

Introduction

Tooling around the Web on one of those evenings when compulsive surfing is the only way to unwind, I bumped into a blog post about a sad-eyed beagle hanging out of its owner's arms.

"The Dog Ate My Moleskin" was the title of the post explaining how the beagle, named Sophie Lee Ramos, had eaten the 2005 Moleskin planner of her owner's former boyfriend.

The enterprising but now disoriented gent was offering on eBay, in a brown paper lunch sack, what was left of his week-old planner, in addition to "several notes, maps and diagrams from my recent holiday trip to Boston."

He commented that before its demise, when it was living safely in his back pocket, his Moleskin had served him faithfully and well and kept him on time.

I have never met Sophie Lee Ramos, and I don't own a dog. But it occurred to me, gazing at the innocent-looking beagle, that the ex-boyfriend and I have a lot in common.

We have this planner, meticulously enter our lives into it, tuck it safely away, and Shazam! Something comes along and eats it for breakfast.

The only recourse is to make the best of a life disrupted — to see the humor, laugh a little, gather up the remains in a paper bag and go on.

It was with that in mind that I decided in March 2000 to let the rest of the world know — as if there was any doubt — that my own planner was in pieces, that I did not have it all together.

Moving an elderly parent, getting kids off to camp and deciding whether to switch to a Palm Pilot were just too overwhelming when there were already Christmas stockings to stuff, Hanukkah gifts to buy, banana bread loaves to produce for

the school bake sale, book groups to attend without reading the book and dancing lessons with hubby to revitalize that marriage bed spark.

That was on top of keeping track of winter gloves, trying to lose weight, collecting all the family photos in a professional-looking scrapbook, remembering to return unfortunate purchases and, during that halcyon period when the mortgage rates were low, building a house.

So instead of keeping the craziness to myself — and in hopes of restoring my own sanity — I launched “Balancing Act,” a regular humor column that has appeared for nearly a decade in Suburban News Publications, a chain of 22 weekly newspapers in the Columbus, Ohio, area.

Since I launched the column, life has showered me and most Americans with even more complications. Thanks to electronic devices, our lives have speeded up. To make them simpler, we’ve bought even more electronic devices. We’ve bought fast food to keep up with the pace, but it looks like we should really be eating organics whipped up from scratch, which takes more time and money. And where do we find the hours to work more hours so we can buy this food and whip it up? If we let them, these are the quandaries that can eat at our ideal days like a pack of hungry dogs.

I’ve found that like the ex-boyfriend on eBay, the best way to tame the dogs that eat our planners is to find the humor in them.

Drawing on tales previously published as “Balancing Act” columns, *The Dog Ate My Planner* presents a dozen dogs, from fashion to electronic devices, from kids to elderly parents, which chomp away at the lives we’ve planned.

Thanks to helpful column readers and my own life experience, each dog comes with its own set of “leash laws” guaranteed to tame that pesky dog. Or make you laugh trying.