

*Lessons from my Dogs,  
Acceptance*

I recently flew to France, and will be going again in two short weeks. Flying over the fertile French countryside, I always marvel at the rows and squares of perfectly patterned and proportioned wheat or sugar beets, all planted just so or “*comme ça*,” in French parlance, whose literal meaning is “like that” but whose actual meaning signifies the proper way things should be, and have always been, done. Yet when I stand amidst a sugar beet patch, I have no awareness of its geometrical shape; the plants growing just seem beautiful, but random. And yet the pattern is there...when viewed from above. And herein lies the acceptance part: first seeing our patterns (as someone greater and wiser might see from above) then coming around to accept them as such, even when we’re in their midst and can’t see clearly.

At the wine stop where I do a couple weekly wine tastings, a friend reserved a table for a large party of ten. I therefore had to tell the folks who usually sat at that larger table to sit at a different one. To my surprise this caused not only upset (to sit at one table and not another) but also yelling with threats and accusations. I was too dumbfounded to play the role of dignified diplomat at which I’ve grown proficient over the years. I let my staff handle the outraged customer. So that when my friend arrived, I could corner her outside and say sorry, they got upset when we said they’d have to sit elsewhere.

Dear Rosie stared at me and replied, “With all that’s going on in Japan, they’re worried about... a *table*? Put me *anywhere* Kay. We don’t care. It’s just a table.” Relieved, I smiled and laughed and thanked her profusely. But she didn’t understand why. It was...just a table. Later after the tasting she told me about her mother who had lived to be close to one hundred. “And she was always happy,” Rosie (who always seems happy herself) explained to me. “Her secret? She said she just never got upset over anything small. She accepted life as it came to her. Happiness is a choice. It’s an attitude.”

Amen to that.

I love dignity and those who exhibit it under calamitous conditions. The Japanese have well exemplified this sense of calm under pressure. And not only calm, but a loving kindness toward helping each other...opposed to egocentric self interest. Accepting the situation, whatever it is, not fighting against it has much to do with dignity. For getting upset with “what is” rarely tends to change the situation and often adds more stress. One might as well act elegantly and with great dignity. In the words of Rosamond Lehmann, “Really, it should be drummed into one in youth, the importance of living so as to be able to face one’s memories when old.”

And so I turn to these wise and gentle teachers with whom I live. Most days I feel I need nothing more than their quiet presences to keep me on course. If it rains outside, they accept the gray day and stay indoors, curled up in dog balls sleeping blissfully or playing endlessly with the Kongs I fill with treats and roll out for them. If the new puppies down the street jump all over them and bite their ears on walks, they accept the mauling, recognizing this is youth and a necessary stage of growth. When I bathe them or clip toenails or brush teeth, they accept without fighting against me, perhaps intuitively knowing that to do so will prolong the task. And when I call them out of a covert, or pull them away from a succulent scent, they reluctantly come, somehow understanding the

reward is a warm bed in which to sleep and cookies from heaven...and that this life they've been given is a trade off. They may not be loose as much as they'd wish, but their needs are taken care of, their comforts granted.

Perhaps the hardest part of all for my dogs is if I must go away...but again they accept, having learned that I'll always return and our quiet lives will resume.

Accepting life as it is and not as we want it to be (if that is different from what is) may well be the greatest means to sustained happiness. As a Native American friend of mine once explained, "Kay, it's not what *we* want, but what the universe wants...for the greater good of all." To be one with life and to be at home in the world, "a citizen of the world," in Margaret Fuller's words, lays the fertile ground for quiet peace of mind. And maybe we can never see the grand plan...just as I can never see the precise boundaries of the sugar beet fields until I have that distanced perspective. But the boundaries are there, I know, and perhaps therein lies yet another lesson of acceptance. Trusting the unknown.

I love you Chance and Sasha, my friends and gentle teachers. Thanks for being the shining examples you are...day in and day out.

*Kay Pfaltz is a writer and animal activist. One hundred percent of profits from books are donated to animal welfare organizations. [www.kaypfaltz.com](http://www.kaypfaltz.com).*