

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Finding peace with our dogs

In this uncertain time, the following essay, published in the Harrisburg Patriot News some years ago, provides a refreshing perspective.

By Bob Quarteroni

I bought Opie, our little 17-pound rescue mutt that I love beyond all reason, a new squeaky ducky to play with.

Opie, who at first was afraid of it and thought it was alive, took it out in the grass and killed it by chewing its squeaky to death after a sustained 15-minute effort.

He flopped onto his back and started squirming back and forth furiously — a behavior that we have somewhat mysteriously termed “the worm” — and started using his front paws to throw Ducky in the air and catch it in his mouth and shake it, shake it.

This went on for maybe 90 seconds, and I was transfixed.

This, I thought, is perfect happiness, absolute joy in simply being alive and full of so much Opieness that it just couldn't be contained.

He was totally in the moment, not worrying about the past or thinking about the future, but completely, innocently, joyously, happy.

And I thought: I'll never feel that way.

It's not possible for me to be that innocent and blissful and overflowing with life, with no intrusive thoughts or random mental junk sullyng the experience.

Reflecting on it, I've come to this realization:

I'm 68, and Opie's 3, but there's so much he can teach me, so much I can learn if I just follow the Opie Path.

For Opie is always alive to the moment, always taking the world as it comes: unfiltered, simple, immediate, as it is, whatever it is.

For Opie, every walk is the best walk, and every run in the woods is the best run in the woods and every new squeaky toy is the best squeaky toy.

And his love is total, immediate, unquestioning, fierce in its loyalty and beauty.

When I return from somewhere, even if I've only been gone for five minutes, Opie greets me

with an intensity and excitement that is miraculous to behold.

Since he's so tiny, the only way he can do this properly is to jump on the back of the couch and then launch a kissing assault on my face with such intensity that he inevitably pushes me down to the seat of the couch.

There, he immediately flips over and I put my hand under his back, which he loves, and he does the now-elevated worm, snarling and pawing the air and making me improbably happy to be part of it.

I know, I know, this is nothing unusual, just normal dog stuff. But I've never stopped to really consider this essence of dogginess before.

Perhaps because they are so ever present in our lives we don't stop to marvel at this two-species minuet of love.

And it made me realize that I don't need to turn to any church or guru or god or belief system to try to find my way through the murkiness that is my life, made more difficult by the crazy monkey that is my brain, by the relentless and often crippling thoughts that came in the hand I was dealt at birth.

All I have to do is try to be more like Opie, to live in the now, to savor every moment left to me, to make every one of my walks the best walk ever, to dump all the trash and baggage and just be like a tiny little dog with a skin condition and a heart and soul big enough to swallow the earth.

We seek wisdom everywhere and it is at our feet, teaching without even knowing it, if only we will listen, closely and carefully.

I don't believe in an afterlife, but if I did, I would pray to go wherever dogs went, because that would be the true paradise, awash with love and saliva, acceptance and as many squeaky duckies as anyone could ever want.

It's often been said that “dog” is “god” spelled backward, but if you look at the sentence in a mirror, it's reversed and very, very believable.

Bob Quarteroni, a former columnist and editor at the Centre Daily Times, died last year. Among his survivors was Opie.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



OPIE