

ONE LOSS

Inspired by a True Story



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As you mull over the exciting prospect of a long and extended break rather than all the words and numbers scattered in the many textbooks around, it is worth contemplating what the term 'break' or 'holiday' actually means. Is it a time of continuous captivating fun with friends, a long time coming trip overseas to visit long forgotten family and friends, or simply the dull of having to find a summer job to pass the time? According to most common dictionaries, a 'holiday' can be defined as leisure time away from work devoted to rest or pleasure and of the three scenarios above, only the first seems to bear any slight resemblance to pleasure. I mean, how much actual fun can be achieved through spending a whole summer with your continuously nagging grandmother? Certainly, pleasure will be achieved in one way or the other during the break but how much fun is actually gained remains the major concern. It is all very easy to have a break at the end of a hard year but often, the most difficult aspect to achieve is to make it 'great' and to live up to the commonly uttered phrase - 'have a great holiday'. Wise souls well before our years have suggested making the break 'memorable' and 'unforgettable' but my following experience lays onslaught to the above theory very much. My story is truly memorable, not only in terms of something that will be engraved in my mind forever, but also regarding an experience that has altered my view on life and mankind. However, the truth about whether it's good or even 'great' is very questionable with certain aspects of it definitely up for discussion.

The morning of the 25th of November 2014 brought our family's short trip around the South Island to Milford Sound. Described as one of the most beautiful places on Earth including the iconic Mitre Peak that rises more than a kilometre out of the sea, it was a trip that was being looked much forward to and expectedly, didn't fail to meet our anticipations, with the photo limit on my iPhone reached much faster than expected. As we cruised back on the courtesy coach to our motel, the prospect of a lazy afternoon on the couch with our playful dog awaited. Alas, this wasn't to be as we were met instantly by the motel owner with a bemused and puzzling look on his face as soon as we arrived. He glanced up at us and exclaimed in a seemingly joking voice – "Your dog has done a runner, we couldn't catch him as he bolted out the door" after the usual banter and greetings. Jokes are well tolerated in this part of New Zealand, and knowing the etiquette around here, we followed the owner with startled and bewildered faces to our room, pondering over the trick he had up his sleeve for us. There was none though. He was saying the truth. To him, this was no big deal. A guest's dog has run away, it'll find its way back sooner or later. If not, too bad – it's just a bloody dog. This was probably why our flabbergasted expression surprised him, pressuring him to start blabbering excuses about how it escaped, and how the few dribbles of rain on his shirt are cold hard evidence of him running around the City Centre like a madman trying to locate it. Unfortunately for him, this was not just any normal dog; this was a cute and friendly border collie that was and still is a treasured piece of the jigsaw in the family for the better part of 10 years.

We immediately started scouring the immediate area after the encounter, calling desperately for him but all was in vain. We never ventured far from the immediate vicinity so it was like we never actually believed our beloved dog would go missing and run away when mistakenly let out by the owner. After a few hours, the truth started to sink in as a feeling of denial drifted through our brains, the so-called first

phase that occurs when you lose something you hold very dearly to yourself. Consequently, we went out in our car and scoured a larger face area with no luck but managed to come across a man walking his own precious dog. This marked the first stage of our journey because he suggested we report this incident to the local Southland District Council. He also reassured us that our dog would turn up shortly and that we shouldn't worry too much, recounting his own experience of his lost companion. The empathetic and understanding nature of both the man and the District Council amazed me, listening carefully to our hastened version of events and offering reassuring tones that everything would work out. No-one could predict the outcome of this event, but their manner of speech was almost enough to will the dog to walk back through the front door.

Thinking about the matter more carefully as I lay on the bed back home made me further comprehend the seriousness of the situation. Our dog has never been lost for as long as I can remember and this was not a setting he was familiar with, having just stayed in Te Anau for one night previously. He was also a very charismatic dog; furry and friendly so could have been easily picked up permanently by locals and to never return. Regrettably, this trait also made this incident dangerous because his amiable wandering would have easily pushed him into dangerous traffic situations, and judging by his poor negotiation of these tasks, the thought of an accident was very realistic and forever at the forefront of our minds. As my mind wandered off into the dark valleys of sleep, the second stage of dear loss started setting in – disbelief. Isn't this just the sort of stuff that only happens in the news and not to you? Isn't this the sort of stuff you casually read about in the newspaper and just feel sorry for? How could such a thing happen to us? All the joyful memories from when he was a tiny puppy at 6 weeks till now flooded into my mind as I drowned my sorrow at nothing in particular before wandering off into the dark wilderness of sleep.

It was dreadful getting ready for the Doubtful Sound trip early the next day, but as the fully paid trip was non-refundable and non-transferable, there was really no other option. Despite the spectacular scenery and breathtaking waterfalls exhibited (including being drenched by one), my heart was only in one place; to find out whether dad (who stayed at the motel) had located our dog. Unfortunately, it wasn't to be but what did occur changed my outlook on the Te Anau community forever. Once the boss of the motel placed the news on their local Facebook page, the whole community had rallied to look for this missing creature and combined with our continued efforts of door knocking and asking whoever we could find, it was amazing that our dog persisted to elude our grasp. It was amazing to see the whole community getting behind one in need and helping out wherever possible. As a result, there were plenty of alleged sightings and mad dashes in the car to wherever we were called but all was to no avail as the dog was nowhere to be seen at any of these areas. All of a sudden, I started to wonder whether all these affirmations were really true and whether our dog was still truly alive. I began to lose faith in humanity and started to self-question myself. How could we not have found the dog by now? What if everyone who had seen him was lying? What if someone was hiding the dog and the community was just trying to cover his tracks with lame excuses? Seconds seemed like minutes and minutes seemed like hours but all

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