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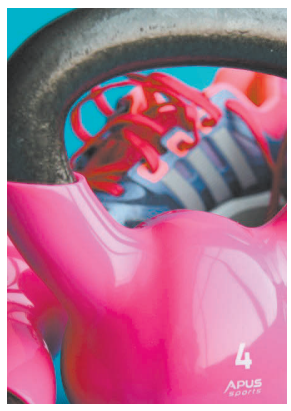

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Opinion

Ordinary Days By Lauren Denton

A year with Ruby

Denton

From my position at the kitchen island as I'm writing this column, I see three dog toys, a few pairs of shoes and a camp chair propped up in the corner of the room. Our dining table holds six books, a school binder, a box of Legos and a mini Christmas tree (don't ask). The floor is about three days past needing a good vacuuming, and there's a smear of honey on the counter from the peanut butter sandwich Sela made yesterday.

It's our Saturday morning house, raw and unfiltered. The best part? I'm withstanding it. I'm sitting here writing these words instead of whirling around in a frenzy, picking up everything and swiping it with a damp cloth, and barking at my people to help me clean up.

Don't get me wrong, I'll get them to help me later, but for now, I'm content to let it sit, to do my work amidst the clutter, and I'm only able to do that by the grace of God … well, and Ruby.

Ruby is our dog. I've written about her here a few times, mainly the part about how our kids finally wore us down and we got a dog — and during the lockdown, no less. She's been with us for a year now (which truly shows how fast time has flown), and in that year, I have learned to let go of a whole lot.

It's no surprise to anyone who reads my columns regularly that I like to keep things neat. I like a place for everything and everything in its place. I like order and routine and a vacuumed floor. In fact, for much of my life, it was hard for me to be able to relax in my space if everything wasn't neat and orderly. I remember many times back when my kids were younger when, instead of taking advantage of a thin slice of time before the end of naptime and doing something for myself — read a few pages of a book, eat lunch, sit and do nothing — I'd whisk myself around the house and straighten everything just so I'd be able to relax.

Of course, by the time I finished, the kids would be awake and the energy level in the house would pick up, and that tiny slice of time to myself was gone. Or I'd look around at the mess all over the house and stop whatever I was doing to get a handle on the chaos, even if it meant foregoing a chance to play a game with one of my girls or to just sit and watch them play.

A cluttered, messy house was unbearable to me, and if I did have to bare it, it made me grumpy and irritable.

I wish I could say my precious children cured me of this malady, but instead it was the dog. Ruby invaded our lives with all the cuteness you could stuff into a fuzzy yellow puppy. She frolicked all over our yard and laps, made cute noises and faces, and liked to sit right next to us, often with one paw resting on our feet.

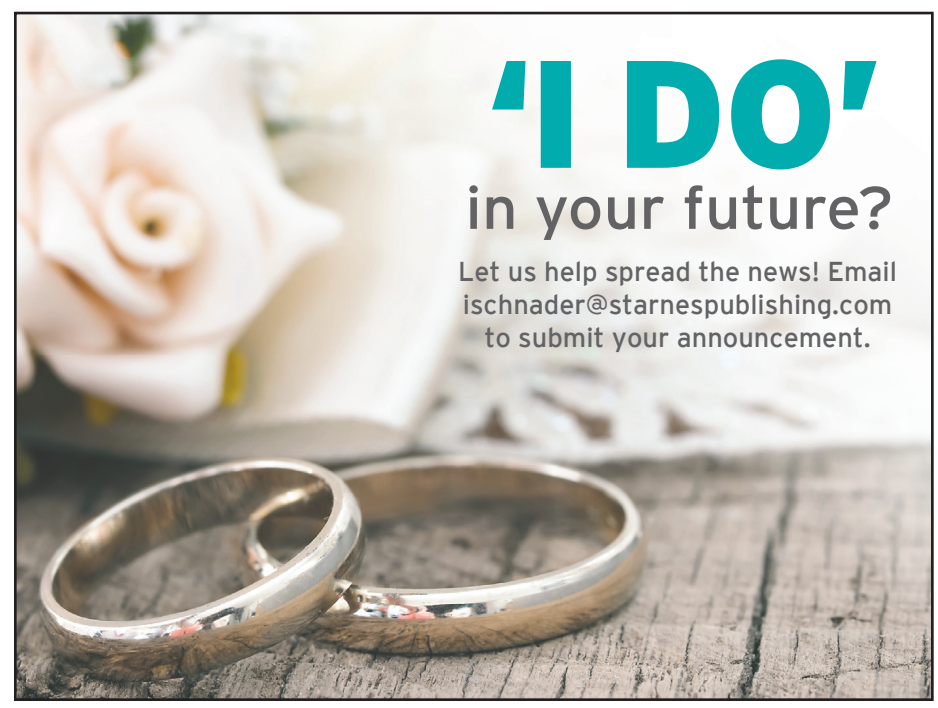
The flipside of all that cuteness was that she also shredded every dog toy we gave her, shed fur all over our house (despite the fact that she was supposed to be a non-shedding doodle) and ate every stray sock, scrunchie and face mask she found — then disposed of them in less-than-desirable ways.

But that was biggest thing that surprised me about getting a dog — instead of becoming more bent on order and cleanliness, I became more OK with letting things be as they are. I realized life is about a lot more than how clean my floors are or how uncluttered my countertops are. And it's OK for me to take a breather while toys and art supplies litter my dining table and dog toys are underfoot — things don't have to be perfect in order for me to relax.

Instead of the mountain of frustration I expected to deal with when adding a dog into our lives, I'm actually kind of grateful she got me (mostly) out of my tight, controlling ways and forced me to accept the big ol' mess that life really is.

Now, to be completely honest, I can only go so long before I pull out the vacuum and take care of the floors, and before I haul everything off the counters and tabletops and threaten to take everything to the garbage can if the rightful owners don't claim their stuff in the next three minutes, but still.

Having Ruby in our house is a constant reminder that life should be about a lot more than clean floors and a neat home, and sometimes choosing joy and fun is the best thing you can do, for yourself and the people in your family. There will always be time to vacuum and clean, but life is short and these people won't be young for long.

So thank you, Ruby, for the fun and laughter you've added to our lives, and for the ways you've changed me.

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