***The Journey***

 *author unknown....

When you bring a pet into your life, you begin a
journey. A journey that will bring you more love and
devotion than you have ever known, yet will also test
your strength and courage. If you allow, the journey
will teach you many things, about life, about yourself,
and most of all, about love. You will come away changed
forever, for one soul cannot touch another without
leaving its mark.

Along the way, you will learn much about savoring
life's simple pleasures -- jumping in leaves, snoozing
in the sun, the joys of puddles, and even the
satisfaction of a good scratch behind the ears. If
you spend much time outside, you will be taught how to
truly experience every element, for no rock, leaf, or
log will go unexamined, no rustling bush will be
overlooked, and even the very air will be inhaled,
pondered, and noted as being full of valuable
information

Your pace may be slower, except when heading home to
the food dish, but you will become a better naturalist,
having been taught by an expert in the
field. Too many times we hike on automatic pilot,
our goal being to complete the trail rather than enjoy
the journey. We miss the details: the colorful
mushrooms on the rotting log, the honeycomb in the
old maple snag, the hawk feather caught on a twig.

Once we walk as a dog does, we discover a whole
new world. We stop; we browse the landscape, we kick
over leaves, peek in tree holes, look up, down, all
around. And we learn what any dog knows that nature has
created a marvelously complex world that is full of
surprises, that each cycle of the seasons bring
ever changing wonders, each day an essence all its own.

Even from indoors you will find yourself more attuned
to the world around you. You will find yourself
watching: summer insects collecting on a screen;
how bizarre they are; how many kinds there are or
noting the flick and flash of fireflies through the
dark. You will stop to observe the swirling dance
of windblown leaves, or sniff the air after a rain. It
does not matter that there is no objective in this; the
point is in the doing, in not letting life's most
important details slip by.

You will find yourself doing silly things that your
pet-less friends might not understand: spending thirty
minutes in the grocery aisle looking for the cat food
brand your feline must have, buying dog birthday
treats, or driving around the block an extra time
because your pet enjoys the ride. You will roll in the
snow, wrestle with chewie toys, bounce little rubber
balls till your eyes cross, and even run around the
house trailing your bathrobe tie with a cat in hot
pursuit, all in the name of love.

Your house will become muddier and hairier. You
will wear less dark clothing and buy more lint rollers.
You may find dog biscuits in your pocket or purse, and
feel the need to explain that an old plastic shopping
bag adorns your living room rug because your cat loves
the crinkly sound. You will learn the true measure of
love. The steadfast, undying kind that says, "It
doesn't matter where we are or what we do, or how life
treats us as long as we are together."

Respect this always. It is the most precious gift any
living soul can give another. You will not find it
often among the human race. And you will learn
humility. The look in my dog's eyes often made me
feel ashamed. Such joy and love at my presence. She saw
not some flawed human who could be cross and
stubborn, moody or rude, but only her wonderful
companion. Or maybe she saw those things and dismissed
them as mere human foibles, not worth considering, and
so chose to love me anyway.

If you pay attention and learn well, when the journey
is done, you will be not just a better person, but the
person your pet always knew you to be. The one they
were proud to call beloved friend.

I must caution you that this journey is not without
pain. Like all paths of true love, the pain is part of
loving. For as surely as the sun sets, one day your
dear animal companion will follow a trail you cannot
yet go down. And you will have to find the strength and
love to let them go.

A pet's time on earth is far too short, especially
for those that love them. We borrow them, really, just
for a while, and during these brief years they are
generous enough to give us all their love, every inch
of their spirit and heart, until one day there is
nothing left. The cat that only yesterday was a kitten
is all too soon old and frail and sleeping in the sun.
The young pup of boundless energy now wakes up stiff
and lame, the muzzle gone to gray.

Deep down we somehow always knew that this journey
would end. We knew that if we gave our hearts they
would be broken. But give them we must for it is all
they ask in return. When the time comes, and the
road curves ahead to a place we cannot see, we give one
final gift and let them run on ahead, young and
whole once more. "God speed, good friend," we say,
until our journey comes full circle and our paths cross
again.

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