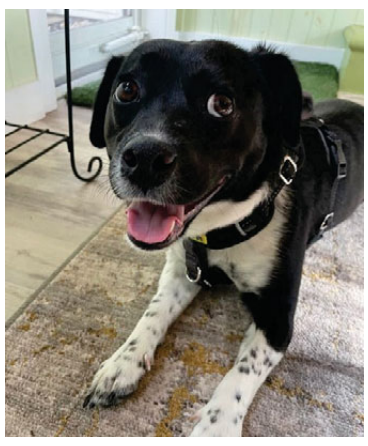
OP-ED

Bring a little Krypto into your life

When I saw the new "Superman" movie, I knew why a friend said my dog, Bonnie, reminded her of the superdog who is a constant headache for the caped hero.

By Jen A. Miller



Google searches for the term "adopt a dog near me" spiked by 513% on the "Superman" movie's opening weekend, and I can see why, writes Jen A. Miller. Left: Bonnie, the author's dog, who reminds her a bit of Krypto, the superdog in the new film.
Warner Bros. Pictures via AP; Courtesy of Jen A. Miller

Two Januaries ago, on a 10-degree day, I met a black dog with white speckled paws at a Tractor Supply in New Jersey. She had just been flown up by a dog rescue group in Puerto Rico, and looked lonely, sad, and lost. I was also lonely, sad, and lost after losing my previous dog, too young and too tragically, to liver failure six months before.

Maybe, I thought as she looked up at me with soulful puppy eyes, we could help each other, too.

What a scammer! This dog wasn't sad, lost, or lonely, but crafty enough to use that gaze to trap me. Bonnie, as I named her, wasn't 2 to 4 years old, as her paperwork suggested. But instead was maybe a 9-month-old puppy, less burgeoning adult and more absolute terror, and had used her wiles to bulldoze her way into my home.

Within the first few weeks of living with me, she destroyed not one, not two, but three reading lights, the TV remote at my and my mother's house, and ripped holes in more socks than I could count. She thought gnawing on the leg of an end table was a better option than a dozen chew toys I bought her, and that tissues, especially dirty ones she pulled out of trash cans, were a snack (which I'd later find in her poop, along with my earplugs).

She could go 15 hours without peeing — no matter how many hourlong walks I took her on — before eventually finding the one spot on my expensive dining room rug that I hadn't covered with pee pads. To try to control her destruction, I shut every door to every room in my house, gated her out of the kitchen, and, per a trainer's instructions, sometimes leashed her to me, even while she was inside.

Bonnie was small enough to pick up and carry into her crate — if I could catch her. I frequently did not, and for months, rushed to not be late to almost every appointment I had booked.

When I saw the new *Superman* movie, I knew why a friend said Bonnie reminded her of Krypto, a superdog who is a constant headache for the last son of Krypton. The white, shaggy dog runs amok through the Fortress of Solitude, nips at Superman's ankles, and, when the hero needs help after he loses a big battle, Krypto first jumps on him in glee, to perhaps compound Superman's already existing fractures, instead of offering him any useful assistance.

These dogs have driven us to the edge of madness. I thought more than once that maybe Bonnie would be better off in another home. But when Krypto goes missing, Superman storms into Lex Luthor's lair, and at the angriest I have ever seen him in any iteration of the character, demands to know, "Where's the dog?"

Likewise, when Bonnie slipped out of my mom's gated backyard, I panicked in a way I didn't think I would about a creature that had caused hundreds of dollars of damage to my home.

We put up with this because good people love dogs, especially the hard-luck cases. *Superman* director and writer James Gunn said he based Krypto — in both personality and image — on his rescue dog, Ozu, who had been saved from a hoarding situation, and then invoked terror in the Gunn home.

But like Ozu (and maybe someday Krypto), Bonnie has become less of a menace as she finally grew into adult dog form. She only carries my book light from one room to another, and if she finds a pair of clean socks, she uncouples but doesn't destroy them, then places them where she thinks they should go, even if that's in her crate.

She still pulled my chest muscle when she darted after a squirrel on a walk, and she tries to hide under the dining room table when I need to put her in her crate, but she also sits patiently by my desk when she knows I've been working too long, snuggles up against my leg when I can't quite stay asleep, and has made both my 7-month old neighbor and a friend's mother of indeterminate age squeal in glee at meeting her.

Google searches for the term "adopt a dog near me" spiked by 513% on the movie's opening weekend, and I can see why. Because despite not listening to Superman or his friends, the dog is still a hero, just like Bonnie has been to me.

When I came home from the theater, I let Bonnie out of her crate and gave her extra pats and a fresh peanut butter-filled treat, which she proceeded to carry into my bed and destroy, which required me to change the sheets. Maybe she doesn't know what a difference she's made in my life, and maybe she never will.

But dogs continue to be good, even when they're bad, and so many need homes right now.

If you, too, need something to help you through this dreadful time, you can't go wrong with introducing a little rescued chaos into your life. Or at least cheer a little Krypto chaos on screen.

Jen A. Miller is the author of "Running: A Love Story."

OP-ED

Philadelphians deserve clean air and water, and stable ground

The costs of fossil fuel dependence are everywhere in Philadelphia. What once powered prosperity now poisons the people left behind.

By Ashley B. Ray

A sign posted in 2024 at a section of the Bartram's Mile Trail, closed after Bartram's Garden received confirmation from the state Department of Environmental Protection that testing would take place in the area to determine what toxic chemicals are present and in what concentration in order to determine the possible health risks of exposure. Tom Gralish / Staff Photographer

How would you describe the environmental conditions of hell? In Dante's "Inferno," each of the nine circles is marked by its own punishment, each set in a hostile, unlivable landscape. But in Pennsylvania, you don't need medieval literature to imagine the underworld. The source material is all around us.

Air too toxic to breathe. Water that poisons you. Ground that burns and caves beneath your feet. This isn't fiction. It's the legacy of industry — where fuels that once powered prosperity now poison the people left behind.

Pollution is expected in any city, but in Philadelphia, it's pervasive. Chemical spills, gas leaks, homes exploding. No longer anomalies, explosions have become part of city life.

This isn't abstract for me. I grew up in West Philly. At 13, crossing the Passyunk Avenue Bridge to school, I feared the South Philly refinery's smoke. *It's going to blow*, I'd think. In 2013, it released more than 350 tons of air toxins — benzene, sulfuric acid, hydrogen cyanide. The city's largest air polluter.

Caused by the ignition of a noxious vapor cloud, the blast came in 2019. A vessel was launched across the Schuylkill, and five workers were injured, with benzene levels remaining dangerously high for months.

In February, a gas main rupture forced an evacuation at Central High, my alma mater. Philadelphia Gas Works manages 3,000 miles of pipeline — half of it outdated cast iron or bare steel, some over 100 years old. PGW is tied to at least 13 deaths since 1979. Yet, it funds a lobbying group that pushed the Trump administration to cut clean energy funding. So Philadelphia ratepayers bankroll both their poisoning and its political defense.

Philly is just one front. Underground mine fires plague Pennsylvania's former anthracite region. Of 11,249 abandoned mines, nearly 10,000 still pose health and safety risks. Residents report illness and backyard heat vents — only for the state Department of Environmental Protection to say there's nothing wrong.

Journalists like Rob Manch and Kaylee Lindenmuth have shown how residents are forced to self-monitor while the state delays action — that is, unless a coal company wants a blasting permit.

This can't continue. In 2019, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change called phasing out coal the single most important step to avert crisis. But Pennsylvania still clings to coal — economically, culturally, politically.

The costs of fossil fuel dependence are everywhere. In July 2024, carcinogens were found in the soil at Bartram's Garden, leaking from a defunct oil terminal. No city alerts. No signage. Just like the 2023 latex spill that tainted a tributary of the Delaware, residents got only cursory guidance.

My mother never let us drink tap water. "Everything in America is poison," she'd say. I used to roll my eyes. I don't anymore.

This isn't just neglect. It's a pattern: environmental deterioration, bureaucratic retreat, displacement, then reinvestment. Collapse clears the way for redevelopment, just not for those already living there.

Under Mayor Cherelle L. Parker, 70 affordable homes in University City were demolished for luxury labs and condos. Her HOME initiative touts "affordable luxury." But it's clear who that's for — and who gets left behind.

The rise of a new speculative elite depends on the collapse of working-class communities — on disrepair, vacancy, and silence. When land devalues and political resistance erodes, redevelopment rushes in, cloaked in the language of "innovation." The Philadelphia Energy Solutions refinery site, once a source of poison for Black and working-class Philadelphians, is now reborn as the Bellwether District — a warehouse hub sold as opportunity, built on ruin.

I love Philadelphia — but not blindly. I love its history, its people, its gardens and museums. When outsiders criticize it, I get defensive: "You don't know her like I do!"

But like Los Angeles, where capital and cars privatized everything, Philadelphia risks becoming a skyline built on burning ruins.

I remember the rage I felt reading a fellow University of Pennsylvania student's post: "I love Philly but could never raise a family here." What made them say that? The visible homelessness? The violence they hear about but rarely face? The pollution?

When I tell friends about gas leaks and explosions, they urge me to leave. "Come to New York!" "Try London!" But what about the people who can't just leave?

What happens to a city when the people thoughtful enough to notice its wounds decide to go?

I ask myself that all the time — not just about Philly, but the country. Do I leave for my own sanity, or stay and fight?

Industry veterans scoff at change. "This is just how it is." But that's not true.

Cincinnati's Duke Energy launched a plan in 2015 to replace 1,200 miles of high-risk mains. Memphis began replacing cast iron lines in the 1990s, cutting leaks by more than half. Omaha, Neb., replaced 243 miles of mains over 10 years and aims to finish by 2027. These projects aren't cheap, but they show that with regulation and investment, aging infrastructure can be fixed.

And Pennsylvania's coal country isn't unsalvageable. In Herten, Germany, the Ewald Colliery was reclaimed — without erasing workers or history.

Pennsylvanians aren't disposable. What must be discarded are the politicians who promise equity while delivering tax breaks to developers.

We deserve a return on our investment — not in abatements, but in breathable air, drinkable water, and stable ground.

What is this silent violence where residents must measure their own poisoning?

Citizens turned scientists build backyard sensors, track leaks, test soil and air. This isn't civic triumph. It's institutional abandonment.

If Philadelphia is to have a future — not just for the wealthy, but for everyone — it won't come from City Hall or Harrisburg. It will come in spite of them, dragged into being by people who refuse to disappear.

Ashley B. Ray grew up in Overbrook, studied anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, and is now writing their way through the onset of a technocratic dystopia. They are unsure if it's helping.