

Don't Wash, Don't Tell

by Roz Warren

My friend Beth asked if I'd walk Butch, her Labradoodle, while she was out of town for a week. Husband Bob would be at work during the day, and Butch was a high energy dog who needed a long mid-day walk. She'd happily pay me the going rate for dog walking.

"I'd be glad to," I said.

Several days later, I stopped by so Bob could give me a key and show me the ropes. I learned where the leash and harness were kept. Butch stood patiently as Bob showed me how to put them on correctly.

"After he comes in from a walk," Bob told me, "we wash his paws." He filled the large kitchen sink with soapy water. "He doesn't like this part, but he's good about it." Kneeling, Bob put his arms around Butch's legs, then lifted up the large dog and stood him in the sink.

"That looks unsanitary," I thought as Bob washed each paw, drained the water, refilled the sink and rinsed them again. "Not to mention time-consuming."

Then Bob took a baby wipe from a nearby container, lifted Butch's tail, and briskly wiped his butt. "We always do this too," he said "Eeeew," I thought.

He lifted Butch from the sink, put him on the floor and dried his clean paws with a wash cloth.

"You go through this every time he goes out?" I asked. I was beginning to understand how Beth kept her house so clean.

"Yup, He resisted at first."

"I'll bet he did."

"But now he's okay with it."

It seemed a little over-the-top to me, but what did I know? I didn't have a dog. I decided to ask around. Maybe every dog owner performed an in-the-sink paw wash and over-the-counter butt wipe after every walk. It could be one of those little dog-owning insider

secrets that other folks don't know about. At work the next day, I queried my dog-owning co-workers.

"I wouldn't put my dog in the kitchen sink," said Eileen. "I prepare food there."

"They wipe his butt? With a baby wipe? Right over the kitchen counter?," asked Deb. "I'm sorry but that's weird."

I was relieved to find that I was right -- it WAS weird. I'd been looking forward to walking Butch. But the post-walk wash? Not so much.

When I arrived for our first walk, Butch greeted me with happy yelps and a wagging tail. It was a beautiful spring day and I enjoyed our stroll so much I forgot all about what was coming. But apparently Butch didn't. Bob had said that Butch would meekly follow me to the kitchen and submit to his post-walk wash. Instead, the moment I released him from his leash, he took one wild look at me and fled. I found him sitting quietly on the bed in the master bedroom.

"C'mon, Butch," I said. "Time to wash up!"

He gave me a look that clearly said, "Maybe I have to put up with that routine from Bob and Beth. But you aren't getting me into that sink."

Taking his collar, I pulled gently.

"C'mon, Butchie! Let's go."

He didn't budge.

"Do I really have to pick you up and carry you down the steps and take you into the kitchen and put you in the sink?"

The look he gave me said, "Try it and die."

I fetched some wipes from the kitchen and used them to wipe his paws -- and just his paws. Then I fed him a treat and rubbed his head. "If you don't tell," I said. "I won't."

It was a great week. The good weather held and we took long rambling walks all over the neighborhood. After each one, instead of going into the kitchen, Butch raced upstairs. Instead of putting him in the sink, I rubbed his head and cleaned his paws and fed him treats on his preferred spot on the bed.

"How did it go?" Beth asked upon her return.

“We had a wonderful time!” I didn't mention that Butch hadn't been anywhere near the kitchen sink. And if she or Bob noticed that any part of their dog wasn't as immaculately clean as it could have been, they didn't mention that either.

I'd really like to think they didn't check.

