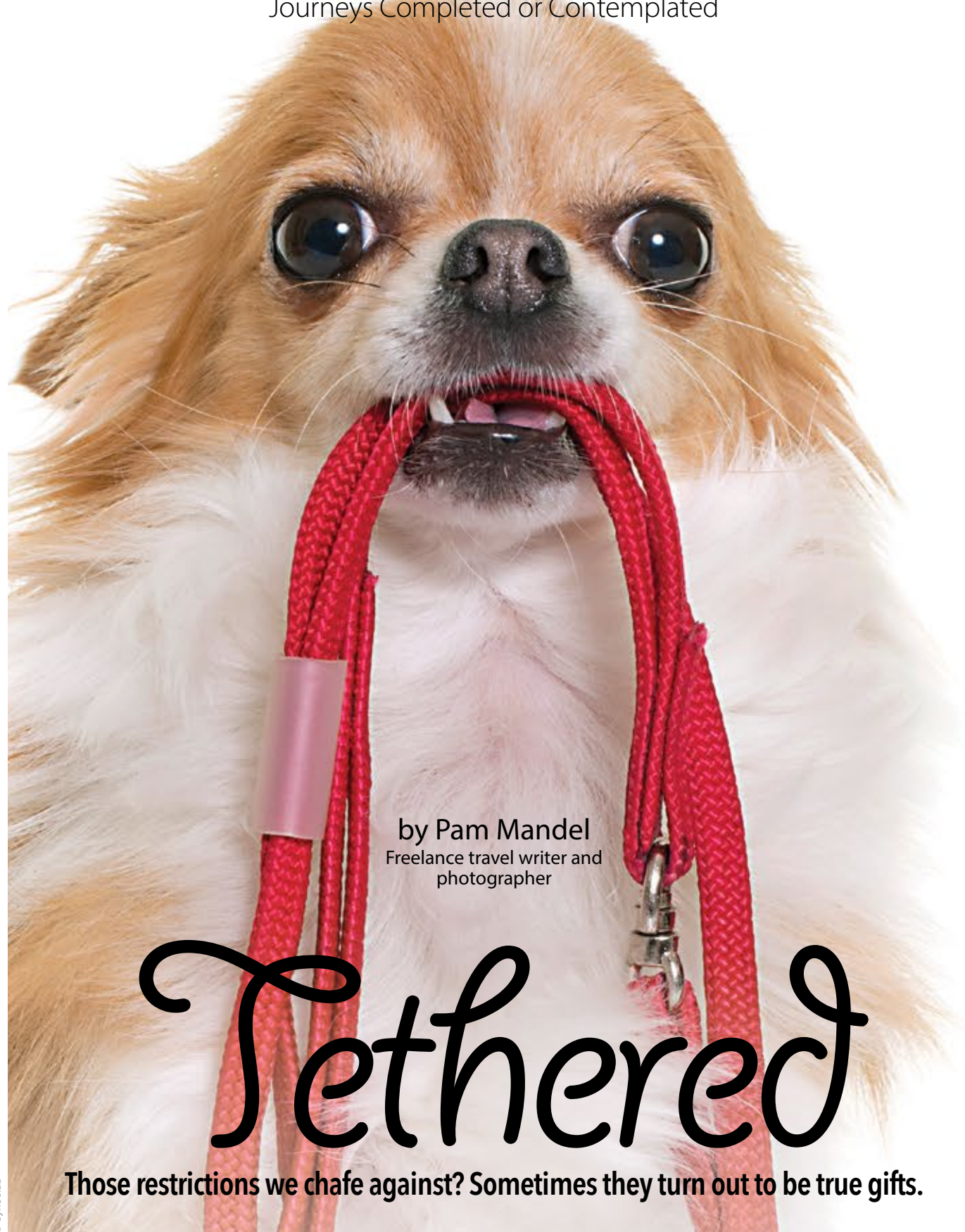


Out and About
Journeys Completed or Contemplated



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Tethered

Those restrictions we chafe against? Sometimes they turn out to be true gifts.

He's always ready to go before I am. I check multiple times for my phone, the house keys ... do I have everything? I check the weather because I want to be dressed for it; he never seems to get cold. He looks in the back door, disappointed to see my shoes are still on the stairs ... what is taking me so long? When he sees I'm not ready — and he knows I won't be, has he not learned? — he rolls his amber-colored eyes and heads to the gate anyway, as though he'd go without me.

Harley is my walking companion; we've been doing this for over a year now, almost every day. We cancel only in the most extreme of weather or if one of us is sick. We missed a date during a wind-storm recently, and I had to cancel for a few weeks to recover from an injury. We walk, rain or shine, in the pale summer twilight or the dark afternoons of winter. We walk for at least 20 minutes, but if it's a nice day and the calendar is open, we'll take our time. Maybe we'll jump in the car and head to the shores of Puget Sound or to a nearby park for a change of scenery.

Harley has brown hair with a lot of white in it. He's three years old, or maybe he's four; I don't know for sure. He's 12 pounds of rescue dog, a mix of Chihuahua, and some kind of terrier, perhaps. He barks at other dogs, he is afraid of trucks with diesel engines, and he is deeply ambivalent about anyone who isn't me. He's an imperfect dog, and I would never have guessed I could love a critter that isn't human the way I love him.

Harley came home with me on a whim. I've always been a dog person, but I've also always enjoyed an untethered life. Harley's arrival created a whole new set of responsibilities. He needed training and walking, and thanks to his excessive loyalties, I would be the one best to provide for him.

The first time I left him overnight, he refused to eat or leave his crate. If anyone but me tried to walk him, he transformed from 12 pounds of small dog into several hundred pounds of boat anchor. His happiness is strictly dependent on my presence. Best case in Harley's view? I would stay home or take him with me. And I would be the only one to provide the structure he needs to be a well-behaved, content dog.

I've done more than accept these terms. It turns out I genuinely enjoy the changes he requires. The benefits of getting a daily walk have been as great

for me as they are for Harley the Dog. I met more of my neighbors in my time with Harley than in the seven years here without him. I noticed the arrival of spring and departure of fall in a way I'd never before experienced, because I watched the change happen in the same place every day. The trees are bare, and then covered in tight little leaves, and then bursting with blossoms, and then the ground is covered in a blanket of petals. Later, the same walk is covered in orange and red leaves, and once again, the trees are bare.

When I travel with Harley, he makes me observe my new surroundings on a much closer level, because no matter the reason for my travels, Harley and I will walk — at the pace of a small dog — in the neighborhood where we're staying. It is grounding in a completely literal way — we walk, and here we are.

If we are road-tripping, we stop and walk every few hours — it is good for him, and it is even better for me to stretch and breathe and get out from behind the wheel.

When I travel without Harley, my heart wings back home — I scan my phone for photos sent by his babysitters; I study his ears to see if they say he's happy or if he misses me. And when I return home, oh, nothing can beat the fanfare of returning to a dog who loves you. Nothing.

The restrictions Harley has placed around my free range life don't feel like restrictions at all;

they feel like a reasonable return for the happiness he brings me. The order he applies to my messy daily existence isn't a burden when it's rewarded with such gratitude. Harley squeaks with excitement when I prepare his breakfast; that makes it worth getting out of bed earlier than I might like to. If we haven't gone for a walk, he'll bonk me with his stubby, pinkish, brown nose, sometimes putting his paws on my knee to tell me that we both need a walk — get away from the computer already.

Yes, he needs me to be on schedule. Yes, he needs me to take him out, rain or shine, at least once a day. Yes, he needs me to make sure he's vaccinated, trained, groomed, flea-proofed, well-fed and sheltered. His needs aren't complicated, but they are consistent. There is no respite; if I know I cannot be there for Harley, I have to be sure someone else will take care of him. He needs; I provide.

But I don't resent this at all. Instead, I'm grateful. And when I see him dancing by the gate as he waits for our daily constitutional, I know he is too. ♦

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