

A Lesson in Black

Sophie has been a full member of my family for five years, and for the entirety of those five years she has been an inspiration to us all. Her laid-back nature, her uncontrollable energy, and her unfailing love has intrigued us from the start.

1. No matter who they are or where they come from, it is always okay to confront, sniff and then lick new persons. Let's skip the small talk; I'd rather find out if you had tacos and rice for dinner or steak and green beans! We can talk and talk about where you have been, what you have done or who you were with and I will never get tired. Often when with family, Sophie finds enjoyment in pestering unwilling playmates. Pushing her snout under a reluctant hand will sometimes be rewarded with a stroke across the back or two; if she's lucky, she'll get a full blown belly rub!

Though sometimes quite irritable and persistent, Sophie always has good intentions. I've found that most people do, too, though many times we don't take the opportunity to show it. Sophie's genuine interest has taught me that being outgoing is often a good thing, and that I should not be afraid to meet new people, even if they do have slobbery tongues and long, skinny tails.

2. Her bowl skims the tile, and we hear an earnest tongue lick the bowl clean, leaving nothing but an empty plate and a full tummy. After waiting a few minutes to be served, all the while carefully watching the chef scoop exactly two cups of dog food,

Sophie dives into her bowl. For two solid minutes, nothing but the sounds of gobbling, scarfing, and crunching can be heard as she gulps down the last remnants of her meal. Following that, she grabs a favorite toy and nags the nearest human to play. Running at full speed around the couch and ducking through many pairs of legs, she is thoroughly exhausted after her fun.

I don't guess it's her eating or her play that interests me the most; it's the fact that Sophie never does anything with a half heart. She enjoys every minute of it, down to the last go-round of fetch and the small crumbs left in her bowl. Sophie tells me that whatever I do, I should always enjoy myself to the fullest, with not a thread of regret left behind.

3. Another one of Sophie's secrets is that naps in the afternoon are okay. As are naps in the morning. And naps at night. Just sitting and watching the birds take wing and the flowers bloom is one of life's greatest enjoyments. A favorite sleeping spot for Sophie is the mini tramp in our backyard. Often on Sunday mornings you can find a tired puppy dog, warmed from the sun, snoozing under the porch, listening to the swaying branches and chirping sparrows.

Although Sophie is happy playing with other puppies, she still makes time for a little rest and relaxation. I know now that not only is it good to get some quiet, down time, but also to stop and smell the daisies. Or roses. Or whatever is in bloom. And don't forget to sleep! After all, what's the use of a comfy, sunken-in couch if you don't

take a good, long nap on it?

4. Though we see in her eyes that sometimes Sophie really enjoys her “alone time,” it cannot be denied that she lives for people. After spending six hours at home alone, hearing the garage door open and the keys jangling in the lock sends a jolt of adrenaline and energy through her, suddenly waking her from her slumber. At times, it seems that her sole purpose in life is to serve her family, and I think it is.

Occasionally, I find myself envying her happiness, her constant joy, and her care-free attitude; then I find myself remembering that she is just a dog, that she doesn't have the worries of semester projects, basketball games, or grade checks. But somewhere inside, I really do believe that she does have worries of her own. And, sure, they might not seem like life-and-death situations, but I'm sure they are disastrous problems to her; a chew toy gone missing might just bring the world to an end. Fact is, our itty bitty problems get blown up into massive emergencies, and we choose to worry our little heads sick over everything. But Sophie chooses not to worry, not to let life get her down, and not to let her problems take over her life. And simple though this concept may be, I think I've just begun to grasp it.

In spite of five years of sharp teeth, accidents in the kitchen, and wet, spotted tongues, Sophie has secured a special place in the hearts of my family. In her awkward puppy stages, we'd often see from the corner of our eyes a sleek, black tail whack a glass of tea or lemonade off the coffee table and onto the floor, but as she grew we watched her take her take her first steps down into the creek.

Over time, I gradually

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came to see how the simplest joys and breath taking moments are not to be wasted.

For years, Sophie has continually pushed the unimportant things away to make room for the important things. No matter what life gives you, the good and the bad, just take what you need and run with it. And I mean literally 'run with it'! Why sit worrying about some paper to write when you could be playing a game of fetch?