

and willingness to stop, watch, listen, breathe, feel and enjoy – and I can start to do the same.

## REVELATION IN THE WOODS

One weekend last year, during some very comfortable weather, I took a hike in a beautiful quiet wooded wonderland. Although I was surrounded by the serenity of nature, I had a three ring circus carrying on in my head. I really didn't think I could pull myself out of my preoccupied mode, and kept drifting in and out of thoughts concerned with to-do lists and worldly affairs. But my dog Bella was leading the way, enjoying a good roll in the dirt and pausing to allow pleasant breezes to blow across her black furry face. Every now and then she would turn and look at me as if to say, "Hello! What are you doing back there?"

I started to really watch Bella as she made frequent entranced stops to sniff trees and rocks. Her face looked vibrant as she moved forward on what seemed to her a fulfilling adventure. I wondered what it must feel like to have her sense of smell and be surrounded by so much to sniff. I started to use my own senses more fully and began to really notice what nature had to offer. I discovered sounds, beauty and even smells that would never have been noticed by my chattering mind.

During that hike, I realized that while a dog has the ability to fully enjoy being wherever she happens to be, a human usually takes all his or her worries with her, even into a paradise like this woods.

## THE JOY OF ENTHUSIASM

It isn't always a relaxing Zen situation that makes me aware of an animal's gift of presence. For example, I once had a very small but wildly vigorous ball of white fur arrive at my house for a pet-sitting weekend. He hiked his leg and marked a chair before his potty pads were down and then barked loudly that he was ready to rock and roll! My three cats looked shocked as he made a vibrating cartoonish sound while shaking his head so fast I thought he would propel himself to the ceiling.

"What the heck have I got myself into?" I wondered, but the more I observed his dramatic behavior, the more I appreciated his great enthusiasm. He seemed "high" on being with potential new playmates while he investigated a different environment. He communicated his excitement by barking, running in circles, and lapping up our TLC.

Later during his visit, we took a walk at the park across the street. When he tried jumping over a stream next to my dog, his back legs slipped right into the water but he still ran on like an Olympic champion. In many ways he was the exact opposite of Bella, yet they still played together, napped near each other, begged in unison for a spare bite of dinner, and shared the backyard. It was refreshing to see how they accepted each other and didn't seem concerned about why things had changed. They were flexible and just adapted.



Bella in the great outdoors.

I am grateful to the many four-leggeds in my life for showing me how pay attention and roll with the punches. Sure, they don't have to pay bills or worry about a 401K plan, but they really know how to automatically appreciate the simple things each moment brings. They are my teachers as I watch them respond to the greeting of another animal, enjoy a hike in nature, chase a paper wad, gaze from a window, or sniff yet another tree trunk.

My fur companions have helped me learn to quiet my mind, have a good laugh, or even lead the way to a new experience I might otherwise miss, by showing me what they already instinctively know – how to live in the present! 🐾