



# DAISY: WALKING ON WATER

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## **Amazing Meeting in the Pre-Dawn Darkness**

Winter set in early that year. The night temperatures dropped well below lethargic refrigeration level and already had produced a series of hard freezes. The most depressing part of the transgression was that it was only early November. A brief and incompetent fall had given up the fight and had bowed to the relentless offensive of disciplined winter. As is not uncommon for still distant January in Central Desert New Mexico, the skies clouded over daily. This opaque armor thwarted any attempt that may have been made by the pale, diminished, indirect sun. Displaying its most spiteful proclivity, the murky firmament cleared every night, and provided no shelter from the frigid night armies of the silent cosmos. Any petty, ground level zephyr became capable of a tedious but sure killing. A miracle believing optimist would have said that this might have portended an early spring. I could have used some convincing.

I was still going about my early morning routine, though the one who had prompted it died six months prior. At the age of twelve and one half, Willy, my feisty, black and tan, full sized Dachshund finally found something capable of beating him; cancer. I had spent more than half his life right next to him and had difficulty thinking of another dog. When considering it, I would always eventually come to the word "replacement," and

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then quickly decide that there was no replacement for the little guy who would have defended me to the death against anything. Willy and I always took our main walk early, often before sunrise, as it was best to be on our path before a potential predator crossed it. I am certain that was what he thought of the enormous humans with large dogs who often came our way during "normal" walking hours. His response was to give a short warning and growl. He would then show his many sharp teeth. If the nemesis persisted, he was well prepared to draw first blood in defending us.

On this dark, cold, and fateful New Mexico morning I had already eaten, showered and dressed and was bringing out the trash, intending to have a smoke before coming back for the departed Willy, just like I had been doing for more than a decade. Through the discredited art of magic, I knew that if I followed the well-practiced precise routine, he, in turn, would perform his magical ritual, and be waiting for me when I got back inside.

I opened the back door, took two steps and froze in terror. A huge black and white dog ran full tilt at me. I thought of Willy, the only dog I ever had. If he ran at someone the next step would be to bite them. Before I could run, the lanky she stopped at my side and licked my bare trash hand. I knelt down to pet her and she licked my face passionately. This was the

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big, expressive brown eyed Dalmatian, who would come to be known as Daisy. Despite the frigidity of the morning, her thick coat was as soft as that of an un-sheared lamb. Her white seemed to glow brighter than anything else in the dim obscurity of the early coming of winter. Though I had no idea at the time, I had taken my first step into the best years of my life.

She was hungry, but seemed oblivious to the cold. I held up one finger as if to say; "Just one minute," a signal she would quickly come to understand. I dumped the garbage and went back inside to look for dog food. I didn't have any. I had forgotten that what I had left of Willy's was donated to a rescue facility months prior.

As I searched, I saw Daisy through the kitchen window. She was looking up at me as if to say; "Minute's up." Her upturned head, as well as her lean body, rested on four disproportionately long and restless paws. She weighed about twenty-five pounds at this stage, which was less than the twenty-nine Willy had packed onto his dachshund frame. I made a quick decision. I did have some canned cat food, usually reserved for Drew, Teddy, Lucy and Little Girl. I put the contents of a can on a plate and brought it to her. She finished it in no more than a second and looked at me, as if to say; "This can't be all there is." This process went on three or four times before she threw the whole thing up.

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I thought; "Oh my God. I hope I didn't make her sick."

She seemed okay and continued to act as if she was looking for additional servings, or more likely, looking for something different. I again asked her to wait a minute and drove to a nearby convenience store. All the way I kept thinking; "I hope I didn't poison her," and drove like a demon, anxious to get back and see her still alive.

When I returned, she was very alive and I was very relieved. She was also very anxious to see me with dog food. She never told me, but I've sometimes thought that she was insulted by the first feeding. She may have thought; "Do I look like a cat to you? Good lord. I am deeply offended. .... But, I'm also deeply hungry." She ate the contents of four of the tall dog food cans and looked up for number five, her long legs dancing to a tune only she heard. As happy as I was that she seemed hungry and energetic, I thought it best to stop at four. Besides, I had only purchased six. I worried if she would still like me. That fear quickly subsided. I bent down to give her a big cuddle and she licked my face as my arms circled her chest. The sun had been making its long awaited entrance over the Sangre de Cristos for the past few minutes and I felt the warmth. In the absence of clouds and wind, a winter day in Corrales, New Mexico can start out at an intolerable twenty

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degrees and reach a comfortable fifty-five. It looked like it was going to be one of those good ones.

She started to jump around me, wanting to play. At age 54, I had no illusions about being able to keep up with her. When Willy died I made a plaque in his honor, saying among other things that; "We grew old together." One of us ran around and the other ambled. Daisy looked at me, seeming to strongly indicate; "Do something already!" So I looked for something to throw, which would allow her to do the bulk of the exercise. I got an early glimpse of her intelligence as she quickly figured out that game. I threw a heavy rope pull toy I had in the garage. As tradition would suggest, she went, got it, and brought it back to me a few times, however, rather than dropping it at my feet, she required me to pull it away from her. She held so tightly I lifted her off the ground. The third or fourth throw produced a different result. She went and got it, enclosed it in her mouth, but waited at the point of retrieval. She looked at me as if to say; "I'm not doing **all** the hard work. Where I come from, this is considered a participatory sport."

I thought that her approach was eminently fair minded. As smart as Daisy was, she was also very young; and thereby had no conception of the frailties and limitations produced by a long life. I had always found exercise to be somewhere near the height of sweaty boredom. After I had retired from pick-up,

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relic basketball three years prior, the closest thing to running I had done was a quick two step in an occasionally successful effort to beat someone with a cart full of groceries to the checkout line.

As I was already falling in love with this rambunctious female, I figured that I could still withstand a short burst of adrenalin inspired locomotion. I ran at her and reached for the rope. She easily ran around me. I repeated the process, but whenever I got close she would again zigzag away. Though I had entertained no illusions about my ability to catch a five month old Dalmatian, I tried to act as if I had a chance, often falling to the ground in a last second desperate move to tackle her. I did manage to fleetingly get a temporary hold on her back leg once or twice. After a while I just sat on the ground, winded by my geriatric efforts. Daisy curiously looked at me a few seconds, then came over and dropped the rope near me. I put an arm around her and held her close, again feeling her soft coat, and happily being the recipient of scores of Daisy licks. This dynamic was to become a pattern with us. I guess that she thought; "At least he tried." When my breath returned I threw the rope and we started all over. At 25 pounds and all legs, she absolutely loved to run. However, Daisy had an even greater desire; and that was to do it with a loving companion.

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When I went back inside the house, desperate for some sort of invigorating breakfast, my wife, Diane, was going through the routines people customarily perform just before leaving for work. As I searched the freezer for some semblance of nourishment, unsuccessfully willing to settle for a frozen "Mama Bessie's Scrambled Eggs with Sautéed Potatoes" with gourmet taste and no preservatives added, and only six calories; I told her that the wildest thing had just happened.

In a hurried cadence, endemic to those cursed with the bleak prospect of soon having to smile and be sickeningly courteous to overly sensitive co-workers, clients and bosses, she said in a weekday prompted monotone; "I know. I brought her home last night."

"You should have told me. I went out the door in the dark, and the next thing I knew a dog was running right at me."

"She's sweet."

"I know that **now**."

Diane made a short snorting laugh and said; "She was roaming around in Las Lunas and showed up at my office. Everybody liked her so much that we kept her in my workplace for a month trying to find where she belonged; or barring that, a new owner. We couldn't do either, and the boss said that we couldn't keep her there forever. So I brought her here late last night."

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In later years Diane told me that she knew that I'd fall in love with Daisy and that it was obvious that I was completely incompetent at finding another dog. Willy was my first and I never could get over the thought that he would find me disloyal if I got re-entangled. But now, since I really had no choice in the matter ..... I guessed that it was unavoidable and unequivocally for the best. For fortification, insofar as internet begotten information was the least bit accurate, I found the comforting support, when I researched Dalmatians and found that they were difficult adoptees. The reasons cited suggested that twenty-first century tastes had moved toward a preference for wind-up dogs, who moved only when wound, for a slow, at-the-master's-side walk, and in lieu of that blessing, remained stationary all other times, urinating and defecating only when well ensconced in an area suitable for such activities; like a cat box.

At Diane's office, they must have had a name for the little ball of energy and affection, but I don't remember what it was. I do remember that Diane suggested naming her "Spot," which I immediately rejected. Sometime during the first week of her attainment of a forever home, I insisted on naming her Daisy. I had two reasons. First, it seemed to me that we were in a time of people using unusual modern names, like Pastiche or Brittany, as in Spaniel. In this, as in all areas, I wanted to go against

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the flow which was I thought contributed to the 2003 malaise, which I interpreted as requiring devilish and stoical nothingness for survival. I wanted to use something from a kinder and gentler, former time; old fashioned and dreadfully out of style. I wanted to re-ignite a thought abhorrent to a right wing, 1960's revisionist. Secondly, in the face of possibly philosophically flawed considerations, she was in simplicity, a truly wild flower. On the most personal level I could muster after three decades earlier having attempted to resist the brainwashing of an MBA program, whose dictum was that all information was biased, I simply thought that I had picked a wild Daisy or perhaps that she picked me. Time would prove me undoubtedly correct in my thinking about reason number two, but shortly after I started walking her in the neighborhood, I discovered that there were two other canine Daisies living within 500 feet of us.

At the time I wasn't certain of how well her thick, soft and gorgeous coat could withstand cold. I probably cared about her too much to leave anything unsure unconsidered. The day was warming up, but it was still morning. I thought that the outdoors was fine for me if I kept in motion, but I still felt chilly when standing still. I didn't want to compel her to keep moving. Even with her energy level, I reasoned that there must be times when she needed to rest. I also wanted to bring her

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inside just because I liked having her around. I put some more food in one dish and water in another and put them in the TV room, whose main attraction was two futons. It was from these run-of-the-mill, cost efficient vantage points that Willy and I had spent his last years. I brought Daisy into the former domain of the warrior and shut the door; as we had cats and I wanted to be on the safe side. I saw that Daisy was still ravenous and I left her in the heated room. I went back outside and did whatever routine it was that I did at that time of day in 2003.

I came back in an hour or so to check on Daisy. She was fine and rather than resting, she was busy at work pulling the last of the fluff out of a futon mattress. She looked up at me with an expression that conveyed not one bit of guilt. I imagined her saying; "I know it's in here somewhere. I almost have it. Give me a few more minutes."

Daisy was soon returned to the backyard. She didn't seem to mind or think of it as a punishment. She soon was chasing birds from her property and I was attempting to stuff fluff back in the futons. Daisy had more success with her project than I did with mine.

I went outside intending to have a serious talk with her. As I walked the fenced perimeter, with her following, I told her that destructive behavior was not acceptable and that under those circumstances she would have to stay outside, at least

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temporarily, until adjustments could be made. She gleaned the seriousness of my conversation and showed that by nipping at my hands; her signal for me to get and throw the rope pull toy.

I thought of another possible place for Daisy the Dogged Destruction Devil. There was a triangular room at the back of the house which was attached to the main adobe structure, but had no access to anything other than the garage. It contained a water storage tank, a water softener and had some heat. On a cold day it would peak at about 50 degrees. But, if I left the door partially open for Daisy's entrance and exit that number would dive. I didn't know how much, but in the case of my new puppy, I didn't have a huge tolerance for error. While I agonized to find a suitable solution, Daisy showed her concern by again nipping at my fingers.

I deferred to her lack of worry; got the rope and threw it, chased her, and wrestled with her to get it back. We played for a carefree hour. She darted like a young OJ Simpson while I made unsuccessful last minute lunges at her with all the agility of a portly, outclassed, high school offensive lineman.

In the very near future, either I became more adept at catching her or she purposely slowed down to give me a chance. I strongly suspect the latter. In our game, when I caught her, I was then required to pull the rope from her un-cooperative mouth and simultaneously wrestle her to keep her from making a break

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for it. On one such occasion Daisy let out a yelp and dropped the rope. She looked at me as if to say; "That's not fun. That hurt!" I immediately recalled my Dalmatian research which told me that this breed did not tolerate any kind of physical abuse and was quick to strike back. I gazed into her brown eyes and thought; "Uh oh." But, rather than attacking, she flouted the American Kennel Club's wisdom and ran full speed around the perimeter of the back yard; did it again, and came back to resume play. I thought she was great and that under no circumstances would I ever risk injuring her. I threw the rope and each time she allowed me to catch her I held on very softly and pulled weakly. After a few easy breakaways from her halfhearted playmate she again looked right at me, this time with seeming disgust. She exhibited a posture which said; "Oh, come on now. Keep it interesting." We resumed our rougher play and I would always strive to find the right balance to make the game exciting, yet safe. Sometimes when my arms tired and Daisy still possessed tons of energy, I sort of played a trick on her. I would hold her between my legs and she would fruitlessly squirm and writhe until she was tired.

We went back in and we both occupied the TV room on a futon which had lumps begging for a dermatologist. Daisy quickly got an MD and started a procedure.

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I said; "Uh oh. .... Stop it!" She looked at me a second and went back to work. She and I were soon in the backyard. I recalled that the triangular room had an oversized pillow, once the never used property of Willy.

I couldn't see any real difference between this pillow and the futons. I expected that she would rip it apart. But, for right now it was the best thing I could imagine to buy time to hopefully come up with an inside alternative.

Off and on we ate and played in the backyard the rest of the day. When I had to leave her in the evening, I hoped she would choose to stay and to a lesser degree that she wouldn't destroy her pillow.

I didn't sleep well that night, worried that she would be gone in the morning. A little before sunrise I went directly outside with a plate of dog food and she came running out of the triangular room. I was relieved and my blood pressure might have returned to normal. As she ate, I peered into the triangular room and was surprised to see that the pillow was still a pillow.

A bit later I came out to play and Daisy showed her usual eagerness. I would come to know that she was always ready. I threw and she chased the rope and we did some wrestling. I

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