

BowWOW!

Facts, observations and musings about Our Best Friends

## **Dog Gone AWOL**

It's one of the worst feelings in the world. You return from work, walk into the yard expecting the familiar jingle of Carter's dog tags. But the sound never comes. You run to check the garage, the backyard, and the neighbor's yard—nothing. **Your dog is gone!** It can happen to the most diligent pet owner, but with some foresight you can close most of the loopholes through which Carter may slip away.

### **Why do dogs leave home?**

Hands down the primary reason dogs leave home is a combination of loneliness and boredom. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, author of "the Hidden Life of Dogs" maintains that the one thing a dog most wants is...other dogs. A dog's human family can substitute for a canine pack but only up to a point. Today, "pack members" are gone during the day and often at night, at work or school, and it's hard for dogs to accept long separations from leadership and affection. They begin to look beyond the boundaries of home for stimulation and companionship. Also, add in that dogs are hunters and scavengers. Given the opportunity they will gratefully leave their over-investigated backyards. Roaming is an innate canine behavior.

If a dog is not neutered or spayed, the call of romance will win over confinement every time. A female in season can attract males from miles around. Dogs that might otherwise have been content to lounge around the house suddenly pull off Steve McQueen maneuvers just to heed the call of the randy.

Severe weather conditions can cause the most well adjusted dog to panic and flee his yard in fear for his own safety. I have known dogs that have broken through windows to escape the noise and attendant sensory input of a thunderstorm. Noise from construction equipment, fireworks or gunshots can have much the same effect.

Certain dogs are so motion- or activity-stimulated that they become "door crashers". The slightest opening in a gate or door creates a golden opportunity to take off after that real or imaginary prey. If there happens to be a real-live squirrel or even another dog in his line of sight, the escape and ensuing chase becomes a self-perpetuating behavior because of the immediate reward.

Some dog losses are "assisted". The most notorious examples are the meter reader/utility worker/gardener/pool maintenance-related escapes. The people who enter your property on a routine basis aren't always careful about closing doors, latching gates and, admittedly, most are not that wild about dealing with

strange dogs. Unlocked gates pose a big temptation for neighbor children to “let the puppy out to play”. Their parents, however, may not have such high regard for your pet. If your dog howls or barks all day while you are at work that testy neighbor may relieve the shared agony by subtly easing your gate open just enough to facilitate an escape.

Not all dogs escape from home. Dogs lost from the backs of trucks, campers or from inside cars are becoming increasingly more common. To give our dogs companionship, we take them with us! The problem is that our dogs are not happy in the car unless we’re sitting with them. Because of higher public exposure, a dog is at greater risk of an “assisted” escape left alone in a vehicle that it is at home.

Determining the reason why and how your dog escapes will point to how to remedy the problem. Next week: What you can do to prevent your dog from leaving.

**BowWOW! Is a production of Tracie Korol and wholeDog.**

She is a holistic behavior coach, a canine massage therapist (CMT), herbalist, and canine homeopath. Want more information? Have a question? Send a note to Tracie at [letstalk@wholedog.biz](mailto:letstalk@wholedog.biz) or visit [www.wholedog.biz](http://www.wholedog.biz).