



Going to the Dogs

FOR A COUPLE of energetic dogs living in a New York City apartment, Sally Browne, our cocker spaniel, and Marty, our yellow Lab, are pretty well-mannered. But they can be a handful, and then some.

Taking advantage of the weather one spring Saturday, my wife Julee, Sally, Marty and I piled in a cab and headed up to Central Park. We were stalled in traffic when a horse pulling a carriage full of tourists stepped up and inclined its huge white head to the rear window of our cab. Marty came unstrung, howling and thrashing around the backseat. The terrified cabbie threw us out. I apologized and gave him a generous tip to make amends. He was smiling as we left him.

In the park, we took our eye off Sally just long enough for her to snatch a hot dog out of a little girl's hand. I bought the little girl another hot dog while Julee apologized to the mother. Meanwhile, the little girl gleefully fed her second hot dog to Marty. "She's always been afraid of dogs!" the mother said, laughing.

We then took the dogs to the lake near Bethesda Fountain for some swimming and fetching. That went fine until a wedding party, resplendent in white, came down the path. Naturally, Sally and Marty emerged from the murky waters to investigate the new arrivals and, of course, they had to shake out their sopping coats, splattering the bride and her maids with tiny dots of mud. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Julee's lips moving in panicky prayer. All was well, though, and Marty and Sally ended up getting their picture taken with the be-spattered bride. Somewhere, in some couple's wedding album, are two wet, grinning dogs, delighted to be part of the action.

A smiling cabbie, a slightly braver little girl and an unusual wedding photo—not such a bad afternoon at that. Maybe God was teaching us, slyly using our two gregarious pets, to hone our skills as humans.

I am grateful, Lord, when You reach into my day and train me how to handle life's stickier situations.

—Edward Grinnan



Bath Time

“COME HERE, MARTY,” I say with practiced nonchalance.

Marty, my yellow Lab, is curled up under the coffee table in a tight ball, as if to make himself as small as possible and therefore somehow less visible, if not altogether invisible. He wears a doomed expression and refuses to return my gaze. The question I can never answer is this: How does he know when I am going to give him a bath?

For some reason this dog—who will joyously propel himself into a freezing lake in the dead of winter and practically refuse to come out—profoundly dreads the prospect of a quick, lukewarm bath. Through the years, I have learned to disguise my nefarious intentions. I don’t put the towels and shampoo out where he can see them. I don’t start running the bath water. I don’t say the word bath; I don’t even spell it out to my wife Julee when she asks what I’m up to. I conduct all the necessary preparations in complete secrecy. And still, he always knows.

How, Lord?

For some reason, I’ve never gotten an answer to that prayer.

Today I get down on all fours, rub his head, look at him and say, “It’s okay, Mar-Mar. I’ll be fast.”

His liquid brown eyes look straight back at me as if to say, “Let’s get it over with.” No, not “as if.” That is what he means. A spine-tingling sense of awe comes over me. I absolutely understand what this animal is thinking!

And then Marty is up, moving slowly like a prisoner going to the gallows. By the time I get to the bathroom, he is sitting in the tub, waiting.

*Lord, maybe some day You will tell me how Marty knows
he’s getting a bath. In the meantime, thank You for the
relationships we have with our animals...and for the miracle
of communication.*

—Edward Grinnan



What's the Hurry?

REMEMBER THE CHARACTER Arte Johnson played on *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* who shuffled along taking half steps, barely making any progress? Well, that's how my cocker spaniel Sally walks these days. Which is hard for me, because I'm usually going a mile a minute, especially first thing in the morning.

"Come on, Sal," I'll say brightly, gently tugging the leash. But underneath my happy voice I'm thinking about all the things I have to do that day, places I have to be, people I have to talk to, e-mails to be sent and answered, deadlines, obligations.

Yet Sally is oblivious, sniffing every object of interest, laboriously greeting friends and strangers alike and sometimes just standing in place, taking it all in.

"Sally!" I'll say a little more emphatically, yet still in that happy voice.

Sally will look right at me, not exactly defiant, but firm, her gaze steady despite the cataracts, her mouth set with determination. I know what she's thinking: *What's the hurry?*

Easy for her to say. What's she got to do? She's retired. When she's not eating, she's either getting ready for a nap or waking up from one. All in all, she's got it pretty easy. *Life is good. So why not take your time?*

Maybe Sally has a point. Life is good, all in all. I'm passionate about my work. I love my friends and they love me, I like to think. My wife Julee's back is still a problem, but she told me the other day it's getting better, slowly but surely.

And then there's Sally, standing there on West 30th Street just staring up at me, not all that much different from when she was a puppy not much bigger than my hand, standing at practically the same spot, looking up at me and challenging me with that same question: *What's the hurry?*

Lord, I'm so blessed by everything and everyone You put in my life. Teach me to slow down and enjoy them.

—Edward Grinnan



Lost and Found

I MOVED SURREPTITIOUSLY through our apartment, trying not to make it obvious that I was looking for something. I was very casual, rearranging some pillows on the couch, moving some magazines around—no big deal.

“You lost something, didn’t you?” my wife finally said.

Reluctantly I confessed. I couldn’t find the TV remote. I hate losing stuff, especially when I know it’s probably right under my nose. And I hate admitting it because Julee gets exasperated with my so-called absentmindedness. In this case, I had been switching channels while talking on the phone and checking my e-mail.

“Take Millie out for a walk,” Julee said with a sigh. “I’ll look.”

When we returned a little later she greeted us, brandishing the remote like she wanted to hit me over the noggin with it.

“Where?”

“Bathroom.”

I hung my head, took the errant device, and mumbled a thanks.

Not a day later I came home from work to find Julee in a frenzy. The apartment looked as if a cyclone had hit it. She couldn’t find her sunglasses. “I just got them!” she cried. “The lenses cost a fortune! I’ve looked all over.”

I poked around a bit. It took me about three minutes. I unearthed them from Millie’s box by the door where we keep her leash.

“You found them!”

“Simple deduction. You walked Millie, came rushing in to do something, and absentmindedly threw them in her box.”

“Funny, isn’t it,” mused Julee. “You can always find what I’ve lost, and I can always find what you’re looking for.”

Funny indeed, Lord, that You let us find each other.

—Edward Grinnan



Faith Challenged

I'VE GAINED some experience with physical therapy after having left hip replacement surgery. The first time I'd been on the operating table was when I had my tonsils out at age six. I was in the hospital for a couple of days after saying goodbye to those tonsils. After hip surgery I was booted out the next morning, and only because it was too late to release me the night before when the anesthesia wore off.

Two days later I was walking my golden retriever, Gracie, leash in one hand, crutch in the other, gesturing for people to make way. Within a week or so, I was paired up with Dublin-born Rachel, the physical therapist who soon became an unexpectedly significant part of my life. The first thing she said to me was, "You probably think this is going to be easy, don't you?"

I lied and said no. My attitude said something else. In fact, it was easy...at first. Rachel warned me not to push myself. Within a few weeks though, she was saying, "You've got to do ten of those, Edward. That was only eight." When I muscled the last two out, Rachel said in her lovely Dublin brogue, "OK, let's do them again, this time with proper form."

But I learned the harder it got, the stronger I got. There is a faith lesson for me in that. It's easy to have faith sitting in church on Sunday. When things get hard, my faith, like an underdeveloped muscle, is challenged. Those challenges push me and make my faith stronger even through the pain.

Lord, my faith is challenged each and every day. Let me meet that challenge and grow stronger in my love for You.

—Edward Grinnan