

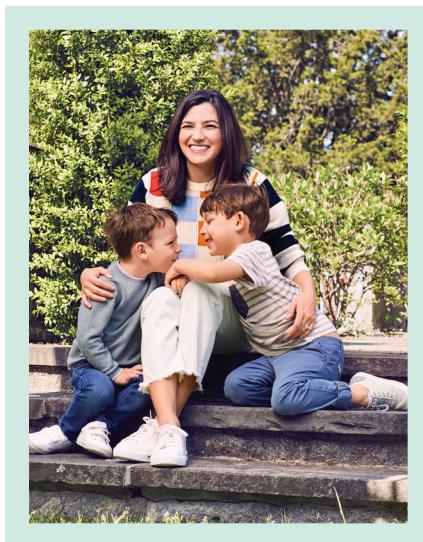
The All-Important Dog Question

THE BARKING at home has become so spirited lately that I worry the neighbors will complain. Thankfully, it's pretty easy to get it to stop. Our puppies, brothers Shirley and Furley, who happen to be my human sons channeling their inner canines, usually respond to a stern, "Go back to being Gabriel and Joey!"

They're desperate for a dog, and this ongoing game (which involves a dramatic rescue from the shelter and fetching balled-up socks) is a way of coping with parents who are waffling on a decision. "Should we get a dog?" is a seemingly unanswerable question, one we bring up, and table, on a weekly basis.

I wish I didn't have this hesitation. Many families we know hopped aboard the pandemic puppy train. My husband still pines for the wheaten terrier from his adolescence (RIP, Barkley), and every single one of my childhood birthday wish lists started with the same item: "Dog (real)." (No way were they buying me off with another stuffed animal.)

Ultimately, when I was 15, a cat showed up on our porch, and I convinced my worn-down parents to let me bring her inside. I bid goodbye to



my dog dreams and became a cat person—one who now has a spouse allergic to felines. So if we get a pet (to echo Dr. Seuss), it will be a dog. Which suggests it's time to resurrect my puppy fantasy.

And yet I delay the decision, in part because I've seen how a pet's care can become more involved than expected. Take my husband's childhood pet frog, George, who recently passed away at the miraculous age of—wait

for it—34. My mother-in-law had to clean that tank well into her empty-nest years. The canine equivalent, I fear, is the novelty wearing off for my kids, leaving me to take a dog down to the sidewalk five times a day. And if I'm honest with myself, I worry I'll be even worse at dog training than I am at sleep training, and our family will resign itself to a life of pee stains, *real* barking complaints, and an inability to go on vacation.

Eight years ago, I barely paused to think before charging ahead with trying for a baby. But the experience of motherhood has changed me. Now, just like my own parents, I've become a nervous second-guesser, more concerned about burning out than the simple joy of a wagging tail.

But then I think about how a dog could help smooth the bumps of childhood, and how, as my boys get older and their lives grow emotionally

How Green Is Your Parenting?

When it comes to eco-friendly living, I know

I need to set a better example for my kids. If you're in a similar boat, I hope you'll read a special green edition of our Life section, beginning on page 71.

It delivers big and little ways to take better care of the planet, from having fun in nature to planning a plant-forward menu. Perhaps most important, the section takes on how to raise our children with optimism in the age of climate crisis anxiety. There are no clear-cut solutions, but one fact is clear: Even our smallest eco-actions make a difference—not just to Mother Earth, but to our own capacity to stay hopeful for our kids.

fraught, I'd value that benefit even more. I see my "pups" cuddling on the couch, and faintly hear my inner child. I'm still not quite ready to adopt an actual Shirley or Furley, but I am inching closer to yes.

Julia



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FETCH SOME PET TIPS!

In this issue—our annual ode to the creatures who make every day sillier, snugglier, and, yes, more poop-filled—we've included seven special tips on taking care of cats and dogs. Look for this paw-print icon throughout the magazine.



My younger son, Gabriel, bonding with good boy Dodger (who is, alas, not our dog).