

## Life and puppy poop.

This past Christmas our three sons, (with blessings from Colleen), instigated and successfully carried out a plan to obtain a source of insanity into our life, which was already on the edge of perpetual motion. They decided to surprise me with a new Jack Russell Terrier puppy.

Now if any of you are familiar with breeds of dogs, the Jack Russell is a high maintenance, energetic, attention loving, schizophrenic, constant motion type of critter. Very loving, but VERY BUSY!!!

We had a Jack Russell for five years prior, but the combination of extreme heat and the thrill of chasing squirrels brought her to a premature end this past summer. With her death, a new routine set in and several things changed as we no longer had a dog to worry about if we wanted to go somewhere. We also did not have our constant companion on walks in the hills, on fishing attempts on the pontoon, on movie watching with popcorn at home. Nor did we have our fearless protector from deer, chipmunks, pocket gophers, squirrels, raccoons and an occasional rat. Life did go on without her, but it was different.

Our new puppy, whom we collectively decided to name Maggie (Maddog Maggie Mae to be exact), was seven weeks old upon her arrival at the Musgrave house and she proceeded to claim the entire house, and all the hearts in it, as hers. Our 3.8-pound ball of energy had taken the center ring of attention and proceeded to bite, poop and pee her way into the family.

Life since Maggie's entrance has taken on a new twist. Our busy lives still are busy, we have work schedules, meetings, parish involvement and free time to squeeze into the daily agenda, and above and beyond this we have Maggie to tend to and enjoy. Just getting dressed in the morning is a new challenge with her tugging at the sock that I am trying desperately to put on. Working on or with anything that is up to 18" off the floor is basically impossible because Maggie is for sure to have her face in my face and nipping on ears is not out of the question, and that goes for both of us!

One of the biggest struggles is with trying to train a hairy little package of movement that the proper place to relieve oneself is NOT just anywhere you want! The natural instinct is that if something is inside and needs to come out, then get rid of it wherever and whenever you want. Unfortunately this does not bode well for living conditions within confined spaces such as a house, sooooooo, someone has to short circuit nature and relearn what is proper etiquette and what is just totally disgusting. Hopefully this lesson will be a short course and graduation will come soon. While graduation plans are being dreamed about, we live in the here and now, and here and now is a constant alertness to what position is the puppy in and what does her body language tell you is in the mind of a now 5-pound walking/running poop factory. Training is not training at all. It is basically timing, timing how long it takes to turn a crunchy handful of puppy chow into a neat package of metamorphosis end products.

Ok, why am I going on about such a crappy subject, (sorry for the pun, I just couldn't pass it up), well there actually is a point in all of this, somewhere.

I look at life the same way as I look at a new puppy. It can be surprising, exciting, energetic, playful, loving, amusing, vibrant, rollicking and just down right a lot of fun. It can also be frustrating, restraining, bothersome, consuming, worrisome, annoying and downright crappy (there's that word again!). The question is, is it all worth it?? Would it be easier not to take the challenge of the commitment of loving responsibilities in our lives? Then all we would have to worry about are ourselves and life would be just a nice little package. I wonder.

God gave us such a beautiful gift when we received the gift of Life. Life comes with its challenges, its puppy poop so to speak. It is when we learn how to deal with and manage the messy stuff in our lives that we can really enjoy it. Sometimes we need to change the way we do things, or our attitude about how things are, or change our focus on what is really important.

Opening ourselves up to loving others AND ourselves is what makes life what God meant it to be, even with the puppy poop!

+peace - tom