

## CONVERSATIONS WITH TWO DOGS AND A CAT

The larger of the two Labradors sat down about 10 yards from me, dropped the Frisbee and placed his paw on it, as he was likely to do about every three trips to chase it down. He stood and barked at me while his sister ran back to me as she always did. Beaver and Minx (named after a couple of woodsy fur-bearing creatures from the Northwest) were doing their best to get their human (me) to play their game. Whenever she managed to catch it she would obediently bring it back to my feet in anticipation of the next chance to chase it, but he never seemed to like the idea of bringing it all the way back to me. I think he somehow had the idea that I couldn't hold on to it and he had to run it down and capture it every time I lost it. Every day we had a battle of wills over who was going to break down in these standoffs. I refused to move, insisting that he bring this errant toy back to my hand, while he barked at me defiantly, insisting I play his game if he were to play mine. His sister just stood beside me and barked with her normal high-pitched yelp, also wanting to know why I wouldn't play the game. They both seemed convinced I was an idiot who just didn't understand the rules of their simple game, but they were going to do their best to teach me, even if I didn't understand their language.

While all of this was going on, the cat, who months earlier had showed up at the door one day and decided to adopt me as her staff person-in-waiting, sat on the hillside and observed this game. From her perspective it was pointless to chase something that would otherwise just lie there lifelessly. If it didn't squirm and struggle it wasn't worth pursuing. Besides, when all of this was over for the day she could again make her inspection of the grounds and then retire to her spot by the warm fire of the pot bellied stove in the workshop. To her, this frenzy of activity chasing a plastic toy was just an interruption in the pursuit of leisure. For the time being, though, she was the self-appointed observer, making sure that the rules of these games weren't breached, and that proper time limits were maintained. Once these two black bounding monsters were tired and thirsty they would go back in the big yard and she would be free from their interruptions for the remainder of the day.

It crossed my mind that there might be a lesson for me in this. Each day I had to take time from whatever I was doing in order to take the dogs out for their expected romp in the woods. Dogs watch clocks more closely than most humans. They know when it's 3:30 PM, and they wait expectantly for their daily adventure and games with the human they're training. Although I struggled with the concept of who was training whom, I considered the possibility that it was sometimes I who wasn't getting the point, and that I might be a little more observant of what was going on at the moment. While most of my daily activities seem to involve organizing and scheduling my various tasks and anxiety drivers, these three creatures were completely free of those burdens, looking forward to their daily time of unbound joy and leisure. When they were in their moment they thoroughly enjoyed it, not worrying at all for anything else.

A little allegory is essential for growth and learning, and as most allegory goes, it is generally limited in its scope and timeliness. If you don't get the point soon, you will probably never get it. Also, the point made may apply only to a limited number of people, and maybe just you. So if a meaningful allegorical moment appears in your life pay attention to it now and don't expect everyone else to get the same point. So as this little story works for me, and has a lesson for me, perhaps there are these moments in all of our lives which have great meaning to us, but we just breeze by without even noticing. And, for me, that is a big part of the lesson: notice and appreciate the moment. Once it has passed it will be forgotten, along with the joy

and leisure that it might have provided.

Actually, it appears to me that there's much to be learned from those elements in our lives that don't communicate by ordinary means, or at least by means we're not accustomed to. And in my case, being isolated to some degree, I've become inclined over time to listen to other, more subtle voices, both from within and without. Out in the country one glaring difference is the absence of the noises and sounds of the metropolis (big city). I can best describe it as a "loud silence," troubling at first, yet serene with time. At first I tried to fill the void with my own voice, as if the silence needed filling. Those of you who know me will have no problem picturing this. But in time I began to listen to the "quiet," and at how pleasant it was.

Considering all the "quiet" it ultimately took for Elijah to hear the voice of God, it struck me that this might not be a bad thing after all. We all talk about "quiet time" or devotional time, but even as we're taught to set these times aside they become just another task in our daily list. We're even taught to organize our "quiet time" in order to get as much out of it as possible. I don't know about you, but this seems a little contradictory to me. Check out the following story of Elijah's encounter with God:

*. . . The voice of God came to Elijah, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" To which he answered, "I have been laboring day and night for you trying to get the truth out to this people of yours, the sons of Israel, who don't obey your rules, who have torn down your altars and killed all your spokesmen. I am the last one left and they want to kill me also." So God replied and told him to go to the mountain (Horeb) and wait for Him. So Elijah waited in the safety of a cave as the power of the presence of the Lord passed, bringing an incredible wind that tore rocks loose from the mountain, followed by an earthquake, and then a fire. But the Lord was in none of these. Instead, there finally came a gentle breeze, as quiet as a sigh, coaxing Elijah from the cave. And when he came out the Lord finally spoke to him. (I Kings 19:10-13, Para.)*

I cannot begin to tell you how to go about having these moments with God. It seems that God did much more than Elijah in bringing about his "moment." But perhaps God is, in each of our lives, constantly setting up these opportunities for encounter, and it is we, in pursuit of completing of lists of tasks, that miss them. What does it take to hear that "loud silence" in your daily life where God is waiting for you? I can only speak for myself here, I'm sure that I've missed most of them. I hope, though, that I can remember to lay aside my lists and my tasks long enough each day to listen to the silence, in case God has a word or two for me. May the winds, earthquakes, and fires of our lives tell us that the voice of the Almighty, the God of eternity, is about to speak to us.

**Be Blessed, Bill Z**