

## Working grrrls



It's still dark out when I get up these winter mornings, but the dogs leap out of their crates, ready to go, anytime, anywhere. They know the routine, though, and wait quasi-patiently while I drink my tea and read the newspaper.

It's also raining, but that's okay. I've managed to convince myself that walking the dogs in the rain is like taking a steam bath, only cold. Good for the skin, the lungs, the sinuses... In fact, I've come to depend on my daily dose of fresh air, wet or dry, to clear my head. It's addictive.

By the time I finally get my coat and hat, the dogs are at the door. This is the minute they've been waiting for.

'Tosca,' our sweet-tempered Rottweiler, is older and more laid-back. Her eyes sparkle and she grins from ear to ear, but otherwise she is well-mannered and compliant. 'Gidget,' the Entlebucher Mountain Dog, has a two-year-old's enthusiasm that knows no bounds. She bounces and yaps and leaps at her leash. If she deems me too laggardly, she leaps at me. Sit-Stay is of limited utility at a time like this. I move as fast as I can.

A short drive in the Muttmobile and we're in the woods – Pacific Spirit Park with dozens of leash-optional trails. We always hike the same trails, although we sometimes loop in different directions. Mostly it's straight down Sasamat, across Council, over Hemlock and up the hill on Huckleberry to the water reservoir where we leash up again. Four kilometres in all, every day of the year.

The dogs think this is my job. If they were children they might be ashamed that we don't have cows or sheep to herd. But they're not children; they're dogs! And proud! And if their personal human has to go count trees, then by God, they're here to help! For bonus points they'll make sure that any squirrel or chipmunk within scenting distance is off the forest floor. Tosca and Gidget are on patrol and at least for now, this particular corner of the world is a varmint-free zone.

Back home, we carry out the ritual whereby the mud from two dogs is transferred to three towels, then the big moment: breakfast! While they wolf it down, I go upstairs to shower and change. When I come down to leave for the office, there they both are – upside down and flaked out in their crates. They sleep the pure and self-satisfied sleep of dogs who are secure in the knowledge that they've accomplished a hard day's work.

I'm self-employed and just for fun, I sometimes reckon how much more money I could earn if I spent this hour a day in the office, instead of on the trails. At least a couple of thousand a month, I figure. Add to that the time I spend training and at matches, to say nothing of the out-of-pocket cost of classes, vets, food, toys and gear, and before you know it I've calculated that it costs me \$50,000 a year to walk these dogs.

No.

That's not what it costs me.

That's what it's worth.

Readers are invited to submit their 500-600-word commentaries to [barks@dogsincanada.com](mailto:barks@dogsincanada.com). Though all will be considered, not all will be published.

