

# HOW LONG?

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*Dog Mom of Andrew, Caspian, and Nicky*

How long is a moment?

How long does it take for your life to change, irreparably, irreversibly?

How long will you spend grieving, regretting, wishing you could have that moment back?

A dog mother myself, every day I encounter many dogs out for walks with their humans. Most stop to talk, or at least to exchange a pleasant word in passing. Each of these people would state unequivocally that they love and cherish and protect and care for their dogs.

But sometimes I see dogs walking without leashes. Whenever I can, I remonstrate: 'I'm worried about your dog.' I say. 'The street is so close, and there are squirrels...'. Always there is a response: 'She won't run away.' 'He always stays with me.' 'She enjoys running around freely.' 'I only let him run loose back here.'

Will she stay by your side? Maybe. But even the best-behaved dogs can be distracted for that one moment. Perhaps there is a cat across the street. Maybe another dog. Or a squirrel signaling a not-to-be-refused invitation with his tail.

Few dogs understand streets. They do not reason. They do not think 'I had better look both ways before I run and chase that squirrel.' They see the squirrel. Their whole attention is on that squirrel. They break and run. And just maybe a car is coming along that street at that very moment. There is the squeal of brakes... the sickening sound of impact... agonized yelps... and then silence. And in that moment, your whole world is changed. Your beloved dog trusted you to care for him, to protect him, and you have betrayed that trust. His little body is shattered. He may well have suffered pain and terror in that last moment. He didn't understand what happened to him.

You do. All too well. And you know why.

This happened because he wasn't on a leash.

In my part of the country, there is a leash law, and all dogs (and cats) are to be leashed if outside of one's securely-fenced yard. Perhaps there may or may not be a leash law in your neck of the woods. Nevertheless, there is a higher law. The law that appointed us stewards over our animals. This law gives privileges, but also carries grave responsibilities. To shelter them. To care for them. To protect them.

You have the rest of your life to remember that moment, to relive it, to hear the crash of impact, his terrified yelps.

How long is forever?

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