

# JOY OF LIFE

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by Joe Smerkers

I awoke early this morning about 4:30 am. I quickly concluded that I wasn't going to fall back asleep so I got out of bed, as quietly as possible. I didn't want to disturb Maggie but she woke-up anyway.

Normally she gets up first and makes breakfast. Today I was hoping she would sleep in. I told her to go back to sleep, that I was ok and that I loved her.

After getting dressed I went downstairs and started making breakfast, a couple of Eggos - frozen waffles - in the microwave. I was still trying to be very quiet, and doing a good job, so I think.

That's when I heard Freckles, our dog, banging around upstairs in his crate where he sleeps at night. He had heard me and thought that it was time for him to get up from his nighttime sleep.

I quickly went upstairs, and let him out of his crate. He eagerly came downstairs with me. Tail wagging behind.

As is the custom in our house, Freckles goes outside for a short walk when he first exits his crate. So we did today.

Peering through a few sidelights next to our back door I could see that new fresh snow had fallen during the night. Not much snow but just enough to let you know to put your boots on.

I had purchased a new pair of boots just last week. The family had gone shopping for the kids when I saw these boots. They looked really comfortable and I needed a new pair. I asked if I could try them on. Luckily they had my size.

They felt wonderful. Warm. Cozy. Friendly.

I read the tags, talked to Maggie about quality, and asked the salesperson - who by the way was not acting as a salesperson in the tradition sense - about the price. I did all these pragmatic things I suppose to appease my conscience. I knew however the reason for buying had little to do with the pragmatics. I

knew they would be a pleasure to wear. And I deserved them.

With Freckles now sitting patiently by the door I slipped on my new boots for just the third time. And Freckles and I went for our walk.

I was immediately struck by the beauty of the first snow. It seemed to add to the quiet in the air, the peacefulness, the wonder. The land - we live on an old farm - was lit today by a bright moon. We walk Freckles up and down our driveway without a leash, so he runs from side to side - over our land never too far distant from one of the family.

It's as if by giving him his freedom to run, he has in turn chosen not to venture too far. No contracts, no rewards, no obedience schools, no hollering, no voice commands. We just walk separately, together. Up and down our driveway. Each of us tied together through unspoken words. Each of us trusting that the other will not leave them. Each of us sensing when its time to return to the house. Each of us willing to follow the other, yet comfortable if we separate.

When Freckles and I returned to the house I continued making the Eggos, took some medicine, and ate. As I began to eat Freckles did so too from this bowl after he was sure that I was not going to share my breakfast with him. We are careful not to do this.

I ate. He ate. I ate. He played. I cooked. He jumped and hoped for something to fall on the floor. I cleaned-up.

We were having a great time together. Coexisting - without communications. Coexisting - enjoying life. Coexisting - each in our thoughts (Freckles?) and activities. Each not worried that the other might diminish our own personal, private experience. Each now sure that whatever was next was bound to be fun.

I had to make a choice now. Read or work in my office. I decided to read. I thought Freckles

would behave better, be calmer and quieter if I sat down and he could sit near or next to me.

I was right. I read a few pages of a new book and Freckles cuddled next to me, biting on a stuffed animal as we sat on a couch together. I read. He chewed. I read. He dropped his animal. I read and began to rub his neck. That's when I stopped reading and began to notice how calm he was. How calm I was. How much each of us was enjoying the moment.

The peace lasted but a few minutes. Freckles got up and became antsy. Shortly thereafter I heard his bark at the back door. This was his signal that it was time for his second walk of the morning.

I put on my new boots and jacket. Out we went.

It seemed warmer this time. Maybe breakfast had warmed me up. I noticed how beautiful Freckles looked - his white hair and big ears with liver spots - against the landscape of new fallen snow. I noticed how peaceful and quiet the surroundings were. I noticed the footprints my boots were making. I noticed that I was alive - and I was full of joy and wonder and excitement and hope.

For all these things I was experiencing before sunrise on a crisp November morning I gave thanks. I had awoken early this morning. No alarms. No wake-up calls. I just woke-up earlier than I had in probably 20 years. I awoke to find something special. I awoke to find the Joy of Life.

As I sit here writing, Maggie has come-down and the days realities are starting to intrude. That's ok. For that's part of life. Part of the joy of life is taking care of these realities.

Maggie and I have brought the crate down, and Freckles is now resting quietly in it. Maggie is making lunches and doing what she normally does in the kitchen. It was nice though we took a few moments to hug and say I love you. The joy that I had experienced earlier seemed to infect this moment with deeper meaning and understanding.

The kids are restless now, and that means the 'real' realities will intrude shortly, leaving little time for contemplation and erstwhile thoughts.

But that's ok too because they are part of our Joy of Life. And maybe what happened this morning will be enough to carry-me through this day of realities. Of tasks. Of things to do. Of pain. Of challenges. Of fears.

But if it is not enough - and HE wills it - there will be others days, other moments of joy. Of this I am sure. For the Joy of Life surrounds us. We need only open our hearts to experience it.

May each of you have a wonderful and joyful day.