touch. They probably won't miss any cheese crumbs they had lingering down there until later.

I'm giving her a pointed look. She's grinning as if to say, "Chill. Nothing but lint and an old Frito. They won't miss a *thing*."

And somebody say, "Wow, she sure does love you. It's like you two are practicing telepathy!"

Doesn't everyone? Sure, we're bonded. She's an Irish wolfhound. She's been inside my head since she was 13 weeks old and I brought her home. I do the driving. She gives me directions from the back seat. Why are we even talking about this? It's just a normal relationship, right?

Then I remember, not everyone's a dog person. They look at us and see an old guy and his....great big beast. Except for Rin Tin Tin and Lassie, dogs are just mute animals. They only talk in cartoons. They're surprised that you can *haverapport* with an animal that doesn't speak English, doesn't use standard American Sign Language and, as far as they can see, is only interested in sniffing the grass and peeing on fire hydrants and bushes.

And I'm always surprised that they're surprised. I even see some people who do have dogs and they're both in their separate worlds,



walking down the sidewalk tolerating each other's company. The bond, it's just not happening. It's such a staggering loss...

I'm not sure it's possible to live with an Irish wolfhound and *not* bond. They insist on it. And a wolfhound is hard to ignore. If they can't catch your eyes with theirs and spill their hearts out, they'll thwap you with a giant paw, give your eyeballs time to stop spinning, and then talk to you once they have your undivided attention.

But the bond is there waiting anytime there's a dog and a person in the same room. It just takes a little coaxing. It's not hard. In fact, [nature encourages it.](#)

Start by recognizing that your partner isn't "just a dog." They're an individual capable of experiencing the same emotions you are. See past the shaggy poker face. They're full of personality. A dog has principles, hope and fears. And unless the dog has a history of unfortunate encounters with humans, he *wants* to be with you. He's just waiting to see if he can trust you.

And then he's waiting to see if you're *listening*. Because most dogs want to talk to you. They have their own rich language they use among themselves. They speak with their tails, their ears, their entire bodies. They're constantly exchanging calming signals, warnings, shows of acceptance. And you're probably missing most of it. But that's okay. It'll come once you show the dog that you're paying attention.

Because that's when you begin to look into each other's eyes. And nature leads the way...

[Oxytocin](#) is a hormone your body produces. It's sometimes called the Feel-Good Hormone or the Love Hormone. It spikes when a baby is with his mother. It leaps when lovers are together, it's that

glow that two close friends feel in each other's company. It's probably responsible for our civilization. It promotes intimacy and harmony.

And dogs feel it, too. When you gaze into your dog's eyes, her oxytocin levels can shoot up as much as 130%. Meanwhile, *your* oxytocin goes up as much as 300%. This occurs between man and no other animal.

Look into a wolf's eyes and he'll see it as a provocation. But 30,000 years or so ago when dogs and wolves went their own ways, the dog stopped fearing us, drew close, and looked into our eyes. Startled, we looked back. And a friendship began. Sometimes it turned into mutual love.

I look across the room at Oona now and our eyes meet. We smile. I know that I'm loved and accepted. And she does, too. Our gazes linger. We don't have to speak. I don't have to resort to miming. Because nature meant for us to be together. To communicate on the deepest, unspoken levels.

Why is this so surprising to so many people? I'm no dog whisperer. This is no dog and pony show. I'm simply in love with my girl. Just as nature intended.