

BEN STORIES

AND

OTHER

DOGGY TAILS

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INDEX

PAGE

3	BEN GETS ARRESTED
7	BEN GOES TO THE DOCTOR
10	THE COMPLAINT
13	REQUIEM FOR HATTIE
16	BEN'S REUNION
22	BEN HAS A GUEST
25	BEN'S LAST JOB
28	PEPPER
31	IT'S A DOG'S LIFE
35	SCAMP MOVES IN
38	BEN DOESN'T UNDERSTAND

BEN GETS ARRESTED

I live in a nice house in a good neighborhood. The yard is pretty big and quite interesting with lots of little nooks and crannies to investigate. We have a friendly squirrel {Mistress called him >Fat Boy= until he had babies, now she is >Fat Girl=}. She comes several times a day to eat at the bird feeder and I bark and fuss although we are really friends. Then there are the birds. There are always twenty or thirty around but I usually choose not to bother them. They are just way too easy. There is one problem with my yard. It has a fence ALL THE WAY AROUND. The fence has gates in it that Master and Mistress can use to get in and out but the handles are much too high for me to reach. Sometimes I get the feeling that the fence is there just to keep me in. Because of that, I want to get out. Did you ever feel that way? I know that cows do because they are always reaching through the barbed wire fences to eat the grass that is greener on the other side. There is just >something= about fences that draws me out. Of course I do not want to stay out, I always want to come back but, well there is just a magnetic something about a fence which makes me want to get out and see what is >out there=. At least it used to **until that terrible day**. I think of the many times that I slipped through the front gate (until Master put a wooden barrier on the gate so I could not get through). What a good thing it was to wander around the neighborhood seeing what I could see. I have been over to National College to investigate the happenings over there. That trip is usually pretty dull since everyone is very busy rushing back and forth to something they call >classes=, whatever that may be. I remember one time when I found a wide smooth pathway and was bouncing along down the middle of this thing called AFourth Street@ when all of a sudden this car came down my path and when he saw me he made a terrible screeching sound and almost stood on his nose, coming very close to me. Master saw that and was very angry, probably at the car since I was minding my own business. It was true that when I returned from these trips Master was distressed. He said he had been looking all over for me and where had I been anyway? I never took much notice of his distress. I suppose I never stopped to wonder why he was distressed because I enjoyed these little jaunts, at least I did **until that terrible day**.

I still remember the times I escaped the fence and went over to Linda=s house. Now that is an interesting place. Pete, Linda, Jason, and Drew live there although Drew is the only one that is much fun. There are usually a bunch of other kids there and they provide some small amusements from time to time but it is the

other two dogs that I mostly go to visit. Boomer and Joy are rather stupid animals and have a barely discernible intellect but we do have a very few things in common and I deign to visit them from time to time. Frankly, I rather enjoy the comparison.

It does me good to get out and mix from time to time, surely Master can see that. It really makes no sense at all to me why Master tries to prevent me from having a little entertainment. But he does ! Still, I find ways to get out from under his somewhat heavy hand from time to time. It may be the mailman, or a delivery person, or one of the Jordan kids next door, but I will find a way to get out of the limitations Master has set for me. I am sure that my dear reader will agree that I am fully justified in making a few decisions for myself. Hattie not only agrees with this but derides me for not getting out more. She thinks I am really much too loyal to Master. I do not agree with that. I think that it is right to be loyal to Master, nevertheless, if I enjoy those stolen moments of total freedom, whose business is it but mine. I can certainly take care of myself, or at least I thought so until that terrible day that I went to jail.

On a sunny day in the month of May this little dog went walking. I slipped out of the gate and decided I would visit Pepper. She is my best {dog} friend. Pepper lives a few blocks up Fourth Street so I proceeded to jog a little, enjoying the sunshine. I did not know that we live in a >Police State=. I thought that this was a democracy. I emphatically deny breaking any laws whatsoever. I was minding my own business, walking along the street when I was arrested and carelessly thrown into a paddy wagon with wire bars all around. There were two other animals of some kind in the Paddy Wagon and they smelled BAD. They were also making highly indignant sounds. These ignorant persons violated ALL my constitutional rights. I have my license, my shots, my collar, and I am registered with the city. I (Master) have been careful to follow every legal procedure and here I am, picked up like a common stray, and bodily thrown into jail. Obviously, this is a mistake, and some day, somewhere, when everything gets straightened out B HEADS ARE GONNA ROLL !! I crawled over into a corner and lay down. I certainly was not going to behave in the totally undignified way that those >animals= were. Anyway, I was sure that they were just going to take me home and that would only be two blocks. Where are we going ? They drove right past My House (with my nice little fence) and on down the street. We drove and drove and drove. I thought we would never stop but when we did, I wanted to get back in the Paddy Wagon and drive some more. You will just not believe what I had to go through. I was taken out of the Wagon and brought into a veritable BEDLAM ! The noise and pandemonium are impossible to describe. Dogs everywhere, dumb dogs barking and howling and generally making a show of their total stupidity.

One would bark then two would answer and four would answer them until every last mother=s son of them were barking and making noise. I simply did not believe I could stand it and it was only the knowledge that >I was legal= that helped me retain my sanity. Master would be here any minute to straighten this all out. Time dragged by so slowly you just wouldn=t believe it. They brought me some limp and listless food but I simply could not eat. They brought me some warm and brackish water and I tried to drink a little but I WAS SO NAUSEOUS. This was worse than my worst nightmare.

The afternoon pressed on, interminably, and it became dusk. Where was Master? What could be going on? Suddenly I heard his voice. He was calling my name. Hallelujah, I am saved. But wait, he keeps calling and I am answering but he does not hear. The jailers are telling him that I am not here! They are lying to him. It is a conspiracy. Help ! HELP !! Then he is gone. He has left me in the hands of the deceivers. I am desolate.

There is worse to come.

You know how it is in prison B there is a grapevine on which news travels at the speed of light. I discovered something which seems impossible. WE WERE ALL ON DEATH ROW !! Every cell held a condemned creature and I WAS LEGAL. I had done nothing wrong ! I had just gone for a little walk. Then a thought began bubbling up through my foggy little dog brain. Was this why Master had the fence? Is it possible that the fence was >good for me= ? As I pondered these things from the depths of my cell on Death Row I began to suspect that the fence was not there to prevent me from fulfillment and fun. Perhaps it was there for MY PROTECTION ! I had never considered this, not for one moment. It had always just seemed to be a pointless restraint, keeping me from >good things=. Perhaps there are also >bad things= out there. Perhaps there are things that want to harm me, even destroy me. Perhaps, no not perhaps, certainly Master has known more than I all along and the fence was my protection from these Gestapo bullies who have thrown me into this dungeon, this howling, smelly, hopeless dungeon.

All night these thoughts floated through my head and at last I really prayed. I sent my requests and repentance out hoping that Master might somehow hear and find a way to deliver me from this coming death. The death which had come from my own disobedience. Morning came and with it more dingy water and tasteless food. With it came more howling inmates and the smells of animals fouling their own kennels . With it came the certainty that some that were there yesterday are missing. They have met their eternal destiny. Master has not come, perhaps I have rebelled once too often. Perhaps his love has grown cold. Perhaps he is not able to

rescue me. Perhaps the enemy is too strong for him. If so, this may be my last day on earth and I am doomed.

Truly, dear reader, I did not understand the final result of my independence. I never thought it would come to this, I was just wanting to have a little fun, see a few fun loving friends, make a few decisions for myself. I never understood that there were sure and certain consequences. If I could only somehow contact Master again I would be different. I would make it my purpose to trust his decisions and to believe that those things which seemed to be limitations and constraints were really for my benefit and protection. I would realize that the enemy is strong and that I am weak and that I have desperate need to be protected by my Master.

It is now mid-morning and I am low enough to carry a flag under a snake when I hear Master=s voice again. He is angry because he has discovered their lies about me. He knows I am here AND HE LOVES ME !! He is going to rescue me from the hands of mine enemies. My joy knows no bounds. Here he is, picking me up and loving me and saying all the things I have longed to hear and despaired of ever hearing again. He places me in the truck and home we go. I run through the gate and rejoice at being, once again, under his protection and in his favor. {Later on I discovered that I was never >out of his favor=, though I felt like I was}.

And that is the story of how I went to jail. I hope you never have to go to jail. I hope that you are wise enough to see the fence as the security and protection that it is rather than a barrier to your happiness.

I tell you that I have changed my ways because that time on Death Row has taught this old dog a lesson. Truly my Master has freely given to me, New Life.

BEN GOES TO THE DOCTOR

AN ARTICLE ON PERSPECTIVE

Hello friends. It is me again, Ben. Some of you have read about how Hattie and I do not exactly agree. Well, Master is letting me share with you again. For those who do not know, I am a Peek-i-poo. Half Pekingese, half miniature poodle. I get my brains from the poodle genes and my fearlessness and outstanding disposition from the Chinese {Lion Dog} part of me. Everyone says that I am such a >gentleman=, and that is very true. I have much dignity and comport myself with considerable elegance. I love my Master ! I have lived with him almost my entire life and I have come to know him VERY well. Or at least so I thought ! I have permission to tell you about something that happened recently. Master says it is all right for me to share although, frankly, he does not come out looking very good. I would think that he would prefer me not to tell you about how he has been treating me, but he doesn=t seem to care a great deal about his reputation. So here goes.

It was just this past Wednesday that it all started. We have an evening ritual, Master and I. Every night I remind him that it is about bed time. He would forget if I did not bounce around, panting, and getting his attention. I am never impatient because he NEVER lets me down. **Except for Wednesday.** Well, back to our ritual. I do this mostly for his enjoyment, of course. I beg him to go upstairs and when he starts up the stairs I run ahead, whirling and dancing and letting him know that I am excited just to be with him. Then he gives me some very good moist food which I eat quickly. He also gets me some fresh water every evening but after that comes the best part of all. He has some special doggy treats which he gives me by hand. There is pup-peroni, sausages, and jerky strips. Every night he breaks these into small bite sized pieces and gives them to me one bite at a time. I can tell you that this is the high light of my day. I love this time! After I have eaten I go get a big drink of water and then master helps me up into the >big bed= where he talks with me, pets me, and B oh my we do have such a good time, every night. **Until Wednesday.**

On Wednesday he gave me my treats early. I didn=t think a lot about it at the time but it was not like usual. I just assumed that he was giving me some extra food. He set out the water but I didn=t drink much. After all, I had the >special

time= coming. Let me tell you, things sure did not turn out the way I thought. I thought that I knew him. I thought I could trust him and depend on him **but he has really let me down**. Some things are pretty hard to forgive. On Wednesday evening things went along pretty normally until bedtime. When we got upstairs I was doing my little dance, whirling around, but he was not paying much attention. He did start talking to me as though he wanted me to understand something but, well, I do not really FULLY understand his language. I can understand a few things, of course but when he comes out with big long sentences I just get sort of lost. Suddenly I noticed that master was getting into bed but he hadn=t gone into the closet to get my food and treats. I begged him, looked longingly at him with my big brown eyes but he did not respond. I paced back and forth from my food dish to master and he still did not respond. My food and water dishes had been placed up high and when I tried to reach them B they just placed them higher still. There was no way I could reach either one. I wasn=t so very hungry yet, but I was getting thirsty. Time went on and I was getting more and more upset.

Finally, the lights went out and that was the last straw. He had not given me my food, MY WATER, and most of all **MY TREATS** !! I have given my life to him. He has received my devotion. Everything I am and have is his. How could he treat me this way. I was getting more and more upset until finally I threw up. That is how my whole night was. I threw up three times and was sick as a ~~~ (well, you know what). You shouldn=t treat a ~~~ like this. Finally, after such a long, long time (I thought the night would NEVER end), morning comes and I am glad that this nightmare is finally over. **But it is not! It is still not over**. What ever is going on here? Still I get no food or water. When I am let outside I head straight for some water B I know where it is, **but they will not let me!** They command me to stay away from this cool, clear, water (can=t you just hear it?) I am hauled into a car and driven, I don=t know how far, and dumped out in this strange place where there are wild animals of ALL KINDS. I mean there were dogs and horses and even (*whisper*) cats. I was put into a cage for a long time and these people wouldn=t give me any food or water either. I thought I had lost my mind. My world had turned upside down ! Worst of all, it seems like I had lost my very best friend. If I haven=t lost him, I certainly have lost faith in him. **AND NO ONE WOULD BLAME ME EITHER !!!** I realize that I am just a dog but I am a VERY smart dog. I am smart enough to know that there can be no justification for him treating me this way. This is unkind behavior, make no mistake ! It is obvious that he has a cruel streak that I didn=t know about.

Finally, someone comes to my cage {me in a cage, can you imagine ?} They take me out of the cage and give me some kind of shot. Well, I do not know anything for the longest time. I guess I went to sleep but when I wake up B wow am I a mess. I feel like I have been on a three day drunk. My head hurts, my mouth hurts, I can=t get my bearings, and I can=t think straight. Finally someone comes to take me home although I am not so sure that he even wants me back. It may be all over for me. Perhaps he doesn=t love me anymore the way he has treated me. I get home after awhile and I am still drunk as a skunk ~ and you know what B those people act like nothing at all has happened. They come and talk to me like they still love me, they lift me up and pet me, and they just don=t feel my pain. I am in real distress here and for them it is >business as usual=.

I thought I knew my master. **I really thought I did.** I have heard talk about >his ways being higher than our ways= and I thought I understood. Now I am not so sure. Perhaps there is more here than I knew . There is just no way that I can excuse him for this recent behavior and if you are honest, you can=t either. You know, and I know that this was all his choice. He could have prevented it **if he had wanted to.**

Now I have a major problem. Can you guess? I have no choice except to continue to live in master=s house. He will continue to act like nothing has happened and be just the same as he has always been. **But me,** how shall I be? Can I trust him and get back into the same routine as before ? Can I love him like I did before ? My only choice is in my choice of attitude. I can BELIEVE and our relationship will be restored and we will have intimacy just like before. I will dance and whirl, he will love me and pet me, I will snuggle and beg, he will feed me and give me treats. OR I can be mad until he apologizes (knowing him, he never will). I can separate myself from him because he is not to be trusted. I can destroy the intimacy **because I AM OFFENDED WITH HIM.**

WHICH WILL IT BE ?

Note from Master: The Vet said that it was necessary for Ben to have his teeth cleaned and anaesthetized him. He had a miserable time but he will be better in the long run.

THE COMPLAINT

HATTIE:

Hello, my name is Hattie and I am a cat. I have spent nine long years slaving for the one we call Master. My complaint is not really with Master, though frankly sometimes I could get along quite well without his interference, thank you. I pretty much leave him alone and expect him to do the same with me except for emergencies. My complaint is about Ben. Ben makes me absolutely sick. By the way, Ben is a DOG. Even though he is old enough to know better {he is seven now}, his brainless lifestyle is driving me nuts (okay, okay, I have heard that old joke that this is not a drive, just a putt).

I have dignity and some sophistication. I truly hate to brag but I must supply almost all of the intelligent behavior in the whole house. That includes Master! Who can understand him? Master disappears for long periods of time, never telling us where he is going or when he will return. While it is true that he has given us some instructions related to what we should do while he is gone and that we should be ready for his return at any time, it is obvious that would expect me to maximize my time and talents. Like the Army, I plan to ABe all that I can be@ and if anyone gets in my way, tough luck to them. I have tried to understand Master=s ways and I am here to tell you that they are past finding out. Sometimes I let him know clearly that I am hungry. Perhaps he will feed me, perhaps not. There is no way to know. It seems to just depend on his whims. Frankly, I have learned to depend on myself. I know when I am hungry and I will find something to eat for myself. Who needs him anyway. You know, I expect that deep down that is Master=s plan. He wants me to be resourceful and find ways to meet my own needs. Some people think I sleep too much. Little do they know! It is true that cats do need a lot of sleep but there is more going on here than meets the eye. I am a deep thinker, you know, and a keen student of peoples= behavior. Much of the time you think I am sleeping, I am really studying human behavior. This way I will learn how to get what I want and need. People { except for Master} are easily manipulated you know. A little purring, some rubbing up against his leg and I can twist them around my paw. Oh yes, I am very deep.

Master and I do have some problems I must admit. As I have already

indicated, his instructions are generally not very clear and not very complete. Consequently I chart my own course as best I can, leaving enough room for him to get his way in the things that are really important to him. As you might suppose there are times when his will and my will are not exactly the same. Does he ever bend his will to me? NEVER! It is his way or the highway. He doesn't give an inch. Me, I am always willing to compromise. A little of this, a little of that. We each get a piece of our own way. Now that makes a lot of sense. After all, no one being has ALL THE WISDOM. We take some of his, some of mine and we can work together. No way. This doesn't work with him. So, we have our little problems but mostly we get along okay. I go my way, he goes his and we have a pretty good living arrangement. I have a complaint though and I am sure you will agree that I am right.

Things are not fair at my house and I have held back long enough. It is high time that someone spoke out and that others discover what I have had to put up with all these years. There are two of us here under Master's roof. The other one is Ben. He will tell you his story later but Ben gets my goat. He is always flapping around Master, slobbering all over him. It is absolutely disgraceful. It makes no difference what he is doing, even if he is gnawing on a bone, he sees Master and there he goes, yip, yip, yip. Bouncing around, whirling, doing that dumb little jig he does. It is embarrassing. And you know what? Master pretends that he likes it. What a joke -----

Ben:

While Hattie is raving away in her usual tirade, let me take just a few minutes of your time. Hattie pretends to be very smart but actually she is just another typical cat. It is not appropriate for me to comment much on Hattie. After all, Mother always told me, if you can't say something good about someone, don't say anything at all. So, mums the word.

I would much rather talk about Master, anyway. It is true that when I see Him, I run to Him and dance and (sing if I could) rejoice. This is not silliness however. I have good reasons for it. I have been told that I am a very smart dog. Still, I am a dog. Master is of a much higher order. Yes, it is true that I can not understand His ways but one thing I have discovered. His ways are not only higher than my ways, they are a whole lot better too. Over the past seven years since I was just a pup I have discovered to my delight that He brings things into my life that I

would never think of. He knows things that I would never be able to know. He takes me places I could not find. Life with Him is a total adventure and I LOVE IT !! Sometimes he invites me to go with him in the truck. Now this is an adventure. We will drive for a long time and when we get out, there are adventures after adventures. Sometimes we will be in the high mountains with wonderful smells of creatures all around. We will walk and wander together and I have joys unbarkeable . If it were not for Master, I would never know that such places exist. If I did find myself there, I would be frightened because I am sure that there are many dangers out in the wild places.

Sometimes He takes me to a place where they have Ice Cream. He gets some for me and says soothing words as I eat and shiver. Sometimes, when day is done and I am tired from all of my efforts, we just sit together on the couch. I lay my head in His lap while he tells me what a good boy I am and strokes my head. These are the very best of times. There I know a peace and a joy which I could never have found without Him. Yes, I do love Him. I delight to do His will ! But it is not as Hattie seems to think. I have reasons for loving Him. He has a wisdom, a gentleness, and kindness which draws me to Him over and over. He loves Hattie too, and in her own way, she loves Him. Yet, there is a difference. She stays at a distance because she is afraid that she will lose her independence. Well, she will lose her independence, but she will gain so very much more. I have tried to convince her over and over but her stubborn pride keeps her away from a truly intimate relationship with Master. I know that she is a member of His household and that He will feed her and care for her all the days of her life but, oh how I wish she could know the joy of His tender touch, His voice expressing His love for her and to her. How I wish she could experience that absolute peace that comes from resting her head in His lap.

AND THE MASTER SAID:

Behold my children, Hattie and Ben. How I love them !

REQUIEM FOR HATTIE

Written in Memoriam by : Benji Ben Pendleton

Well Hattie is gone. Her long life has come to an end and she deserves to be remembered. You know that I am not a writer. Someone who can express themselves should be writing this but alas, I am the only one who can tell the tale. Hattie was much mis-understood, especially in her later years and most especially by humans. Humans are not very good about understanding different species. They >humanize= almost everything. Oh well !

Towards the end she did little but lay around and shed hair. But that is not the whole story, not by any stretch of the imagination and her story deserves to be told, **NEEDS TO BE TOLD.**

Hattie had a poor kitten-hood, one might even say miserable. She was snatched away from her mother and siblings when she was barely two months old. She never even knew who her father was, never even saw him. When she was only about six months old she underwent surgery and was mutilated for life by having her front claws wrenched out and they did something so that she was never able to become a mother. She always regretted that and I think it did something to her personality. When Hattie was very young she was brought into Master=s house. Even though this proved to be a blessing to Hattie, one might almost say a >salvation=, it was nevertheless very traumatic. You see, at this time Master and Mistress had four small children and life there was, shall we say, active and exciting? Hattie had been very much alone up until then and suddenly she is immersed in sounds and touches and B everything. It is no wonder that she began to withdraw. Hattie was much older than I and so everything I tell you about her early life is hearsay, yet it is from an excellent source, Master Himself.

Master and mistress had a problem. It was a very great problem. They had mice. Now truthfully, I do not know exactly what a mouse is. That is because of Hattie. Where Hattie was, mice were not. Hattie was a beautiful Calico cat, full of

zeal and energy. She was an exact replica of a cat that Master=s grandfather had when Master was a child. The grandfather=s cat was named Hattie and as soon as Master=s mother saw her she exclaimed AWhy that=s Hattie@ and so she became. Master=s house had a problem with mice. He was using ordinary methods to control the mice when one of his children said ADaddy, why don=t we just pray ?@ And so they did ! Diligently ! And the mice prospered. They were fruitful and multiplied. The Lord added to their house daily, or so it seemed. Prayer meetings in Master=s house became very exciting, especially for some of the ladies. During long prayers the mouse orchestra would serenade them from the kitchen. I have really never noticed Master being embarrassed but I suspect he was during this period. This went on for quite a time and Master and the entire family were diligent in praying and the mice proliferated.

One day, kindly Uncle Sam Schindel came to the door with this young cat, Hattie. She was the answer to prayer. She loved to catch mice and was she ever good at it. She became a hunter par-excellent. In no time at all there was not a mouse to be seen or heard in that house. {Master may have forgotten that when she got older}. Hattie was ACTIVE ! When she ran out of mice she started hunting birds. Even though she had been mutilated and handicapped with the loss of her front claws she was able to climb any tree and could be seen on the roof of every house in the region. When you have read of other great hunters and explorers such as Daniel Boone or Jim Bowie, or Jim Bridger, did you get a picture of people who were gregarious ? Did they just love to be in cities and around lots of people ? No, of course not. They were just a different type. Well, so was Hattie. She was a different type. A Mountain Cat, so to speak. Mountain folks are independent, they must learn to fend for themselves and this describes Hattie to a At@. Some people mistook her attitude for one of haughtiness and pride. It was always hard to know with Hattie because there probably was SOME pride but there was much more to her than that. Hattie had real character. She was never one to go >with the crowd=, oh no, not her. She heard her own drumbeat and never listened for yours, but neither did she EVER criticize others. She did her thing and let you do yours. This can not be said of everyone.

Hattie was a poor traveler. Let me say this better. Hattie was a POOR TRAVELER. When Master brought her to Rapid City she nearly died. After that you had to FIGHT to get her in a motor vehicle. Me, I love to ride. I can travel for

thousands of miles and just love it. Hattie would just lay down and get sicker and sicker and sicker. She missed a lot of fun, I have to say.

Master had an animal named Ginger during most of Hattie=s life. Ginger was something called a dog. I ran into a whole mob of them that time I was thrown into jail. Dogs are strange beings, not like us. Hattie took good care of Ginger, more than anyone ever knew. Ginger was B how should I say this ? Ginger was stupid. That is as kindly as I can say it. She needed a lot of taking care of. She was just one of those dull plodding creatures that give neither much pleasure nor much grief. Let us just say that Ginger was very faithful and leave it at that. Unknown to the household, Hattie did a lot for Ginger, especially after that dumb >dog= got her foot caught in the fence. Oh, you haven=t heard about that ? Master has a very high fence around the yard. To me, the fence looks about thirty feet high but then, I am rather short so perhaps it is not quite that high B but it is really high. One day Ginger decides she can jump over it and run off to some kind of adventure {who knows what, pardon the expression, thoughts were in her head}? Now the best, most athletic day Ginger ever had she could not jump over this fence. Does she know this ? Do you know quantum mechanics ? So here she goes, taking a mighty leap she soars right into the fence. Somehow she gets her front paws over the top and there she clings. During her struggles she tries to climb up the fence using her back feet but her right back foot goes through the fence rather than on it. This threw her off balance and she flings herself backward but is now dangling with her foot caught in the fence. Ginger howled and screamed and yipped as she struggled upside down in the fence. This was back in the alley by National College and someone walking by stopped to help her. Also one of the Master=s children, Linda, was close by. They helped her get loose and took her to the Doctor but she was hurt bad. In fact, when she got old {Ginger lived to be almost 16} she had something Master calls arthritis and it hurt her all her life. Well, anyhow, Ginger needed a LOT OF TLC and who was there but Hattie. Did she ever get any credit for this ? I DON=T THINK SO ! I got to know Hattie in her later years. I came to see real quality in that cat. Patience, kindness, gentleness, some really good fruit. She was uniquely special and, though he did not often express himself, greatly loved by Master.

I am not much of a philosopher, after all, I am only Ben but still I wonder if Hattie doesn=t represent many of us. Alone, mis-understood, and under appreciated. Now she is gone and it is too late for anyone to make up for the

neglect. I wonder how things might have been different if the entire household of Master had been able to look past Hattie=s exterior and see what was inside. What if they had seen her heart and responded to that instead of her behavior. I like to think that if we had responded to her heart that many things such as joy and peace may have been developed in her as well.

Goodbye old friend, we love you still.

BEN= REUNION

I am absolutely exhausted. I do not know when I have been so tired. Yet, it is a good kind of tiredness and just laying here panting gives me time to review the wonderful events of the past few days. I have seen friends that I never thought I would see again. There was Happy, Kari, George, Hambone, and C I, I am just almost overwhelmed. I know that I am not being very coherent so let me back up a few days and try to explain.

When I was just a pup, I suppose I lacked just a few social skills. Even then I had an obedient heart but lacked knowledge. It seems that I was always blundering about doing the wrong thing. Finally Master decided that I needed some training. They called it >obedience school= and I sure learned a lot. This was a rigorous training school which went from Friday evening till Sunday afternoon. Then we met once a week for a very long time. Well, as you can imagine, some of us made a bunch of friends and some made a few enemies. We were all young back then and knew nothing about life yet. We were full of energy and play and it was hard to pay attention as we were being taught. There is something about youth and puppy hood that is special. If I only knew then what B oh well, too soon old, too late smart! You know, when you are just a pup you can learn ANYTHING quick. Well, at least some of us could. Frankly, we had some awfully nice dogs that were just as loyal and true as they could be, but learning, well for them it took a lot of hard work. It was a >special time= and it was a time when we were being formed. Each one of US belonged to a Master. I didn=t come to appreciate that for some time. As I got older and came to know more of >the world=, I I learned that there

are some out there who *have no Master*. These are called >Wild Dogs= or heathens. It is hard for us who have been given so much to imagine, but they have no one to care for them B ever. If they get a thorn in their paw there is no one to take it out. If they get sick -- too bad ! It is said that these wild beasts claim that they are free. Can you imagine ? One is forced to wonder how they define freedom. It is likely that their real problem is that they have NEVER known real freedom so they are easily deceived. Is it freedom to have no protection, no guidance, no healing, no love ? Oh yes, they are free indeed. Free to freeze when cold, free to go hungry or eat garbage, free to be lonely and whimper through the night. It isn=t even as though they have >independence=. For survival they run in packs and then find themselves submitting to the pack leader and any others in the pack that are stronger. Strength, guile, and meanness make the rules. This is free ? No thanks. I will be free with Master any time. Forgive me, but I did not intend to get on my >soapbox=. I was talking about my friends, not the wild ones.

Last week, my training class had a reunion. We are older now, of course, and we all had some aching joints and a few gray hairs on black dogs but would you believe it B we were still just about the same INSIDE. Take Happy for example. Happy is a type of Beagle called a Black and Tan. I must admit that he was a very good looking dog when he was young and he has matured into a most distinguished looking and impressive fellow. Truthfully, Happy does not have many interests in life. He cares nothing for running around playing tag, catching a Frisbee {like Kari}. In fact, Happy is not very social at all. Most of the time you would consider Happy dull, dull, dull. You would be dead wrong. Happy is not dull at all, he is just waiting on his Master to give the command and Happy is all ears and wagging tail. There are two things that Happy loves more than all else. Happy loves his Master and Happy loves to HUNT. Hambone, who lives next door to Happy and often goes hunting with him tells about Happy going out early in the morning and staying till dark just hunting all day long, especially when the weather is quite cold. He runs through the briars and he runs through the brambles till his poor old tail is bloody and raw from whipping through the weeds and bushes. He will come in totally exhausted, almost too tired to eat, but by morning here is old Happy ready to go again. When his Master is ready to hunt with him, Happy goes out of his skull with joy. This is what he was created for ! During those times his true skill becomes very apparent . As soon as they are in the woods , Happy is tuned to his Master. His nose is to the ground trying to catch a scent, his eyes are to the ground and straight ahead (at these times Happy has true tunnel vision), but his ears are alert to Master. They are a team. Master is the brain of

the outfit but Happy works with him like a well oiled machine. He is beautiful to watch and highly valued by Master. Soon Happy catches a trail and off he goes, but with real purpose. You see, Happy has learned that he is not just to chase the rabbit, he is to control it. So Happy begins to bay, the rabbit begins to run. The rabbit thinks that Happy is just following but, in fact, Happy is herding the rabbit around to Master. Yes, if you want a politician or a beauty queen, forget Happy. But if you want a hunter, Happy is your dog. You could just tell, as Happy and his Master walked into the reunion, how much Happy loved his Master and how much Master valued Happy. I really got quite emotional.

Kari was also at the reunion and she is truly a piece of work. You almost have to know poodles to have some idea about Kari. Kari was a cute pup, but flighty. She is a white poodle, not a giant poodle, but rather a mid-size (which is still much bigger than I am). When Kari was a pup she was nervous as a cat on a hot tin roof. Jumping around on tip toes (why can't she just use her paws like normal dogs), flitting from here to there. She was a caution I can tell you that. I tried very hard to get to know her but it wasn't easy. You start off on one subject and before you even get >into it= She is off somewhere else. She had the attention span of an ADHD gnat. I think it was measured in nano-seconds (and not too many of those). Well, let me tell you, at the reunion she had sure changed ! She was the star of the show. Kari had developed into a Queen with regal bearing, quick but kind intelligence, and all the good looks that one hopes for in royalty. Kari had become an impressive creature and she just charmed all of us into being her admirers. It wasn't looks alone that captured us, in fact it truly wasn't looks at all. It was her character. Kari=s Master had small children and almost from a pup Kari had been entrusted with their care. She quickly grew into a very responsible dog and was rewarded with love and increasing responsibility by both Master and the children. As time went on Kari became practically a member of the family (something which Happy would not even desire to be). It is simply impossible to know how such things happen. Was it this wonderful family that so transformed Kari ? Was it Kari that produced such an attitude in the family ? Was it because of choices that each and every one of them made over a period of time ? Was it, perhaps, foreordained ? {whatever that means} This I know, it was a joy and a privilege for us to see how she had matured and become a true class act. They say that she is tremendously smart. Perhaps so, I know that she is not stupid, but if she is exceptionally smart she appears not to know it herself. She is quite modest and humble about all her accomplishments. All of you readers out

there in the Canine world would like her (unless your own insecurities got the best of you).

George, as I have said, did a little hunting also but basically George was sent to graduate school to learn how to watch. It is possible that I have not got the straight of this because it doesn't seem to me that it would require any teaching at all to help a dog to >watch=. Yet, George says that he is a >watchdog= and he must know. Whatever it was, George had become a very strong authority figure. He actually had a kind of military bearing. It wasn't always comfortable to be around George because he was so alert and always >on guard= as though he expected the unexpected at any moment. As you know, I am pretty laid back and this was, shall we say, different for me. Yet, during the short time of the reunion I really came to appreciate George. He wasn't much for jokes or small talk but he had learned what his job was, and he had taken to it like a duck takes to water. Once he discovered what his Master wanted him to do, he engaged himself to the task with a whole heart. As I listened to George tell about his life, I came to appreciate what a tough task it is. For hours and hours George patrols the grounds which he has been chosen to protect. He makes no noise, takes no rest. Most nights this is absolutely all he does. Can you imagine? Most of us would, after a while, lay down on the job. Inside ourselves we might say AOh well, nothing is going to happen tonight@ and we would find a warm place and curl up. I have heard my Master talk about a wedding one time where some young ladies went to sleep on the job and when the Chief came, they were not prepared and missed out on the good stuff. Well, George will not miss out! He stays alert and at attention all the time he is working and this has paid off for his Master on several occasions. Once, I hear, George even saved his Master=s life. George is different. George is kind of severe. I doubt that George has many close friends (except his Master, of course). But I certainly came to respect him and love him. He is called to a certain kind of work, not my kind, but an important kind, and he has given himself to the task. It was a privilege and an honor to see George once again.

I could go on and on and on about my wonderful friends but perhaps I should close with just one more. This is Hambone. What can I say about Hambone as a pup. She was all feet and kind of clumsy. She was something called a Shepherd from Germany. She was big enough to be frightening (whatever that is, my Master says that I am not frightened of anything so I suppose I am not very secure with that terminology). Actually, no one was frightened of Hambone. She was so nice, so gentle, and so calm and laid back that you had to like her. Frankly, I thought that she would turn out to be a pleasant bit of fluff. Was I ever

wrong! At the reunion Hambone was still nice and gentle. She was still very calm and laid back and, at first, I thought that she probably spent most of her time doing very little. She certainly didn't brag about herself or even talk much about herself although she talked a lot about her Master. Hambone's version was that she was blessed with having the perfect Master. He included her in ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING he did. If he went to a restaurant, she went with him. If he took a taxi somewhere, he took Hambone along. They were like Siamese twins connected at the waist. And did he ever love her. He took excellent care of her, bathing and grooming her. Frankly, we were all wondering if perhaps Hambone might just be >putting on the dog= just a little. This seemed almost overboard B until Hambone's Master walked into the room. He had on dark glasses and carried a white cane until he got to Hambone. He was carrying a very special kind of brace and halter which he quickly slipped onto Hambone. Hambone knew just what he was doing and helped him in every way as he connected the brace. Then, off they went. Hambone's Master gave Hambone very few instructions but she knew what she was doing.. I saw them come to a stop light. Hambone understood that three of the four lights meant ASTOP@ but the fourth one meant go. Not only that, she watched for cars and even if she could have made it across, she knew enough to wait until her Master could also get safely across. She was his AEyes@. She was a ASeeing Eye Dog@. There are specially trained dogs of many kinds. There are police dogs, drug sniffing dogs, and others but none has such an important responsibility as the seeing eye dog.

I have only related the >success= stories. There were others, of course. Some had shown great promise. They had everything necessary to become successful but were lacking the >character= to do so. Some of them simply refused to >be told what to do=. These were, of course, worthless. They truly were good for nothing. Others wanted more show than go. These were not reliable. Still others wanted to reach the goals of their Masters but they wanted to do it >their way=. We called them Sinatra dogs. These received quite a bit of training but actually could not be depended on to follow through with anything NIH. (Not invented here). There were others that simply didn't want to work. They seemed to feel that Master would feed them and house them anyway so why put forth any effort. They were right. Their Masters did feed and house them but never >worked with them=. The relationship never developed and they certainly never >BECAME FRIENDS=.

It was a wonderful reunion and I hope we can do it again, though we probably will not. It is truly one of the great joys given to us in this life that we can

see how others have been brought forth into grand accomplishments by their Master. Opportunities have been presented to us to do the kinds of works that dogs have never done before, just because we have a Master who loves us and chooses to let us work with Him. Joy unspeakable and FULL of Glory !!

BEN HAS A GUEST

Sometimes the Christian life is glorious and fulfilling. Sometimes it is something else. I am sure all my readers know just what I mean. There are times when life with the Lord is as comfortable as a patch of sunlight on a carpet. We are just content to lay and soak it up. It is a warm feeling and we wonder why anyone would choose another kind of life. Then, all of a sudden, here comes the homeless and the destitute claiming more from you than you really care to give. I have an example I would like to share with you.

I have a friend named Tucky. Actually Tucky is more like B an acquaintance than a real friend. She has been around our house a few times but always before she came with her own family. During those times she was never much of a problem, in fact I could ignore her and she pretty much ignored me. That was just the way we both liked it. It seems like her family is pretty decent and it is a deep mystery to me what happened, but apparently they have thrown her out. At first I had no idea why a good family would dis-own their canine friend, their basic and fundamental responsibility, though in time I gained a lot of understanding. I am not saying she deserved it but human families are not stupid and they generally do the right thing. They threw her out B we caught her. Truthfully I do not have a very keen sense of the passing of time but it seems like she was here, FOREVER !! I have heard Master telling stories by someone named Mumford. I have never met him, but what he says makes sense to me. He tells about the >will power screw=.

When something comes into our lives we just clamp our jaws and decide to >wait it out=. Mumford says that there is one problem with the >will power screw=. Someone comes to visit and we set the screw for two weeks B they stay for three. He says Father God, in His plan to teach and mature us, simply out-waits our endurance. I understand that. I have just lived through that . That explains my situation with our guest.

I have learned quite a bit from Master. He has taught me to share in many ways. I try not to learn too much from Mistress. She is so giving and outgoing that if I followed her example I would give everything away. There would be nothing left for me to give good stewardship over. So, when Tucky came I decided that I would be a good friend and share everything. Let me tell you, that didn=t work well at all. Tucky had no intention of sharing, she wanted it all. I have a food dish in the kitchen that is left on the floor, full of food, all the time. I use it when I want a light snack and I never over eat. WELL, Tucky barges right

in and scarfs it all down immediately. You will never guess what happened next.

I LOSE MY FOOD BOWL. Because our guest is so incredibly greedy, I get punished. Why don=t they train the little idiot, why punish me. I ask you, have I done anything wrong ? No ! Yet, up it goes and I have to do without. My main meal is at night when Master feeds me moist food and then >hand feeds= me some special treats. This is our special time of being together. I am glad to do this for him since he clearly enjoys it so very much. Can you imagine what went on with Tucky here ? Sure you can. As soon as the little glutton smelled food she was all over Master like white on rice. As my moist food was poured out, guess who was crowding me out and eating it all. I tell you it is just about more than a body can take. I will admit to growling at him and even snapping a little. After all, if no one else is going to teach the ragamuffin manners, I certainly can. Now it is true that Master contrived a way to satisfy the >notorious guest= and for me to still maintain some kind of decorum and have my food and get my attention. Well, good for Master, but that did little to change our guest.

Let me tell you a little about Tucky and it will help you to understand. I may have the facts a little fuzzy but I think I have gotten the gist of things. Tucky is his family name. I think his given name is Ken because I have heard Master tell others that he came from Kentucky. I know he is a foreigner cause he is a Welsh Corgi. Wales is probably some county in Kentucky and it is clearly a foreign country. This guy is barely civilized. Please be patient with me because my education is a bit spotty {I am totally self educated you know}, but I have deduced that the Corgi is a diminutive of incorrigible. That certainly fits. I am only telling you these things so you will understand what I have been having to put up with. I know better than to >judge= another, in fact, I did my very best to teach and train Tucky while he was here B to no avail.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, I have come to that place of maturity in life where I spend much time in meditating. Our guest was no help in that. She is still pretty young and has way too much energy. As you know, dear reader, in this world you shall have tribulation. Her name is Tucky. It was during one of these times of meditation with frequent interruptions from >you know who= that I started to understand some things. So far, all of my attention had been on Tucky. How could I constrain her, how could I control her, how could I teach her civilized ways.

It began to dawn on me that this whole thing wasn=t about Tucky at all B it was about ME !. Master had brought Tucky into our lovely home because I needed to learn some things. Now, I have known for a very long time that Master loves me very much but this brought me into a >new dimension=. Is this love ? Is it love

when some intruder comes in, steals your food, steals Master=s attention, robs you of your much needed rest, and who knows what all ? Is this love ? Well, this will knock your socks off, dear reader, but I have come to believe that the answer is yes. This is love of the very highest form. Let us examine this carefully. Let us just suppose that I had grown just a teensy bit selfish. This may even be true ! As hard as it is for me to accept, it just may be true that I had become just a little bit self-centered. My Master, who needs me so much and loves me a lot came upon a wise plan. He would provide a situation where I could see, for myself, this slight defect in character. He knew that as soon as I saw it I would repent. So here comes Tucky. At first I was angry and focused on the one that I thought was the cause of my trouble. I fussed and snapped and sulked but none of that helped at all. The more I blamed Tucky the more miserable I became. During my meditation time it was somehow made clear to me that my problem wasn=t Tucky. My problem was that I had a >Tude=. My attitude was bad. As I lay there on the front porch, warm and secure, I thought and thought and thought. I began to see Tucky through Master=s eyes and realized that his basic problem was simply that he was a >dog=. What could you expect. I, however, because Master has adopted me, have become something higher than a dog {I really don=t know what yet}. I was miserable because I, too, was behaving like a dog instead of following my higher nature. You know how it is. One thought leads to another and then that leads to something else and pretty soon I was as happy as a pup again. I came to love and accept Tucky and we became quite good friends. I have never loved Master more than I do now because I have experienced a depth of his love and wisdom that I never knew existed. This makes me feel even more safe and secure.

Wouldn=t you know. Just as soon as I got myself lined out Tucky=s folks decided to give him another chance. They came and picked him up today. I feel almost lonely but, to tell the truth, it feels good to get back to normal also. I am just amazed at how good it feels to be an overcomer. It makes a guy almost want to go out looking for mountains to climb or rivers to cross B but first, I think I will meditate a little while on my warm front porch.

BEN=S LAST JOB

It is really difficult to know how to start this. Everything has changed for me and all the things I used to know, I see differently somehow. Let me see if I can start awhile back and make some sense out of things.

A little over a year ago I began hearing Master and Mistress talk about >getting old=. It took me awhile to figure out that they were talking about >ME=! I didn=t >feel= old. I know that I moved a little slower and that I needed to rest more often but, inside, I was still the same puppy I always was. Frankly, I even thought I had gotten a little bit wiser and that I had gained some pretty good qualities along the way. Yet, I will admit that I had some aches and pains and was often not very comfortable. This went on for awhile and I would notice that Master and Mistress would often hold me and pet me with a strange expression on their faces. I could tell that they were troubled about something and I tried to comfort them but that only seemed to make them feel worse. My life was still good, of course, because I had a warm place to live, a good yard to wander about in, enough food B although food wasn=t so interesting to me any more. Most of all I had my family and we loved each other so my life was good, even if I did hurt some and had to be lifted up on the couch most of the time.

I do not remember what happened next very well. I remember Master taking me to the dog doctor who examined me. I remember them just shaking their heads and talking so softly I couldn=t understand. Actually, I must admit that my hearing had almost left me and I couldn=t see very much any more either. I remember going home with them and Master, especially, was really upset for a couple of weeks. I couldn=t help. Then one day I heard Master ask Mistress if she would >do it= since he really didn=t want to. She said she would and took me to the car and we went someplace. I remember her being with me and holding me when we went into a building with strange noises and smells. Then, just as she was loving me and holding me B EVERYTHING CHANGED ! Suddenly I was in a different place. I was young again, younger than I had ever been. I have never felt so good, so light, so un-chained. I could see, forever it seems. I could hear everything I wanted to hear, and I could even >talk=. I wish you could picture the place where I am now and see the things I see B but you can=t. I can=t find just the right words and everything here is >outside your experience= so you can=t relate. Therefore, I will not try to help you see where I am now. You will just have to come and see for yourself.

For quite awhile I just wandered around meeting folks and tried to get used to my new home. At first I really missed my old home. I missed Master and Mistress and all the old things but pretty soon I began getting interested in new things. Hattie was there. Can you believe it? Hattie!! You know, I really loved Hattie but she was so selfish and such a brat. Well, Hattie has changed a lot. I suspect I have too. Not that I have >tried= to change. I am just different somehow. Well, pretty soon I started having my work to do. I didn=t know that I would have work here, but I do. It is interesting work too and there is plenty of it. I enjoy my work a lot and look forward to be involved with it just about all the time. Yet, I had a problem. I was able to let go of just about everything in my former life but I was worried a bit about Master and Mistress. I know that they were lonely for me. I know that they thought a lot about me and, you know, they are getting a bit old also. I felt that I must do one more job. I must find a companion for Master and Mistress. Inside, I just felt that this was something I MUST do. Here, you know, when you have that strong inner feeling, it is always right. It simply means that my New Master is giving me instructions. One last job - find a companion for Master and Mistress. Now, how can I do that?

I began asking around. I talked to Hattie. She understood what I wanted to do and why I wanted to do it, but she was no help at all. I talked to some other animals but they couldn=t help either. Finally I ran into, of all things, a squirrel. Can you believe it, this squirrel KNEW master! I was so surprised! I asked him how he came to know Master. Was he a tame squirrel? ANo@, he said. AI was a wild squirrel living in a small town in Missouri. It was the fall of the year and I chose to live in a very large Oak tree close to a school so I could be around children a lot. How I enjoyed those children as they went to and from school each day. The streets were wide and there was not much traffic. There were Oak trees lining the streets and back from the streets as far as you could see. Missouri has pretty mild winters and there were lots and lots of acorns for us to gather and store in our dens. It was a good life and my friends and I enjoyed it so much. Then one day I got careless. As I was crossing the street I failed to see a car coming until it was too late. I almost made it but the front tire clipped me as I was scampering away. I made to the side of the road and just lay there in such pain that I can not describe it. One of the children tried to help me and, please forgive me because I am ashamed, I bit the little girl. I really didn=t mean to but I was hurting so bad I just couldn=t help myself. The little girl ran home and got her father, your Master. He came and tried to help but I was still hurting so bad that I was snapping at him. I heard him say how sorry he was for me but because of the

possibility of something called >rabies= he would have to have me examined since I had bitten his child. With compassion he put me out of my pain but before he did I heard him say, this one I want to be with me in paradise. The next thing I knew, I was here. I am waiting for him because I will ride his shoulder when he comes here. We will be great friends.@ ADo you have a name@, I asked? ANo, he will give me my name when he comes@. I explained my problem to him and asked if he could help since he had been here for a long time. He said that he had an idea and it just might work. He said if love is strong enough and if your cause is just, our new Master might let us influence others >down below=. He suggested that the little girl that he had bitten was very sensitive to both people and animals and that I might be able to work through her. Now, my love was strong enough and my cause came from my new Master, so I set out on my last job on earth.

Frankly, how it all happened is not very clear to me but I will describe it the best I can. I went to my new Master and told him my problem. I told him that my old Master needed a new companion but I wanted to be sure and get him the right one. He understood. Choosing just the right companions are very important. He said we must not pick one that looks like me or it would be very hard on both the new companion and Master. Yet, he must be very smart or Master would be disappointed. He must be friendly and one that loves to love and be loved.

Finally, my new Master pointed towards earth and I saw. I saw a cute, young dog. He was a miniature Schnauzer. His name was Scamp and he lived with a family in Spearfish, South Dakota. Most of the family loved Scamp a lot but there was one, insurmountable problem which I won=t go into. They had to send him to another home. One of them >just happened= to work with the little girl (grown up now) that had been bitten by the squirrel a long time ago. My new Master gave me the ability to put thoughts into the mind of this girl (woman) and, sure enough, it worked. Becky heard of Scamp and talked to Master about him. {Actually he was called something else at his former home but his name was really Scamp}. Soon, sooner than anyone expected, Scamp came to live with Master. Just like I expected, they hit it off splendidly. Scamp is happier than he has ever been and Master and Mistress are no longer lonely.

And so, I completed my last job on earth. Now I am ready to carry on with my new, most wonderful tasks here. Incredibly, as soon as that job was finished it seems that I began to lose interest in everything on earth. There is so much up here to see and to learn that the old stuff just isn=t very interesting to me any more.

**ONE DAY YOU TOO WILL SEE
AND UNDERSTAND**

PEPPER

Pepper looked listlessly as Janel walked by. Dimly, in her little doggy brain she remembered times when she used to run, jump, and play seeming never to get tired. Now, even standing up was such a painful effort. Something was wrong but she had no idea what it could be. Pepper lay and thought about things. This was her family, the only family she had ever known. There was master Richard and Mistress Lillie of course. But the others were the ones that had brought so much love, gentleness, and sparkle into her life. There was Alden. He is so much bigger than when I first came. One day he will be just like Master, I know he will. Then there are the girls. Janel, Calli, Sayra, and Lissa. They all still run, play, laugh, and giggle. There was a time when I joined right in, but no more. I hurt inside and can not get rid of it. I make messes in the house and I never used to do that. Everyone is patient and nice to me but I know there is something wrong about that. While Pepper lay there thinking about days gone by, days gone forever she heard her name being called. Listlessly she got to her feet and stumbled in the direction of Richard=s voice. Dimly, she realized that she was being put into the big van and driven somewhere. Achingly she lay there until she sensed being taken into a place where there was a hundred doggy smells. She remembered being fondly hugged and people saying goodbye.

Suddenly, Pepper woke up. I mean she REALLY woke up. The pain was gone and her brain was absorbing things like NEVER before. As an earth bound dog even the present was pretty dim and her brain was totally unable to reach into the future and had little ability to remember the past. Now, however, she was really and truly alive. She remembered the recent past and now, she understood. She had been very sick and very old. Her doggy body had been giving up. She had more than one disease which was bringing pain and she deeply longed to escape the torment. She remembered and understood clearly the love of the five children and their parents. Now she recalled words and expressions that then, she had no power to understand. Now she knew the depth of love that had been poured out on her and the pain with which that love had ended her misery.

Pepper had little time to ponder this because she felt SO GOOD and wanted to run and play. She looked around and saw lots of other animals around her. To

her great surprise she recognized some of them. She saw several bunnies, some of them still tiny and recognized them as bunnies that Alden, Janel, Calli, Sayra, Lissa, and Lillie had raised and cared for. They recognized Pepper as well and rushed over to her. Their brains had also been greatly improved and they had been given the power of speech. Lo and behold when Pepper responded to their cries of joy at seeing her she discovered that she too had the power of speech. The small crowd of animals gathered together and talked about old times and old adventures. What a good time they were having when Pepper suddenly asked, "Where are we?" "Do you remember the stories we heard the family telling each other about Jesus and Father and Father's house? This is the place!" "It sure is a big house", Pepper said. "Well, it isn't exactly a house. It is more like a place and a dwelling place. In fact I have heard some up here call it a Kingdom. Still I am sure that this is where they meant when they talked about Father's house", one precocious bunny said.

Pepper looked around at the "house". It was perfect! The green of the grass was greener than green. The clouds floating overhead were perfect. There were trees and hills and everything a young and frisky dog could possibly want. As Pepper was looking around she suddenly jumped back and barked (she did not speak, she barked). She saw a familiar form in the distance. A very familiar form. Pepper broke into a run and then jumped high in the air. She had forgotten how HIGH she could jump and this was a dandy. Barking and almost howling she ran toward the familiar form. Ben looked up from his strolling along when he heard the barking and howling. He saw Pepper running toward him and Ben began running toward Pepper as fast as his short little legs could carry him. At first these two dear old friends just frolicked about acting like dumb creatures because they were so happy to see each other. Then they began talking. They talked about the old days gone by when they were so dumb they couldn't even talk. (In fact these were very smart dogs as dogs go but now they were glorified dogs and greatly changed). They talked about the times when Ben had stayed for long periods of time when his Master and Mistress had gone on long trips. They talked about running around in Ben's yard when Pepper came to visit him. Their minds were so clear they could remember, and understand things they never understood before.

Just then a small squirrel popped up in a big Oak tree. He seemed to know Ben very well and ran over to see what all the hubbub was. Ben introduced the squirrel to Pepper and told the squirrel's story. This caused Pepper to inquire, "Why are we here?" In the world there are countless animals, fish, and insect and I

really do not think they seem to all be here@. ANo, not all creatures come here. It is only those special ones who have been greatly loved by a member of the Royal Family. It seems that our masters and their children are of royal blood. There is a King in this land and these are all His children. Any animal that they have loved and that they want to be with them here B those animals are here@. AHow come we were so lucky and blessed@, Pepper asked? AHey, we are all a lot smarter here but that is one of the questions we do not know the answer to. I think it has something to do with the genius, planning, and love of the King Himself but I sure don=t understand it. The wonderful thing though is that I do not have to understand it, I just get to enjoy it@.

Then Pepper said to Ben, ATell me about this place@. And that is where this story must end. One day you and I will be in that very place. And one day you and I will meet a dear friend and ask them this same question. And one day B we will be able to complete this story of

good friends,

full of life and vigor, enjoying the eternal splendor of

Father=s house.

IT=S A DOGS LIFE

REFLECTIONS

Master says that in something he calls scripture that it says that there is a time for every purpose under heaven. A time to live, a time to die. A time to sow, a time to reap. I do not really quite understand what that means, I suppose, but I think I have come to a time for reflection. I have heard others {humans} talking about me and they think I am just lazy. It is true that I spend a lot of time laying on my special pillow on the front porch and it is also true that much of the time my eyes are closed. The humans think that I am asleep just because I jump when they come close but I think the truth is that I am thinking about things. In fact I am sure that this is true because I have heard Master say exactly the same thing about himself. {Benji=s note: We are indeed very much alike, Master and I}. What do I have to think about ? Well, quite a lot, actually. Let me see if I can stay awake B er eh , I mean organize myself so you might understand what I spend so much time thinking about.

I had a very poor puppy-hood, as most of you know. I was snatched from my mother when I was just a pup and sent to a Foster Home. At the Foster Home I was isolated outdoors {This was in a foreign country called Texas and was it ever hot } The Foster Family was a very nice family but they must have had some kind of prejudice against my race because they all stayed inside while I stayed outside. Here I was, mourning over the loss of my mother and siblings and sent to a place where I might as well have been in >Solitary Confinement=. It is true that the nice man who lived there would spend a little time with me each evening but still, I was very lonely and afflicted. There is a time for every purpose under heaven and this was my time for that. As I meditate, I am thankful for that experience. Why, you ask ? It is hard to say but I know that these experiences and hungers when I was very young became a kind of reference frame from which much of the rest of my experiences have been measured. I heard Master sing a song which had a line I never forgot Alf I=d never had a problem, I wouldn=t know that He could solve them. I=d never know what faith in God could do@. That is a major mouth full and seems to me to explain a little bit why I am so thankful for those early months of my life. One day Master came into my life and brought me to my brand new home. I think I must be a Christian because so many things I

hear he and Mistress say just exactly describes how I feel. I was like I was brought out of death into life. Why me ? I do not know B I was just chosen by him. I did nothing to deserve this destiny which he brought me to, he just DID IT.

After arriving at my new home it was like I had been adopted into this family. And it is really a big family too. I absolutely lose track of >relationships= because there is a really big bunch of people who treat each other and talk to each other like they are brothers and sisters. You know what, they all accepted me and treat me that way too. Of course my relationship with Master is absolutely unique and special, we both know that. Sometimes when others are visiting, often doing something they call praying, I can sense that they feel that their relationship with Master and Mistress is >really unique= but that doesn=t bother me. I know !

I have heard Master teach about manna. Food was provided every day. My life is like that ! I don=t know where it comes from but every night we go upstairs, Master gathers my manna out of his closet, and then we have our very special time while he feeds me my manna right out of his hands. This is a time which goes way beyond food. It is a time for >being together=. He talks to me, teases me sometimes, and roughs up my head with his big gentle hands. Afterwards he helps me up into bed with he and Mistress and talks to me some more. After a bit he swats me on my rear and I go off to meditate some more while they read for awhile. These are the very best of times for us all. I hear that some people do not believe that manna is still provided. I truly feel sorry for them.

I am a good traveler. I have been all over the world with Master and Mistress. Actually, I have no idea how big the world is but when you go for days and days and never see the same things twice I suspect you have just about covered it all. I like traveling ! We stop every little while and have some water and exercise. When we travel I get to be with Master and Mistress ALL THE TIME and who wouldn=t like that ! Sometimes we listen to music and I have come to enjoy the beat and rhythm. Sometimes they listen to sermons and then I just sleep because I truly do not understand those things. In the evening we usually stop early and when we get out of the truck there are such things to see as I never even imagined. I suppose that must be the main reason I like to go with Master. I see things I never even dreamt of before. He expands my horizons and draws me into situations and places I would never go myself. Why me ? I simply do not understand but it must be this thing called >Grace= I hear Master and Mistress talking about. Whatever it is I=ll take it and be glad. We have been in the great high mountains together, my Master and I. We have been in the sandy, prickly deserts also. We have traveled across miles and miles of what Master calls the

>bread basket= where wheat and corn grow. There must be enough there to feed the whole world. One time we went to something called an Ocean . Master really loves the Ocean but I wasn=t much impressed. Oh sure, I saw a lot of water but it wasn=t any good to drink and every time I got into it a wave came along and knocked me down. Master can have the Ocean, possibly I just don=t know enough yet to appreciate it the way he does.

Many times while I am laying on the front porch with my head on my paws I am thinking more deeply than humans expect. I have been to Church lots of times. Master really loves Church and I agree. Sometimes Church is out in the back yard, sometimes it is down at Joe=s place in the wild Sandhills of Nebraska. Often Church happens in someone house. Possibly some of you have never been to Church and do not know how special a Church experience can be. Let me see if I can explain. How the people know when to start coming together I have no idea.

Perhaps some of them don=t know either because they do not all come at the same time. Anyway, here they come and when we see each other there are such smiles all around. People hug each other and talk about B well they just talk about anything and everything. Some just joke and kid around {I have gotten used to that but have never understood humor}. Others talk about their families or their work. The kids run around and play and laugh and this I really do understand. Finally somebody starts to play some music and everyone comes together to sing. Boy, do they like to sing. I don=t sing. Not at all. I tried once and thought I was a pretty good baritone but EVERYBODY shushed me up. I know when I am not wanted and so I cut my singing career right off. I just don=t sing anymore. But I like it and enjoy the beat, the tunes, and some of the words. I=ll tell you what I really enjoy!! It is called >atmosphere=. I LOVE the atmosphere when we sing. I have no words to describe it but it when the singing is flowing from song to song, some people have their eyes closed and hands in the air, all are feeling content B it is at those times that my heart has found it=s home. There is just nothing like it. After the singing usually the younger kids go somewhere else, I don=t know where and the rest begin to talk. Someone, usually Master, brings up some problem, some experience, some lesson, or some scripture. He does what he calls >laying it out=. Then someone else talks about it, then someone else, then another, and another, and another. These people really get into it. This one will share this experience, someone else their experience of ideas. Sometimes they stop right in the middle of all this and pray.

I think the best Church meetings for me are what Master calls the >Mens Meeting=. These are wild. How these men love one another. They will joke

and tease one another until you are sure someone is going to get really mad B but they never do. Sometimes they are all laughing like mad and in a heartbeat they are totally serious and talking about how to deal with their big problems at home or at work. These guys really ride a roller coaster in their meetings from fun to prayer and back again. Often I lay there like I am asleep but trust me, I am drinking it all in. I have heard that some people don=t like Church but I can only suppose that they have never really been to Church. It is really great. Living with Master and Mistress I have had the privilege to go to Church more than most and it is truly some of the spiciest spice in my life.

A lot of the time when I am doing my front porch meditation I am thinking about >why me=. Why was I chosen to be adopted into Master=s house ? Why does Master love me and treat me so special ? Why am I given manna to eat every day of my life ? Why am I given so much assurance that Master will never leave me nor never let me leave. {I have told you about me time in prison and Master even sought me out there and came and brought me out into freedom}. Why me ? I have no answers. When I was young I often escaped out of the yard. I am a very strong willed dog and have frequently come into conflict because of that. Why me ? I think it may be a little like me and the Ocean. There are things I will never understand and just have to accept.

Master knows, that is enough.

SCAMP MOVES IN

Hello! My name is Scamp and I am happy to get acquainted with you. I am including my picture so you will not confuse me with the previous owner of this house. I am told that he has moved on to better housing, something like a mansion the way they talk around here, and probably better servants. His name was Ben and, though I never got to know him, he must have been something else the way they all talk about him around here.

I moved here from Spearfish, South Dakota and had a very nice family to take care of there but everybody figured I was needed more down here, so here I am. I am a miniature Schnauzer, a year and a half old, and have been in this new home about two weeks. Already I have learned a whole lot of things. Let me just tell you about some of the things that have been happening to me. Boy! Life is a trial sometimes, let me tell you. I have gone on a long trip to a place called Peer (Pierre) where I saw more Canadian geese than I thought existed. They were everywhere. Master and Mistress talked a lot about seeing lots of Christmas trees at the Capitol building but I didn't see any Christmas trees. I have been through Custer State Park, played around at Bismarck Lake, been to the Frisbee Golf Course, and lots of other things B but that is not what I want to tell you about.

It was a morning, much like other mornings. We all got up (except Master, he slept in as usual), I went outside and checked out the yard. Mistress is especially proud of the way I guard the feeder in the back yard. I saw some pigeons and other birds trying to steal our seeds so I chased them away. I am very good at that. I saw a squirrel sitting on the roof of the house next door just waiting to get at our things but a few loud barks sure chased him away. I made sure that no one was lurking near the tool shed and all the gates were closed. I made VERY sure that the snarly cats next door were in their place. All was well so I asked to come back inside and Mistress brought me in. I really like Mistress!! She makes me feel so comfortable and >at home=. Master is okay but, frankly, he scares me just a bit. It is not so much what he does, it is what he seems to be capable of doing. What happened on this particular day is a good example. I hope you are able to understand what I am going to tell you. It would be a lot easier for you to understand if you, yourself, had a Master who was not easy to understand and who was rather scary to you. About the middle of the morning Master called me to get into the car. Now, I had no idea where we might be going nor did I know what he had in mind. He just called and I am supposed to go. Well, I went. When I got to the car he opened the door and I waited for him to help me get in. Would you believe it? He wanted me to get in all by myself. It would take a tremendous leap for me to jump

right into that car (It is a monstrous SUV). He kept encouraging me to jump in but I just knew I couldn't get that high. Finally, he reached down and helped me get in which, of course, was just what he ought to do. So, we started down the road. What road? I have no idea, not even now. He was driving, of course, so I suppose he knew the way. I will admit that he was pretty gentle with me, petting me and scratching me while he drove, still one would like to know where one is going! After awhile Master stops the huge vehicle and opens the door for me to get out. It is not nearly so far down out of the seat as it is up to the seat so I jumped out easily. Luckily we were in a good place. In fact, it was a wonderful place. There were trees and shrubs, a slow moving stream (they call them cricks, here), and lots of squirrels, ducks, and geese. I ran around for awhile and smelled such wonderful smells as you can hardly believe. Still, I was rather miffed that I had no control over where I was going. I think that is just the way Master is, he controls just about everything. After awhile Master calls me and I ran to him. He opens the door of the Huge SUV and waits for me to jump in. Well, I just can't jump that high and yet he EXPECTS me. Finally, he helps me in. We drive some more. I notice he does not ask me where I want to go. I feel as though he doesn't trust me very much.

Finally Master stops at a big store that has the name Office Depot. He goes in and doesn't even ask me to go in with him. So I sit (and sleep a bit). Back he comes and we take off again. I admit he did scratch me a little and give me a treat but still, I feel slighted that he doesn't consult me or ask my advice. This is the way things go for hours. We drive around, he gets out, gets in, I stay. I admit it was rather fun at times but still -----.

Do you understand my point? Oh, I know he feeds me and gives me a place to live. I can even begin to see that he is training me so I will fit into the household better. Yes, I can sort of understand that, in the long run, this will help me to have a better relationship with both Master and Mistress. I also am smart enough to know that Master knows more than me and can control things that I don't even think of but still C look at it from my point of view. I would like to be in control of some things. I am not entirely stupid. What about my self esteem? If Master makes all the decisions how am I ever going to have things to be proud of? Do you see my conflict? I am not the only one either! Master and Mistress have lots of friends that come to the house and talk with them about lots of things, mostly Christian things. I hear them talk and try not to laugh at them. Thy are just like me. They too have a Master (I wonder what He looks like?). They all seem to have the same Master (how does that work?). Their Master is smarter than they are just like my Master is smarter than me. Their Master can do things they can not do, just like mine. Their Master also seems to be a Master controller, just like mine. He takes them places and they do not know where they are

going. He tells them to do things that they are very sure they can not do, then He keeps insisting that they try. Sometimes He keeps them waiting while He is busy doing other things, just like mine. They kept talking about something called >trust=. They were supposed to learn to trust. I have to think about that. How do I know I can trust him? I am pretty sure I can trust Mistress but Master, I am not so sure. I wonder, how can I learn to trust?

I discovered yesterday that Master must have realized that the huge SUV was much to high for me and lowered it somehow. I discovered this as he called me to the great huge machine and told me to get in. I am not exactly sure how this happened but I was afraid of what Master might be about to do so I jumped, and, would you believe it, I jumped right in. It wasn=t so high after all!!

Prov. 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Written by Dick Pendleton

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BEN DOESN'T UNDERSTAND

In Matt. 20:1-16 "The kingdom of heaven is like a person who owned some land. One morning, he went out very early to hire some people to work in his vineyard. 2. The man agreed to pay the workers one coin (one day=s wages) for working that day. Then he sent them into the vineyard to work. 3. About nine o'clock the man went to the marketplace and saw some other people standing there, doing nothing. 4. So he said to them, 'If you go and work in my vineyard, I will pay you what your work is worth.' 12. They said, 'Those people were hired last and worked only one hour. But you paid them the same as you paid us, who worked hard all day in the hot sun.' 13. But the man who owned the vineyard said to one of those workers, 'Friend, I am being fair to you. You agreed to work for one coin. 14. So take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same pay that I gave you. 15. I can do what I want with my own money. Are you jealous because I am good to those people?' 16. So those who have the last place now will have the first place in the future, and those who have the first place now will have the last place in the future."

As the brothers began arriving for the Brothers= Meeting,@ Ben began to get excited. AI really like these brothers= meetings. It is important for guys to get together and just be themselves on a regular basis,@ Ben thought. AI know that is why a lot of the wild dogs run in packs. We really need this kind of male bonding or whatever it is. All I know is that when we get together and talk about the real stuff of our lives I feel that there is nothing fake going on. This is real stuff with real guys. These meetings make me feel secure and like I am part of the stuff that we ought to be doing. Besides, I really like the men. They treat me like I am one of them. They don=t >talk down= to me.@ Ben settled himself on the couch between Master and Master=s son, Richard, as the meeting started. Ben didn=t follow everything that was going on; he didn=t try to. All he knew was that the >Spirit= of the meeting and the love of the men for one another were flowing like a river through the room. AI really enjoy the joking and laughter that fly back and forth here,@ Ben thought. AThese guys really do seem like brothers. They have fun and then, zing, they speak straight to each other about problems and work and then back to having fun. I feel really safe here.@ By and by the brothers started talking about a scripture that one of them (David) found interesting {part of this scripture is shown above}. Ben heard them battling ideas back and forth, talking about how each of them identified with the different workers. Several could see themselves in the first workers because they had been Christians for a long time. Others saw themselves in the last workers because they had only recently started walking closely with their Master. Ben lay still on the couch with random thoughts running through his fuzzy little doggy brain. Finally Ben confessed to himself that he just didn=t understand the story. AI guess it is just too complicated for me,@ he thought. AI can understand simple things, but these other brothers are very deep. They see much more in this story than I can.@ Indeed, the brothers were telling stories from their own lives which related to work, wages, bosses, and expectations.

One phrase began to run through Ben=s mind as the brothers= conversation became mere background noise for him. AThe Kingdom of God is like a person who owned some land.@ Ben began to think about himself and his Master. APerhaps the Kingdom of God is like my Master,@ he thought. APerhaps I am living and working in His field. That much seems clear to

me, but to go deeper is very hard for me. He decided that he just did not have a grasp of these ones called >human=. Perhaps I can relate it to ones I understand, like dogs, he thought. The Kingdom of God is like a person. I can relate to that, Ben thought. My Master is a person and he is very much in charge of my kingdom. I suppose this story then is about a person who is exactly like this Kingdom of God that Master is always seeking.

Why would anyone tell a story like this? Ben wondered. I would be ashamed to tell such a story to a group of honest and noble dogs. I know that I am only a dog, but I know a thing or two about the relationship between a Master and his good friends. That seems easy enough, although some of the silly dogs might go too fast and think that the Kingdom is like working in a field.

As dogs do sometimes, Ben's thoughts drifted. He began thinking about different kinds of dogs and different kinds of Masters. There are some who have never been invited into a Master's field, Ben thought. These are the >wild ones=. The wild dogs, well they work only for themselves. These don't like being told what to do. That would steal their freedom, or so they think. Wild dogs are really a very strange bunch. They are totally undependable and absolutely selfish. If they want to lie in the sun all day, that is just what they do. If they feel like baying at the moon or chasing raccoons or opossums up trees, then they stay out all night running around. Independence is their creed or so they say. Don't you believe it! They are not independent nor do they want to be. They want to be fed when they are hungry, want to have a warm place when they are cold. They want love, affection, and belonging most of all, just like the rest of us. There are many things they want others to provide for them WHEN THEY WANT IT. Their basic problem is that they are selfish and want to be in control. I do not want to get up on my food box about wild dogs. As you might know, they are one of my pet peeves.

There are some dogs that have bad Masters. I have heard of such things and often wonder how I could have been so fortunate. Who knows why bad Masters do things? I have seen some in action. I have heard them yelling at their animals in great anger, sometimes even kicking and beating them. Why? These bad Masters don't take the trouble to train up their dogs in the way they should go. The dogs were never taught how to live close to their Masters. Dogs are like children, you know. We need to be trained, not just taught tricks. Oh well, so much for those poor beasts with bad Masters. Who could expect very much from either the dog or the Master in those cases?

This story though, is not about wild dogs nor is it about bad Masters. That is why it is so strange. Perhaps if I just share my bewilderment with you, it will help me understand better. The story seems simple. It is about a good Master inviting others to work in the Kingdom of Heaven stuff. What an invitation! Bow Wow! Excuse me. I sort of got carried away. Can you imagine how any self respecting dog would behave if he was invited by his Master to do something with Master? This is exciting stuff. Just think with me for a minute. Left to myself, I am little more than a wild beast. I have some instincts and some intelligence. A good Master invites me into His Kingdom and whole new worlds open themselves up to me. I can live in a house, ride in a car. I can go on great journeys with Master and see a multitude of

things. I can have many friends, both human and canine. I get fed good nutritious food and when I am sick, I am cared for. There are games we can play and yes, there is work we can do. The work may be helping the blind, hunting for food, caring for small children {my primary specialty}, or being on watch for burglars. But just think, none of these things belong to the work of the animal kingdom. They are all Master=s work. We are so blessed just to be invited to be a part of what Master is doing. It is not overstating things one bit if I say that to do work for my Master is the high point of my life. There is nothing that makes me happier or more full of joy. This work requires skills which Master must give me because I do not naturally have them, and yet when I use these skills, I feel all warm and fuzzy. It is hard to explain, but if you have ever experienced it, you know what I mean.

AI am sure that there is much about this story that escapes me, but one thing I know. I know that if any humans think that they are invited into Master=s field because Master needs to get work done, then they know **NOTHING** about Master. They are invited into His field because He loves them and desires to make them fruitful and fulfilled. He desires to have them close to Himself and uses His Kingdom work to show them more about Himself. I think he wants to help them change so they can have better fellowship together. Now this is what I do not understand. Why should any dog (or human) care what Master does for others when he, himself, is being well cared for? What possible difference could that make to him. I am invited to do Kingdom stuff. Master says that He will take care of my needs for that day. Master does what He says He will do and I am content. Why should I even look at what He is doing with others? What is that to me? That is the part of this story that I don=t understand!

AOh well, I am just too simple to really understand this story. Perhaps if I were >deeper= I would find good reasons why Master=s workers would be competitive with one another, but I am just simple. All I can understand is that the Kingdom of God is like a person who is a good Master. This good Master invites people to work for Him and then he takes care of their needs for the day. It doesn=t matter what time of day you start, He takes care of your needs for the day. Still, though, that seems like quite a lot. Every day I can rest content that I have a Master who will take care of me that day. I can live content with that. I don=t have to be smart and know the >deep things=.

AI really do appreciate you letting me blow off steam like this. Sometimes human behavior is very difficult for us simple ones to understand.@