



Photo: © Tom Thompson

# What's in a name?

To most of us, our four-legged-friend is much more than just a dog. So what term should we use to describe our relationship? Basil's mum, KAREN LINDSEY, gives it some thought...

"Are you sure you're happy referring to yourself as Basil's mum?" my brother tentatively enquired after reading the first draft page of my pooch's travel website. "Isn't it just, well, a bit nambly-pambly?" After my initial knee-jerk dismissive response, sipping my morning coffee, I stared nonchalantly out into the garden. I registered that I wasn't focused on the leafy beauty before me – my mind was definitely elsewhere. Tap, tap, tapping on my brain, a niggling doubt... could my brother have a point? It's well documented that I am, indeed, a 'highly attached pet owner' (a professional term, rather than my own), so you'd think I would have absolutely no qualms about pinning the 'mum' tag proudly upon my chest, within pricking distance of my heart. Well, I didn't think I had any reservations, but my brother's inquisitiveness got me thinking.

I took to the internet for an insight on whether anyone else was experiencing a similar dilemma, and was astonished to find it's a hot topic that creates much lively debate.

Relationship status feedback included 'daddy', 'chosen mum' and 'puppy's person', whereas among

the less nambly-pambly titles were 'food apes', 'the humans' and 'human slaves'. However, there were many dog lovers who said they were perfectly happy to use the term 'mum' (and/or 'dad'), although some alluded to the fact that they did so on the pretence there wasn't a fitting alternative.

As I said, a real mixed bag. I set about considering alternatives that may be more fitting to describe the relationship between Basil and myself – after all, this whole quandary came about because I'm writing a blog from my four-legged-friend's 'pawerspective'. (I know, painful pun, but I can't resist!)

## BIRTHING PAINS

What I needed was a descriptive term that would accurately reflect our deep connection. But, contemplating further, since I didn't physically give birth to Basil (and, let's face it, you'd have heard about me way before now had I done so...), it needed to be from a non-bloodline standpoint – mindful that the title of 'mum' should, respectfully, lie at the paws of Basil's birth mother, Lola.

During my research, I landed on the phrase 'significant other'. Ooh, this sounds promising,

I thought, until I googled the meaning: 'a person with whom someone has an established romantic or sexual relationship.' That would be a no to this expression then!

How about 'significant other from another'? I quite liked this phrase, but I still couldn't get past the romantic connotation, so I hastily dropped the 'significant'.

'Other from another?' Not bad, but how would Basil, if he could talk, differentiate between the genders of my husband and I?

## BROTHERLY LOVE

So I kicked around the saying 'brother from another mother'. Now, what does that mean? Well, it's a term used to describe a good friend you've known almost your whole life. The word 'brother' is used because the friend is so close to you that he's almost like your own brother, but has a different mother.

Hmm, yes, I think that might work... I am, indeed, a good friend that Basil has known for almost his whole life. I'm also extremely close to him, to the point where I'm not exactly his brother, instead more like his 'mother, but from a different mother'. Eureka, I think I've got it!

"Hi, I'm Basil's mother from another mother." Mam for short. How does that sound? And my husband would be his 'father from another mother'. Fam. Hmm, I'm pretty sure there would be some quizzical looks should my husband call 'Come to Fanny' in the quiet one day, but hey, nothing much fazes him!

Having gone through the name-game exercise, how do I feel? Quite good actually, but the tap, tap, tapping niggle is still pounding away... Am I just complicating matters in order to be more PC, or to stave off any potential ridicule? Whatever the reason, I feel vindicated for going through the process.

So, there's just one thing left to consider: does it

really matter? Surely, what's important is not about defining our relationships through titles, but by the bonds we forge. It really has nothing to do with blood, but everything to do with connection.

As such, since our connection runs so deep, and my husband and I are wholly responsible for Basil's well-being and all that entails, the most fitting and simple adjectives to best describe my relationship to Basil, is his 'human mum'. And even though I don't think of Basil as being my 'animal son' (that just sounds plain weird!), he is, in many ways, my little boy.

To be honest, I think it's pretty apparent I'm Basil's 'human' mum without actually using the prefix, as I neither sport four legs, have a waggly tail, or wear a fur coat.

Having gone full circle, in answer to my own and my brother's initial question... Yes, actually, I feel more than happy introducing myself as Basil's mum. Hooray, we got there in the end!

## MUM'S THE WORD

One thing's for sure: I'm grateful for my brother's diplomatic query. Although I wasn't consciously aware of any uncomfortable thoughts, subconsciously I clearly did possess them. Now, however, it's very easily with my initial intuitive introduction.

Furthermore, I'm absolutely fine with whatever anyone else chooses to call themselves in relation to their pooch. While closer to home, as long as my brother continues to be the lovely, caring 'uncle' that Basil adores, who could ask for more?

Travel With Basil is a travel website dedicated to championing those lovely hotels, B&Bs, pubs and restaurants with rooms that are truly dog welcoming.

• Visit [www.travelwithbasil.com](http://www.travelwithbasil.com)



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