***The Journey***

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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.  
  
~unknown~*