

Learning from dogs as they sniff the world

By Jan Hoffman, New York Times

Our daily tug of leash war goes like this. I tell Chico we're taking a left. He yanks right, wet black nostrils burrowing in loamy leaf piles. Me versus a 15-pound Havanese, incensed by scent.

Today, I let him win.

That's because I have fresh appreciation for his sniffing behavior, after reading a new book, "Being a Dog: Following the Dog into a World of Smell," by Alexandra Horowitz, a professor of cognitive science who runs the Dog Cognition Lab at Barnard College. In it, she explains the elegant engineering of the dog's olfactory system and how familiar canine behaviors – licking, sneezing, tail-wagging – have associations with smell. Horowitz also describes how she trained herself to enhance her inferior human sniffing ability.

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