

Two sisters



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By Nate Smelle

LOVE of a companion animal is truly something special. When I first moved to L'Amable back in 2006 I had yet to learn how strong this type of connection could be; or, how without the day-to-day distractions that come with human interaction your fuzzy, scaly, or feathery friend and you have the potential to form a bond deeper than any words can express.

Hiking the land that would soon become my home, assessing whether it was a place for me, I sat down underneath a large cedar tree to take in my surroundings and the peace of the forest. Deciphering the collage of bird calls coming from the treetops above, I fell into somewhat of a trance ? a state I still often find myself succumbing to when I allow myself the time to submerge myself in such moments of bliss. Resting with my back against the twine-textured bark of the tree on which I leaned, I could hear the sound of several footsteps crashing frantically through the underbrush towards me. Unaware of the inhabitants of this relatively foreign forest ecosystem that I was visiting for the first time, I braced myself in preparation for whatever ferocious beasts were trampling my way. Picking up the biggest twig I could find, I tightened my grip on the handle of my less than deadly weapon and readied to take a swing at the first pack of hungry wolves or rabid wild turkeys stomping towards me. Suddenly I felt the sensation of a cold wet tongue licking my face. Turning slowly towards the jaws or beak that I assumed were about to rip me limb from limb, instead of finding a ravenous fiend in search of a feast, there I was staring back at two faces that I would come to know as friends. The origin of the sound that I had believed to be my impending doom, turned out to be a pair of border collies, sisters named Patches and Abigail that lived with my soon-to-be neighbour around the corner. Both dogs had shaggy white fur with black spots scattered from head to tail. As they gently wrestled with one another to get up close and say hello, I noticed that they each had black patches on the opposite sides of their faces. I also recognized that when they put their heads together they created the appearance of a Yin-Yang symbol. As I got to know them better in the years to come, I realized that each of their personalities reflected the different attributes of this symbol.

Despite the instantaneous bond we shared, it wasn't until after my own furry friends Pal and Dudley moved in that I really got to know these new neighbours of mine. Almost every day for the next seven years the five of us would hike up into the hills or along the Heritage Trail to see what we can see, smell what we could smell and hear what we could hear. Watching them as they explored the fields, forests and wetlands where we roamed, I could see how much they enjoyed each other's company. It was also on these adventures that I realized how happy I was being in their presence.

When cancer took Dudley in the spring of 2012 and then Pal in October of 2013, I began to appreciate how much I cherished my friendship with these two sisters. As I threw the last shovels of soil over my two best friends, it was Patches and Abigail who showed up first on both occasions to offer their affection and condolences. Up until two years ago, these inseparable sisters would pay me a visit at least once a day, stopping by for a belly scratch and a snack. Sadly, these visits have become less frequent with the onset of their old age. Not having seen either of them since the end of May, I feared the worst.

Running into my neighbour at the grocery store last week I learned that Patches had passed on and that Abigail was having a rough go since her sister moved on.

Returning to the spot where I first made their acquaintance, I recalled the warm welcome to the neighbourhood they had given me back in 2006. Listening to the same bird songs that had entered my ears years earlier while leaning against the same cedar tree, I thought of the last time Patches dropped by and how she turned around twice after leaving to come back for a couple more treats and a rub behind the ears. Although these days of making memories have come to an end, the joy these four friends of mine brought into my life will stay with me for at least as long as I'm breathing.