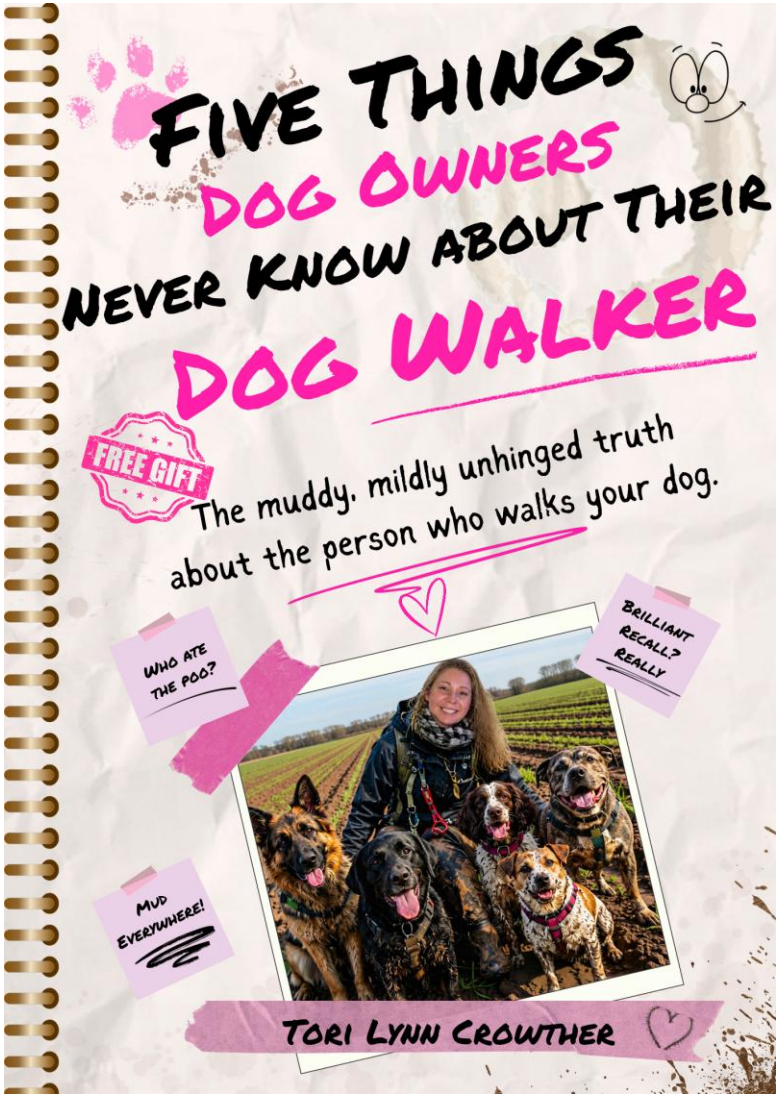


ABSTRACT

You trust your dog walker with your beloved companion. But what really happens when the lead comes off and the adventure begins? From naked rugby players and disappearing puppies to muddy disasters, secret dog gossip and the daily chaos of life on four legs, this humorous guide reveals five things dog owners rarely know about the people who walk their dogs.

Tori Lynn Crowther

Five Things Dog Owners Never Know About Their Dog Walker

The muddy, mildly unhinged truth about the person who walks your dog.

A little book for dog owners, written by someone who probably has dog hair in their coffee.

Tori Lynn Crowther

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Dedication

To the dogs.

The real stars of this story.

The professional mud collectors, pigeon inspectors, stick enthusiasts and serial offenders who inspired every page.

May your treats be plentiful, your walks be long, and your owners never discover what you've been telling your dog walker.

Warning

Before reading Five Things Dog Owners Never Know About Their Dog Walker, please be aware that the information contained within may permanently alter your relationship with both your dog and the person who walks them.

Possible side effects include:

- Realising your dog walker deserves danger money.
- Discovering your dog is not the innocent angel you believed them to be.
- Feeling guilty about every time you've said, "He never does that at home."
- Looking suspiciously at your dog and wondering what secrets they've been sharing.
- Developing a new level of respect for anyone willing to pick up warm poo in horizontal rain.

The author accepts no responsibility for damaged illusions, bruised egos, or awkward conversations with your dog walker.

If at any point you find yourself saying, "My dog would never do that," please understand that your dog walker has probably already got photographic evidence.

Proceed at your own risk.

The dogs know what really happened.

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A Little Introduction

Dear Dog Owner,

You trust me with your precious fur baby.

You hand over the lead, wave goodbye and go back to your important human activities, safe in the knowledge that your dog is having a wonderful adventure with a professional who understands their needs.

You imagine fields of wildflowers. Gentle breezes. Happy dogs frolicking through the countryside like something from a Disney film.

Oh, bless you.

In reality, I have spent the last twenty minutes persuading a Labrador that a dead pigeon is not a suitable lunch, while a Spaniel tries to climb into a hedge because he can smell something that died during the previous government. Meanwhile, your perfectly innocent little angel has rolled in something that smells like Satan's underpants and a blocked septic tank.

And I still have five more dogs to collect.

I've worked with dogs since the 1990s and I've run TLC Dog Walking in Yorkshire since 2007. That's over thirty years of mud, twelve types of drizzle, and knowing exactly which dog has farted without turning round.

So here are five things your dog walker knows that you probably don't. Some might surprise you. Others might make you wonder whether I'm legally allowed to work with animals.

Let's begin.

Thing One: We Have Your Keys, and We Have Seen Things

When you give a dog walker a key, you hand over more than a way into your house. You give me a quick look at how you live. Mostly that's lovely: a kitchen, a lead by the door, a dog bed in the one patch of sun. Occasionally, it isn't.

One morning, I arrived to collect three dogs from a house with a gleaming, modern kitchen and the sort of glass balcony that suggested the owners had considerably more money than sense.

Everything looked lovely. Tasteful décor. Immaculate surfaces. One of those kitchens where you feel guilty putting your car keys down in case you scratch the marble.

And above it, on the glass balcony, were approximately fifteen young men in their early twenties.

Naked.

Completely, gloriously, spectacularly naked.

Not wearing little boxer shorts. Not wrapped in towels. Not in the process of getting dressed.

Naked as the day they were born, except considerably hairier in places and with significantly more confidence than nature had ever intended.

They were rugby players, apparently, and had decided that the best possible way to spend their morning was to parade around a glass balcony in full view from the kitchen.

Ten to Fifteen of them. I lost count somewhere around the seventh penis because, frankly, I hadn't expected to need a tally chart for my working day.

There were penises everywhere.

Long ones. Short ones. Ones that appeared to have given up on life. Ones that seemed to be desperately trying to retreat into the human body like tortoises confronted by a predator.

And the worst part?

They were strolling around as casually as if they were choosing breakfast cereal in Tesco.

One was leaning against the balustrade, chatting to another. Another was stretching. A third appeared to be conducting an animated conversation whilst his entire downstairs department was hanging out in the fresh air.

I had arrived to collect three dogs.

I had not knowingly booked tickets to the World's Most Unnecessary Willy Exhibition.

Now, I consider myself a professional. I have dealt with aggressive dogs, dogs with diarrhoea, dogs that eat things they absolutely should not eat, and owners who insist their dog is friendly whilst it is actively attempting to remove another dog's face.

I can handle most things.

But there is no formal training module for what to do when you arrive at a client's house and discover an entire rugby squad airing their tackle above your head.

Do you wave?

Do you pretend you haven't noticed?

Do you ask whether any of them would like to book a dog walk?

I stood underneath the balcony with three leads in my hand, staring resolutely at the ground with the sort of intense concentration normally reserved for archaeologists examining a potentially significant Roman artefact.

That bit of flooring was fascinating.

Absolutely riveting.

I could have written a bloody dissertation on the kitchen slabs.

Meanwhile, my peripheral vision was screaming.

I could see movement above me. I knew there were men up there. I knew what they were doing. And I knew that if I accidentally looked up

and made eye contact with someone's todger, I would probably have to move to another county.

The dogs, naturally, were being no help whatsoever.

Dogs have absolutely no understanding of social embarrassment. They don't care if you're having a breakdown. They don't care if you're standing beneath fifteen naked men wishing the earth would open up and swallow you.

They just want their walk.

One was sniffing my trousers. Another was trying to eat something off the kitchen counter. The third was staring up at the balcony with the sort of innocent curiosity that suggested he was considering whether any of these men might have treats.

I was standing there trying to maintain the dignity of a respectable small business owner whilst silently screaming:

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, SOMEBODY PUT SOME UNDIES ON.

Eventually, the young man who lived in the house spotted me.

He looked down, saw me standing there with the dogs, and called out cheerfully:

"We'll be out of the way soon!"

Out of the way?

OUT OF THE WAY?

Mate, you're not a delivery van parked across the drive. You're a walking, talking collection of naked blokes, and I'm fairly certain I've just witnessed more of your mates' genitalia than I have seen in the entirety of my adult life.

Possibly more than my eyes were ever designed to process.

"Lovely!" I called back, because apparently my mouth had decided to abandon me and start working for the diplomatic service.

I was trying desperately to sound normal.

Casual.

Professional.

Like this was an entirely ordinary Tuesday morning.

Inside, however, my brain was conducting an emergency meeting.

Right. Don't look up. Don't look up. Don't look up.

Oh God, that one's moved.

WHY HAS THAT ONE MOVED?

They all move, you idiot. That's how bodies work.

I KNOW THAT. I JUST DIDN'T EXPECT TO SEE THE ENTIRE RUGBY TEAM'S COLLECTION BEFORE NINE O'CLOCK.

The young man disappeared inside a room, presumably to put on some clothes, whilst his mates continued their leisurely stroll around the balcony.

I gathered the dogs as quickly as possible, trying to look as though I regularly collected animals from properties featuring an open-air penis convention.

Someone shouted from one of the rooms "We'll be gone by the time you get back!".

"Don't worry."

Don't worry.

I love it when people say that.

It's usually a reliable indication that there is, in fact, something to worry about.

I smiled, collected the dogs and left, walking with the determined pace of a woman who had seen things she could never unsee and was now seriously reconsidering her career choices.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the sort of thing nobody mentions when you decide to become a dog walker.

They tell you about the fresh air.

The exercise.

The joy of working with animals.

They don't tell you that one day you'll find yourself standing in a stranger's kitchen, trying not to make eye contact with fifteen naked men whilst pretending to be deeply interested in a flooring slab.

And they certainly don't tell you that you might end up seeing enough penises before breakfast to qualify for some sort of honorary medical degree.

I've seen dogs mate in public. I've witnessed things come out of dogs that should never have existed. I've had dogs cock their legs on me, vomit on my shoes and attempt to eat their own poo whilst looking me directly in the eye.

But somehow, the naked rugby team still managed to make the list of things I hadn't been emotionally prepared for.

And the really annoying thing?

Not one of those bastards offered to help with the dogs.

We never mention these things. Not to you, and certainly not to the neighbours. What happens behind your front door stays behind your front door, which is a promise I've kept for almost twenty years.

Thing Two: Your Dog Tells Us Everything

Before you panic, I'm not suggesting your dog walker runs a canine intelligence network.

But I have your dog. And your dog is an absolute blabbermouth.

You might tell me that little Milo is a perfect angel at home, never steals food and always comes back when called. Milo tells a slightly different story. Within ten minutes of meeting me, your beloved companion has usually revealed enough to destroy years of carefully constructed public relations. The dog who is "not allowed upstairs" practically pays council tax in the master bedroom. The dog who "never begs" can hear a sandwich wrapper being opened from three streets away. The dog who "doesn't really like treats" has just nearly dislocated my shoulder reaching for a piece of chicken.

Dogs also have no sense of timing.

One morning a group of women in the park stopped me to admire the dogs. They gushed. They told me how lovely the dogs were and how well behaved, and I stood there glowing, because for a few minutes my dogs were the perfect advert for professional dog walking.

Then Jack walked over to one of the women, positioned himself beside her leg and used it as a tree.

She didn't even notice, which made it funnier. She was still telling me how well behaved the dogs were while Jack quietly turned her leg into his personal toilet. I said a quick goodbye and left at speed. There is no polite way to say, "I'm terribly sorry, Jack appears to have mistaken your lower limb for a convenient shrub."

The Recall Myth

Every dog walker has heard it. It should be printed on a T-shirt.

"He's got brilliant recall."

It's said with great confidence by someone currently hanging on to a lead attached to a dog who is trying to launch himself into the next postcode.

"He always comes back when I call him."

Wonderful. What do you call him?

"Kevin."

And what does Kevin do?

"He looks at me."

That's not recall, Brenda. That's customer feedback.

Yet the same dog will race towards me as though summoned by royalty, and his owner will stare at me as if I've secretly implanted a remote control. I haven't. I've spent months building trust, learning what motivates him and making it worthwhile to come back.

Also, I have cheese. Never underestimate the motivational power of cheese.

When It Matters

Some of what dogs tell us isn't funny at all. I see dogs every day, away from the routines of home, so I notice when something changes: an older dog taking longer to stand up, a confident puppy who suddenly finds the world overwhelming, a dog who stops eating.

One day one of my walkers arrived to collect a Saluki and found her unconscious. She rang me straight away, I got the dog to the vets as fast as I could, and by the next day she was looking brighter. The dog hadn't told anyone anything. She didn't need to. Somebody was paying attention.

Thing Three: I Talk to Your Dog. A Lot.

I have shouted "Don't pee on his head" more often than I've said "I love you."

If I told the average office worker how much time I spend talking to animals, they'd assume I'd lost the plot somewhere around my third muddy field. I negotiate. I plead. I bargain. I make promises I have absolutely no authority to make. And occasionally I threaten disciplinary action.

During the first lockdown I once spent fifteen minutes talking to a Labrador as though we were two executives negotiating a merger. He listened attentively. He didn't interrupt. He didn't tell me I was overreacting, or explain what he'd read on Facebook. He was, frankly, a better conversationalist than half the people I know.

Dog walking, once you strip away the wholesome photographs, is a never-ending series of diplomatic negotiations with tiny furry dictators. Some refuse to walk unless they can carry a stick so enormous it needs planning permission. Some won't get out of the van until somebody else goes first, as though they're arriving at a royal engagement. And there is always one who lies down in the middle of a muddy field and announces that he is finished.

Not tired. Not injured. Finished.

You try encouragement. You try praise. You offer treats. You kneel down and attempt calm, rational discussion. The dog stares at you. A crow flies overhead. You briefly consider changing your identity and starting a new life in Scotland.

Then you say the magic words.

"Shall we go home?"

Suddenly he springs to life as though he's just heard the butcher is giving out free sausages, and he's halfway back to the van without you. If dogs ever discover how much power they have over us, we're all finished.

The Job Titles

Spend enough time around dogs and you'll realise they all have jobs.

There's the Health and Safety Officer, who spends the entire walk monitoring everyone else like a middle manager who's discovered somebody forgot to fill in a spreadsheet. A dog starts running? Potential incident. A dog finds a stick? Major incident.

There's the Social Secretary, who believes every living thing exists to become their friend. Dogs, humans, horses, sheep. A plastic bag blowing across a field at forty miles an hour? Definitely a friend.

There's the Food Inspector, who can detect a dropped crumb at distances normally associated with military radar.

And there's the Union Representative. The route is unfair, the weather is unacceptable and the compensation package is frankly insulting. If another dog gets a biscuit, they file a complaint. If the walk goes on too long, they stage a sit-down protest. I have a soft spot for them.

The Poo Commentary

There is also a truly alarming amount of conversation about poo. Not casual conversation. Forensic analysis.

"That's a bit loose."

"He's definitely eaten something."

"Did you change his food?"

At some point you realise you've spent half an hour discussing the consistency of dog faeces with somebody whose name you only know because it's printed on the side of their van, and you're both completely comfortable with this.

Try that at a dinner party. Someone asks what you've been up to this week.

"Mainly monitoring faecal output."

The cheese board arrives much earlier than expected.

Thing Four: My Own Dogs Think I'm Useless

People assume that a professional dog trainer must have perfectly trained dogs. I've worked with dogs since 1990. I teach loose-lead walking and recall for a living. Surely my own dogs are perfect.

Absolutely. And I've got a bridge in Leeds I'd like to sell you.

My own dogs have seen my qualifications and are unimpressed. They know every weakness, every inconsistency and every rule I'm prepared to bend.

One Boxing Day I was hoping for a quiet morning. Alice, my scruffy black mongrel, nicked something off the kitchen side and legged it to the living room to eat it in secret, like a seasoned burglar. Nobody knows what it was, including Alice. Then my husband made coffee, and Alice tried to steal his toast. Nicolas barked because Alice was stealing the toast. And Shiva ate the toast while everyone was arguing about the toast.

Another time, Alice declared a sock her emotional support sock. She carried it from room to room with enormous dignity, and every time anyone tried to remove it she looked at them as though they had asked her to hand over a child.

At work, I use calm, confident "stooge dogs" to help me assess dogs who struggle around other dogs. Shiva, my German Shepherd, is brilliant at it. Nicolas, my Cavalier, is technically trained as one too. He looks at the other dog, decides he has better things to do and wanders off. He'd make a terrible undercover agent.

Nicolas has also barked at a glittery Christmas reindeer as though it were a threat to national security, and been reduced to a nervous wreck by a crab the size of a digestive biscuit.

Here's what I've learned. Being good with dogs doesn't mean having perfect dogs. It means understanding that dogs are living creatures, not robots. They have personalities, fears, preferences and opinions, and some of those opinions are spectacularly inconvenient.

The difference between me and a lot of owners isn't that my dogs behave. It's that I know why they don't.

Nothing keeps your ego in check quite like being professionally qualified while chasing your own dog around the house shouting, "Give me that immediately!"

Thing Five: I'm Not Judging Your Lead Drawer. (I Am Judging Your Biscuits.)

Not you personally, of course.

Well. Not entirely.

Dog walkers notice things. I can spot a retractable lead from half a mile away, identify a badly fitted harness before I've said hello, and recognise the sound of someone shaking an empty poo bag dispenser in the hope that another bag might magically appear if they rattle it hard enough.

The Lead Drawer

Every dog owner has one. It might be a drawer, a basket or a cupboard that can't be opened without risking an avalanche of tangled nylon and mild regret. In it: the lead you bought because it was on sale, the one your dog chewed through in six minutes, the one that promised to be waterproof and gave up at the first sight of drizzle, and the collar that matched absolutely nothing because your dog rolled in fox poo the day after you bought it.

Nobody ever throws any of it away. "What if I need it one day?" Need it for what? Nobody has ever been able to answer that question.

I'm not judging. I'm simply wondering why a dog whose main ambition in life is eating sheep poo has a fluorescent pink lead with a matching bow tie.

Priorities, Brenda.

The Treat Situation

There's an unwritten rule in the dog world: if one dog gets a treat, every other dog within half a mile is entitled to an immediate inspection. The moment a packet appears, heads come up, ears go forward and I have a small committee round my knees.

Treats say a lot about their owners. Some arrive with a beautifully organised pouch of carefully selected rewards. Others produce a handful of archaeological artefacts fused into building rubble. Carbon dating may be required. They proudly tell me their dog is highly food motivated, then offer a biscuit that looks as though it has been rolling around the bottom of a handbag since Easter. The dog sniffs it, looks at the owner, looks at me and quietly reaches a conclusion.

"No."

Fair enough.

Your dog isn't being difficult when he ignores a piece of dry kibble while a squirrel performs aerial gymnastics in a tree. He's making a perfectly reasonable assessment of the options. The squirrel is exciting. The kibble is Tuesday.

What I'm Actually Judging

I'm not judging you for loving your dog. Or for spoiling him, or talking to him in a voice normally reserved for newborns, or having seventeen nicknames for him. I've heard them all. Wiggle bum. Absolute walnut. Tiny terrorist. Each one delivered with complete sincerity.

What I quietly wonder is whether he's getting what he actually needs. Not what Instagram says he needs. Not what your neighbour's Cockapoo enjoys. Some dogs need long adventures; others need shorter walks and more time to sniff. Some love every dog they meet; others would happily avoid the public for the rest of their lives. Maybe your dog hates busy cafés. Maybe he'd rather spend half an hour sniffing a hedge than complete a five-mile walk. That's not failure. That's information.

The best owners aren't the ones with perfect dogs. They're the ones who listen, adapt and ask for help when something isn't working.

And one request. Please, no sticks. I have a strict no-stick policy, because a stick that lands upright can become a spear. A dog I walk was badly hurt that way, and I don't think I've ever hated a stick so much. He came through, thanks to some brilliant vets. Throw a ball instead.

A Final Confession

I Wouldn't Swap This Job for Anything. Well, Almost Anything.

Dog walking isn't always glamorous. Social media would have you believe I spend my days wandering through beautiful countryside in perfect sunshine with impeccably behaved dogs and the occasional rainbow appearing on cue.

Sometimes that happens. The rest of the time it's raining sideways and I'm stopping a Labrador from eating something that ought to be investigated by the Environment Agency.

One October, a dog bouncing round my van distributed poo across the walls, the floor, the doors, me and, in a feat of aerial engineering, the roof. The roof. I can't stress this enough.

And one January day I spent an hour shouting across a field at a dog carrying something that had been dead for quite some time. "DROP THE DUCK!" I never imagined those words would become part of my professional vocabulary. They're now in the title of a book.

Then something small happens. A nervous dog who used to hide behind his owner starts trotting confidently beside me. A puppy who found the world overwhelming begins exploring with curiosity instead of fear. An older dog who can't manage long adventures any more still gets a gentle wander round his favourite field, taking in all the smells he's loved for years. Sometimes a client says, "I don't know what you've done, but he's so much happier now."

Suddenly none of the muddy trousers matter.

Dogs don't care what car you drive, how much you earn or whether your house looks like a magazine. They care that you turn up. They care that you understand them. They care that when they're nervous you're patient, when they're excited you join in, and when they discover a puddle that absolutely must be investigated every single day, despite containing exactly the same muddy water as yesterday, you wait.

For the record, your dog has had an excellent time. He's sniffed seventeen trees, investigated a suspicious patch of grass, followed a leaf for three hundred metres and made at least one decision that required immediate intervention. He is now exhausted, delighted and ready for a nap. And as soon as he's dropped off, I'll drive to the next house and do it all again.

Because that's what dog walkers do. We turn up. We care. We clean up. We laugh. We occasionally cry into our coffee. Then we pull our waterproofs back on and head out into the rain again.

Although a decent cup of coffee and a working washing machine wouldn't go amiss.

One Last Thing Before You Go…

If you've made it this far, congratulations. You now know more about the secret life of a dog walker than most of my clients.

If you'd like the full madness, it's all in the diaries.

The Secret Diary of a Yorkshire Dog Walker: Dogs, Dead Ducks and Other Daily Disasters (Diary 2024)

A year of true stories, including a puppy who disappeared into the Yorkshire fields and may have survived on potatoes, a Labrador kidnapping scandal that wasn't, a sheep that joined the walk, a van redecorated from the roof down, and one enormous object I found in the woods and carried home in a carrier bag.

[Link to Diary 2024]

The Secret Diary of a Yorkshire Dog Walker: Poo, Pandemonium and the General Collapse of Civilisation (Diary 2020)

A shorter companion diary from lockdown, when dog walking, social distancing and a national toilet roll shortage collided with predictably ridiculous results.

[Link to Diary 2020]

Want more stories like these? Join my mailing list:

[Link to sign-up page]

And if you're thinking, "My dog would never do anything like that…" then I'd gently suggest having a quiet word with your dog walker. Preferably before they publish their version of events.

Thank you for reading.

The guide may be over. The dogs, however, remain fully committed to the chaos.

Tori x

About the Author

Tori Lynn Crowther has worked with dogs since the 1990s and has run TLC Dog Walking in Yorkshire since 2007. After nearly two decades of professional dog walking, dog training and collecting stories that nobody would believe if they weren't true, she began writing the Secret Diary of a Yorkshire Dog Walker series.