

Surveying 'Da Situation



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Mickey

Not long ago I lost a very good friend. We met about 14 years ago and I can't tell you how much he touched my life. His love for me was forever unwavering. His loyalty was unquestioned. I have never had a friend like this before and I doubt I ever will again. This friend was my dog Mickey. I have had many dogs before in my life. We raised hunting dogs when I was growing up and also had the assortment of house dogs, but none of them ever touched me as much as our Mickey.

I met him on a spring day at a client's house about three hours north of where I live. It seemed a local run-of-the-mill beagle found his way inside the pen of my client's field champion Brittany spaniel who was "in season" and the next thing you know, a litter of pups arrived. My client wasn't very happy since pups from his Brittany, when properly paired, brought a good price and usually turned out to be very productive hunters, but this lot was going to be hard enough to give away. He mentioned several times during my twice-weekly visits how I surely could use a pup of my own.

Well, although I am a dog lover, I knew the lovely lady I called my wife wasn't and keeping her happy meant a lot of peace for everyone. I mentioned the new pups to her over dinner one evening in casual conversation and she gave me the "don't even think about it" look. Of course she was right. We both worked. We had enough to do to take care of our small children without adding a pup to the family. I thought about it for a while and, maybe it was my upbringing or maybe it was the fact we did have two small children, but



something told me on the next trip north I was coming home with a pup.

It was a week or so before I went back to his place. I finished my business on the project and stopped by my client's to say hello. As usual he greeted me with a handshake and a smile, but this time he pulled me close and whispered, "Those pups are old enough now to leave their Ma." I didn't know what to say. I heard the voice of my wife in the background but it went away when I looked over and saw the litter playing together in the backyard. I figured I had made her mad before and was destined to do it again, so what the heck. I watched the group play for a while and hollered out to the pups, "Hey!" Every one of those pups scattered looking for its mother – except one. This one's ear perked up and he turned toward me and ran over as fast as those pudgy little legs would allow with an odd look on his face. I knew right then and there which one was my choice. "I'll take this one." I told my

client. "Have you got a box to put him in for the ride home?" He came up with something and off we went.

About half way home, I wasn't so sure I made the right decision. The new pup had thrown up twice and ate two big holes in the side of the box. I could feel the long reach of my good wife like an icy blast of cold air on my neck. As I got closer to home, I called her at work and said, "Hi Babe. Do you love me?" She responded, "You are bringing home a dog, aren't you?" Oops, busted. I fessed up and after getting the lecture I deserved I could tell she was softening a little. She even volunteered to get some food, a kennel and, of course, a collar and leash.

Even though my bride never admitted to being a dog lover, she "kind of" bonded with Mickey and made sure he was treated right. She had some rules, though. There was to be no table food fed to the dog. He couldn't be anywhere near us when we were eating and there were certain rooms in the house he

simply was not allowed in. He also spent his nights in a kennel and couldn't even think about getting on a piece of furniture. To my surprise he learned all those rules very quickly and rarely, if ever, broke them. Of all the dogs I raised, he was by far the most intelligent. No matter what happened to me during the day or night, I knew I would come home to at least one friendly soul. Even if it was way past the time when I should have been home, Mickey always forgave me and even knew to keep his distance the next morning when I was trying to shake off the night before.

The years finally caught up with my pal and we could all see he was slipping. We took him to his favorite vet and were told he had developed a tumor. Our options were limited. We decided to keep him comfortable so he could spend his remaining time as happy as possible. He was never in pain, but before long just about any physical activity (including getting up from his bed) was too much for him. I knew the time had come and we let the kids know the only choice we had. My daughter came home from college and, along with my son, said their goodbyes.

My wife, being the rock she is, knew I would be a basket case taking Mickey for his last ride, so she insisted she would do it the next day. Later that night, she was working in the kitchen and I was in the family room where Mickey was laying in his bed. I could hear him breathing heavily and knew we were doing the right thing. I got up, went into the kitchen and grabbed a couple pieces of lunch meat and a couple pieces of cheese. As I sat back down in the family room, Mickey turned over, as he had done a thousand times before, to see what I had in my hand. As I watched him, I couldn't help myself and threw a piece of meat over to him. He couldn't believe it but it was gone in a flash. Next I tossed a piece of cheese, then the next piece of lunch meat and finally the last piece of cheese. They all disappeared. He struggled to get up, and as he walked over to me, he peered into the kitchen looking at his mistress and then to me with an odd look on his face. It reminded me of the time we first met. I rubbed him behind his ears and knew I had made the right choice almost 14 years earlier. Goodbye old friend. I hope I get to rub you under your ears again someday. And that's the situation as I survey it...