

Why dogs are better than our biggest ?money pits?

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Children, like dogs, seem to like me. Call it animal magnetism.

Children aren't like cars, motorcycles, airplanes, your favourite CD or even a really good pair of jeans.

You can't trade them in for a new, spiffier model each year. While they may not depreciate right off the lot, they are quite costly things to keep and maintain.

These tiny critters don't do much for the first few years. They're totally dependent on mom, dad and other caregivers to give them that healthy start. They also need goofy faces and some simple phrases to learn everything they need to know about human nature. We had tiny tots once. We also had dogs.

I firmly believe our dogs thought these things to be mere nuisances. They didn't play well, smelled kind of funny, and made some incredibly high-pitched noises. Of course, dogs being the voracious things that they are, really loved following kids around for the free food deposited on almost every surface.

I really liked our kids in the beginning. They were relatively good natured, well behaved and didn't require a lot of resources. Sure, there was laundry, food and minimal clothing requirements. Carting them around in those awkward, heavy car seats was a physical challenge.

Our offspring were still quite noninvasive as they grew into active toddlers, waddling around like little quackers. They can cause a lot of trouble, despite their proximity to the ground. You learn quickly to put things at the 4-foot level to keep them safe from these destructive beings.

It wasn't until they began talking back that I realized what a chore children can be.

I thought, okay, give them life, pick them up when they fall down and pat them on the bum once in a while and they're good to go. Now I'm in a pickle.

I have three kids ??Lexie, 17; Liam, 14 and Kyleigh, 9. They're generally okay, as far as kids go. But they're putting a heck of a dent in the good, old, tattered pocketbook.

The other day, my youngest told me I owed her \$15 for helping to clean up the basement. When I protested, she lowered it to \$12! Whatever happened to chores? Whenever I direct my little ones in that direction, I'm told by my better half it's my job.

I believe one of the reasons they call it March ?break,? is the pressure it puts on the bank account.

It's just that kids don't seem like a very wise investment. The return in terms of cuteness, love and perpetuating the species just doesn't add up. The bottom line is they're more trouble than they're worth.

My eldest returned from a school trip to Los Angeles, where her drama class visited all the sights and sounds of Hollywood. She loved it and found the suburbs of LA simply enchanting. While she did run out of money, she didn't splurge on Rodeo Drive. In fact, she can be frugal at times. That's my girl!

Boy, when I was in school, we got to go to Ottawa and Quebec City! Okay, I managed to go on a bus trip to Washington, DC in Grade 12, but that was as exciting as it got.

She'll be picking her university courses soon and then the fun begins. While we do have an RESP, we'll be lucky if it covers her first year.

My boy child is a little cheaper to maintain, but he'll be entering high school this fall and that will mean dishing out more money for this, that and the other. He also wants to play football.

The youngest is our princess and we all know that princesses love lipstick, lip balm, hairbands and everything pink. She takes art classes and consumes art supplies like a thirsty camel at an oasis.

At one time, I did think of starting a part-time, home-based business of renting out our kids to lonely grandparents who have no one to cater to. It was a win-win scenario that required very little effort on my part! Plus, I'd begin recovering some of my costs. I still think that idea has merit.

I have read that it costs roughly \$20,000 to own a dog from birth to death. For us, it would amount to a really nice car.

Dogs love you unconditionally and don't overcharge you for chores. They don't care about birthdays, holidays or vacations. They're overjoyed with hand-me-downs and will take your unwanted shoes, clothing and furniture and have a great time. They always make you smile and laugh; that's why pet owners live longer.

According to MoneySense.ca, the average cost of raising a child to age 18 is a mere \$243,660. That works out to roughly \$12,825 per child, per year or \$1,070 per month.

You can probably whittle that down to maybe \$5,000 per head, but I'd like to stress that it's after-tax cash.

I bet my rent-a-kid idea is sounding pretty good right about now.

Of course, such estimates are just that, and may include the perceived cost parents' lost wages from staying home. Children are affordable to parents at all income levels ??that's why we still have them! We just have to alter our priorities and spending habits. That would explain the rusted holes in my min-van and the non-rusty holes in my socks.

When you're out walking the dogs, strangers will smile and ask to pet your pooch. When your kids are trashing the neighbour's garden and you're shouting out the front door for them to get inside, you wish you had a bag over your head!

But children enrich our lives in so many ways that just can't be measured in dollars and cents, right? I say strap a portable debit machine to their belts and send them out to work!

I may never see black ink ever again on my personal balance sheet. My bumper sticker reads: ??I'm driving this because I have children!?

But I have three wonderful human beings who will make the world a better place.