



**A Personal Note from Single Steps Strategies Founder
Mary Grace Musuneggi**

...And Other Living Things

With the current state of the financial world, people often ask me if there are segments of the economy that are still doing well. Seems that one area that continues to prosper is pets and pet supplies. No matter what happens in our world we still love those little creatures that add unconditional love to our lives. But with that in mind, I wanted to share with you an article I wrote a few years ago as a reminder of that special love, but also as a call to remember how we need to care, now more than ever, for all the other living things in our lives.

I Love My Dog...And Other Living Things

I love my dog. I know this, because I am one of those millions of Americans who have made going to the pet store a momentous event. I take my dog along...of course. I buy gourmet doggy biscuits, and the best in collars and accessories. My beagle, Duncan, has ceramic feeding dishes and a wagon filled with toys. He has a sweater for when it is chilly, and a coat for when it snows.

And although I am a little over the edge when it comes to Duncan, I know that as much as I love him, I love others more...my family, my significant other, my friends. However, I have had "paws" to wonder if there are some people whose sole love relationship exists between them and their pets.

On a trip to PETCO, Duncan and I were followed into the store by a very large man in his late 50's. He was carrying a small terrier. In a quiet voice he whispered; "Daddy loves his little baby. And because you are a good puppy, we are going into the store to buy you dog food and a toy. Would you like a new ball? Yes, you would. And when we get home, we will play and play."

As hysterically funny as I thought this was, I dared not to laugh, as how many times have I been guilty of having that same kind of conversation with Duncan? But I couldn't help but wonder if this same man had little talks like that with his kids, his wife, or other humans in his life.

Then, because life has a way of teaching us through mere contrast of events; the next day I found myself walking into Giant Eagle, followed again by a rather large, but younger man. This one had a very fidgety, pouty-looking 5 year old boy in tow. And the dad's conversation went something like this, "I am telling you right now, don't ask for a thing. I just have to pick up a couple things; and then we are out of here. Your mother always does this to me. When I am tired and on my way home she thinks of something for me to do that she could have done herself. All I want to do is get in and out of here. Do you understand me?"

Of course it was not necessary for the little boy to answer him. It was obvious that he understood very well.

So I wondered if this man had a dog. And what kind of conversations he had with his dog when he went to PETCO? And did he talk like this to his wife or other humans he knows. And I wondered if the conversation that the man at the PETCO store had with his dog, had been the one the father had with his son, how differently the little boy may have reacted. “Come on, son, we need to get a few things in the store. And because you are such a good boy, how about while we are here, we find something you would like, too. And, although I am tired from working today, I missed you; and when we get home maybe we can play ball for a little while after dinner. I love you, son, and I am glad we can spend this little bit of time together.”

But why do we go to these extremes for our dogs? Maybe it is because they love us unconditionally. Maybe because when we walk in the door, they jump up and down, wag their tails and treat us as though life was not worth living while we were away; even if that was 5 minutes or 5 hours.

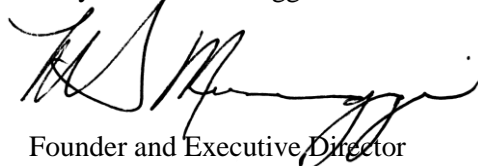
They don't care less for us if we are tired, or having a bad hair day. They are ready to play when we want to play; and they will come to our defense against anything they perceive to be a threat. They instinctively know when we are sad; and they respond to the mere sound of our voice. Who else in our lives does all of this, all the time?

But maybe that's because we don't tell the humans in our lives all those little things we tell our pets? Should we say more often, “Daddy loves you and we are going to play and play”? Should we run to the door when our spouse walks in after 5 minutes or 5 hours? Should we defend our friends against anything we perceive to be a threat in their lives? And should we approach each person we meet with the love and affection we show our dogs?

I love my dog...and I have told him that and showed him that today. I must remember today to do the same for all the other living things in my life. And maybe in return they will do the same for me.

And all of life's journeys begin with a single step.

Mary Grace Musuneggi

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Grace Musuneggi', written in a cursive style.

Founder and Executive Director

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