



Jules Hudson

COUNTRY ESCAPE

As the birds and the bees herald a welcome return to spring up and down the Borders, it's a time for new arrivals in the Hudson household. Not all planned...

Every year, it seems the debate surrounding sex education hits the headlines, and the buck that passes for responsible policy goes round and round again. Who should tell our children about the grisly facts and figures; should it be left to teachers, to parents, to the hearsay of the playground, or indeed the benevolent wisdom of an ancient relative? I know farmers who simply let their kids watch the rams about their business and, come spring, they've helped with the lambing. Problem solved.

Now I should at this point confess I never had any such conversation with our little chap, Iolo. I mean how much does a labrador really need to know? I too passed the buck to fate, safe in the knowledge it was an issue we'd never have to face, or so I thought. Often, whilst I'm away filming, Iolo spends time with a great friend who also dog sits for other lonely hounds. It's a win-win: Iolo gets all the care he needs, I'm assured he's well looked after, and he gets all the fun and company a young dog could wish for, so much so that often, when I've picked him up, his euphoria at seeing his daddy again is tempered with the sadness that he's leaving his playmates behind.

So imagine my surprise when last September I had a call from the dog sitter (whom I shan't name to avoid embarrassment) who in a rush of explanation and concern unfolded the story of Iolo and Doris. Doris it turns out is a beautiful golden lab with fine features and a lovely manner, so lovely in fact that, unknown to anyone, not least the dog sitter, she and Iolo managed at some point to have what modern parenting would describe as a sleep over. Now I'm not for one minute envisaging an evening awash with Coke, crisps and a DVD. This was clearly an altogether much quicker affair, but the result, so I was told, was that Doris, having seemed off colour and hence examined by her vet, was pregnant.

When the call was over, I sat with Iolo in the warm afternoon sunshine in the garden, somewhat taken aback, and proceeded to have a chat with him. What had he been thinking? Who started it, and had he really thought through the consequences? Was she a looker?

Iolo's face said it all. She was gorgeous, funny and, like him, young. He had of course, no idea what the consequences would be because I hadn't told him what

they might be, because despite my best efforts at explanation, they were after the event. He was right, and I'd failed him.

Thankfully, Doris's parents were extremely understanding, and when just a couple of weeks after the call the puppies arrived, we went over to see them and meet our new in-laws, who could not have been more welcoming. Six beautiful cuddly labrador pups presented themselves in a scene of

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hilarious chaos, and buried underneath them was Doris, looking a little weary but beguiling nonetheless. I could see how things had happened.

With the arrival of the puppies, the obvious question followed; would we like to have one? We had, as it turned out, been thinking for a while that Iolo should have some company, and here it seemed was the perfect opportunity. I'd left Iolo's understanding of these things to fate, and now it offered its hand in return. It was in the great circle of life a good deal for everyone, and we willingly accepted the offer of another bouncy black bundle of fun. So just before Christmas, aged just 10 weeks old, Teddy arrived to keep his dad company and on his toes, and I'm delighted to report that from the outset they've become inseparable.

Iolo and I share many things in common, and not just a complete lack of sex education in our youth. You see, like him, I've also just become a father, to our baby boy Jack. Teddy has proved himself a wonderful and welcome surprise, and although I'm pleased to say Jack was planned, that's clearly the limit of it. What happens now over the rest of our lives only time will tell. Oh, and fate of course... ♪

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