

## Leonbergers- 7/17

This month, LCA Show and Event Committee Chair Amy Garabedian is our guest columnist. Amy has been an LCA member since 2003, and has served in many capacities in the club including Vice President and 2015 National Specialty Chair. She breeds Leonbergers under the "Good Life" kennel name.

### Welcome to Leo Land.

I'm a full-fledged, card-carrying, permanent resident of Leo Land. If you've never visited, it's a place where every surface is covered in fur, where there is a clear, wet path marking the way to the nearest source of water, and most of all, where gentle, giant, hairy dogs take up residence, well, anywhere they feel like it.

I didn't always live here. In fact, I didn't own my first dog until I was married and out of my parents decidedly fur-free home.

After extensive research, my husband and I settled on a breed, the Leonberger. It was a fateful decision and one that impacted our lives in innumerable ways, not the least of which are dozens of friends, fifty puppies, and owning a dog training business.

When our first Leo fluff bundle came home, Aja Marie was all I could talk about. I'm fairly certain members of my family thought I'd gone... overboard. Maybe especially so when they received the birth announcement.

In those first years of life in Leo Land, I would tell every person who stopped to ask 'what kind of dog is that?' how completely *perfect* this breed was. How gentle, and loving, and empathic, and smart. And, and, and. I would absolutely gush praise for the breed, minimizing the downsides of owning a giant dog. I was young and in love.

Years passed and a second Leo followed. I became a show fancier, a volunteer, and a breeder. Somewhere around the time we whelped our first litter, my attitude shifted. Not because I believed any less about the specialness of our breed. No. Precisely the opposite. I felt I needed to guard Leo Land against intruders who didn't belong, who wouldn't understand properly. When asked about the breed I would emphasize just how much they shed and how messy they could be. After all, if people couldn't put up with that, why further the conversation? My focus became patrolling the borders of Leo Land, shielding it like some kind of furry utopia.

More years passed, two additional Leos have joined our pack, several co-ownerships have formed, and six more litters of puppies have followed. My tact has changed yet again. Now, I try to give balanced information to people. I'm not trying to 'sell' people on a Leo, but neither do I try to deter them. It's novel, but now I give them the most honest information I can and let *them* decide.

What changed? I'm not so young anymore, but I am most definitely still in love. And time lends a certain perspective. Leo Land isn't a militant compound; it's a community. What makes Leo Land special is just

as much the people who love the breed as the breed itself. It is the people who live here who will safe guard these beautiful dogs, and it is the people who will cherish this place for future generations.

~ Amy Garabedian, Leonberger Club of America, Troy, Michigan