

"Late Eulogy To A Late Friend"

by

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I come before you this evening to right a wrong, to correct an oversight which for several years now has been an emotional burden on me, borne with more than a small amount of guilt.

Few times in a man's life will an opportunity, such as that afforded me this evening, come to fruition. I, therefore, am seizing the day or this evening, if you will, to set the record straight.

I am compelled to share with you some facts regarding the life of a past family member, one M.P. Tilley, Jr.. M.P. Tilley Jr. was a beloved and faithful relative, for whom we felt a great love and concern. This in itself is amazing, when you consider that this kinsperson moved in with us practically unannounced, had a world-class case of halitosis, and extremely poor personal hygiene habits, often embarrassed us when we had company in our home, and often did not come in until the wee hours of the morning!

But blood is infinitely thicker than water, and being the wonderful and caring family that we are, we came to accept these shortcomings over time. There are certain responsibilities that we must accept in order to keep the family intact!

M.P. Tilley Jr. passed away in 1989. The oversight is that no eulogy was ever presented, no obituary carried by the Kentucky New Era, no mention by Dink and Jim on the Early Bird Show, no church bulletin notice--only our closest friends knew.

M.P. came to live with us in 1972, when my son was 3 1/2 years old. They quickly developed a special camaraderie, one which would last until those final days in '89, and beyond. M.P. could be somewhat gruff, maybe a bit rough around the edges, often uncooperative, constantly inconsiderate of the needs of others, but somehow with a special recognition of the needs of a young pre-schooler. And that friendship would grow and prosper through the coming years, never flagging when their individual interests took on new directions, or when other pursuits occupied their time. M.P. was unique, and brought a unique impact to our family lifestyle.

But enough of this charade. I know that, by now, William Turner cannot believe that there was a person in Christian County that he did not know; he's going to ask me if he can go through M.P.'s personal belongings to see if there is anything of historical interest there. Mike Herndon wants to know why the New Era was not furnished an obituary, Curtis Brasher is wondering what bank handled M.P.'s estate, Duard Thurman is concerned about who prepared annual tax returns, Jim Love can't believe he and Dink were not at least informed of M.P.'s birthday, and Brooks Major is thinking M.P. should have been a Baptist. David Cavanah is hurt because he was not afforded the opportunity of filling M.P.'s prescriptions, and Kenneth Cayce is upset because he never saw M.P. in his store!

Gentlemen, do not despair. M.P. was not a person. M.P. was a small tan and white and brown and black pseudo-beagle whose nomadic traits brought her to our garage that fateful day

in 1972.

It took little more than a bowl of water and a few crusts of bread, offered by the small hands and warm heart of a 3 year old to cure that Snoopyesque creature of her wanderlust. The cure proved to be permanent as she remained that night, the next day, and the next, and the next, and some 6000 more before taking up residence in that great kennel in the sky.

And what would our family life have been like had she wandered into someone else's garage that day. I really can't say with any certainty. But, I can say that there was a specific enrichment afforded us, a veritable "feeding bowl" full of memories set for us and a notoriety accruing to us among our peers.

I must beg your indulgence as I reminisce briefly, and in so doing, perhaps nudge a few of your own memories from your past. As the first few days wore on, it became obvious that this dog was determined to remain a Tilley, and so the matter of a name was of the utmost importance.

Since this was to be a boy's dog, we agreed that the boy referred to should name her. During the most serious of discussions, I asked my 3 year old to think about what this brindled beagle looked like to him. "What does she look like to you, John" I asked. "A marble," replied John, without further explanation.

Now I immediately let my analytical mind take over. Well, she's not round, she's not made of glass, she doesn't roll smoothly when on an incline, you wouldn't want to carry her in

a small bag with other dogs, and I've never heard of anyone winning a Beagle shooting championship.

But on the other hand, her coat was mottled, in varying colors of tan, white, brown and black, and her legs were just slightly longer than those of a marble. Maybe John was on to something here.

"So what do you want to name her, son?" I asked, as I broke from my critical reverie. "Marbles," came the answer.

And so it was, and would be for life. The formal name was soon lengthened to Marbles P. Tilley, Jr., the "P" being inspired by her penchant for standing, at a slight angle, close to trees and fireplugs, and the Jr. part just seeming right to John even though there was no senior forebear. She would seldom be referred to by this formal name, except in situations calling for extreme scolding. Even so, I cannot count the times someone has said, "What's that dog's name, again? Marbles? Ha Ha Ha - that's such a funny name for a dog (as if it would have been a perfect name for a cat, or a snake or a manchurian gibbon. But, the die was cast, and I thank, in this case, a rose by any other name would not have smelled so sweet, at least figuratively speaking.

Marbles set up housekeeping in our garage, next to the furnace, just next to a workbench on the South wall. But no sooner than she was afforded the luxury of a visit into the big house, (at least it was big to her), she convinced herself that she was a house dog. She had no trouble convincing John that this was a reasonable desire, but she was never able to

convince Joy or me in the same manner.

Discipline was never a strong point with Marbles. This is not to say that she had none, but what she did have was strictly self-induced, with no attention paid to external attempts at behavior modification.

Despite seventeen years of forceful whacks on the rump, she never failed to make valiant efforts to enter the house simultaneously with guests, collecting paper boys, delivery men or tax assessors, or us!

She intuitively knew that John would always be her accomplice in gaining entry, and that she could more easily fly past Joy or me when we were entering with 6 bags of groceries, or three suitcases. She once got tangled in my feet, (or I in hers, since she had twice as many) as I carried a pail of paint thinner outside to clean brushes. The pail slipped from my grasp, and, landing with its base at about a 45 degree angle to the floor, emptied most of its contents rather forcefully on Marbles' Southern region. Bolting in a Northerly direction, she found a sudden need to run and sit down at the same time.

Had we been able to direct and control her route, we could have had a beautifully clean den carpet, but as it turned out, we got only a partial job out of it. The incident also inspired one of her infrequent baths, given grudgingly in order to get her front half to match her back half once again.

And, as I stated earlier, she never seemed to learn, or maybe just would not accept the fact, that she was not supposed to be a house dog. I don't think it ever dawned on her that,

had she been more adept at learning the proper latrine habits necessary for house dwelling, we might have been more receptive in embracing her as a true housemate. But, alas, she never learned.

She never learned any tricks, either, but exhibited a special expertise in the accidental creation of "stupid pet tricks."

Always the consummate beggar, she would hunt for food in the most logical of places, beside the dinner table as we were eating. She would stand on her hind legs, and emit a sound so pitiful and appealing that at least one of the three of us would be moved to offer her a morsel. At this point, she would invariably become so excited over the imminency of her goal, that she would simply fall over backward. Shaking her head to sort of clean the cobwebs, she would get up and do it again, maybe several times, until she finally reasoned that our arms could reach down to her standing head level, and that it was so much easier that way. However, the next time, it still took two or three "backwhumps" and "head clearing shakes" to remind her of her former successes.

Equally as exasperating, but humorous, was the day Marbles furtively stole two large blocks of pepper cheese from a sumptuous summer buffet set for guests on our outdoor deck. This time, she fell over backward after enjoying the pilfered repast - she was sick for two days and sneezed and wheezed for a week!! Bad dog she was, and pepper cheese joined lettuce as the only food she would not eat!

One of her most creative tricks was her impersonation of the Hollywood star at Graumann's Chinese Theater. We unknowingly set the stage for her by pouring a concrete foundation for an addition to our home. The concrete was just a bit too wet for paw prints when Marbles decided to record them for posterity.

When the carpenters found her, she was belly and nostril deep in 6 Bag mix, struggling mightily to extract herself, return to higher ground, and acknowledge an admiring public. Had it been five minutes later when they noticed, I guess the old girl would have been "set for life," by keeping a stiff upper lip, and adhering to rigid standards.

But luck was with her. Her rescue was effected, and another infrequent bath administered, along with one of those scoldings in which she was referred to as Marbles P. Tilley, Jr. She may have learned something this time, because I never saw her walk on a sidewalk again.

Another trick which, in spite of its aggravating nature, brought much joy to us was her ritual of celebration, performed faithfully each time she was able to outsmart her masters and gain entrance to the house.

Our back door leads from a covered carport, down a hallway of about 12 feet in length, then down two steps into a sunken combination den/dining room, a drop of some 16 inches. The room is about 24' x 28' with two doors at the far end leading into our living room and kitchen, respectively. As one enters the room, the first 18 feet of floor space is carpeted, and the

last 10' or so, the dining area, is in hardwood flooring. The two exit doors from the room have steps leading up to them, as the floor level of the living room and kitchen is the same as that of the back entrance.

Marbles' ritual of celebration, then, would commence immediately upon breaching our ranks at the back door. She would negotiate the hallway at breakneck speed, and, just short of the first step-down, would launch her little short-legged body into the air and soar into the den, her long, floppy ears assuming a horizontal position, extending sideways from her head. (Had she ever learned to flap her ears up and down, she could have challenged the World Record for the running broad jump. I often marveled at how aerodynamically perfect her ears must have been to provide such lift, but could never interest NASA in a funded study of same.)

Her landing technique was equally as amazing, as she would daintily touch down on her two front paws, with the rear legs stretching forward to engage the carpet for traction so as not to lose speed.

At that furious pace, she would head for the living room door, never recalling that a slick, waxed hardwood floor would replace the carpet just short of the steps leading up to that door.

Invariably, as she realized that a 90 degree left turn was required to make the living room, she would hit the slick floor, and the definition of "inertia," the tendency of a body in motion to remain in motion, would become painfully apparent.

As she scrambled to counter-steer from the resulting skid, she would bounce off the wall, rebound up to the first step level, everytime, and make one awkward lunge up to carpet level in the living room.

As she brought herself back up to speed, she would immediately be faced with the left-turn, slick-floor dilemma again, as the living room carpet gave way to the wood floor of the entrance foyer. For the second time, inertia would prove to be no ally, only now, the left front leg of a table would serve as a backboard, causing her to carom into the kitchen with a grimace, but still fighting for speed and recognition.

Another 90 degree turn off the door jamb and she would be headed back for the den, only to repeat the circuit one or two more times for good measure. At this point, if no one was chasing her and screaming "out" at the top of their lungs, she would take her chosen spot, underneath the baby grand piano, in the living room, on the clean carpet, and curl up in obvious self-satisfaction. She knew her perseverance had again won out over our weak resolve to banish her to the out-of-doors.

In her twilight years, when the tan and brown and black patches of her coat had become flecked with gray, when cataracts had clouded her vision and arthritis had stiffened her joints, she still held to this ritual, always rejoicing in the fact that she was a member, if only temporarily, of the "in crowd."

The ritual continued, but the routine took a bit longer. Of course, the overall speed was diminished, and the force of

the impacts with walls and table legs and door jambs was reduced in accordance with the laws of physics. The major difference though, lay in that once-marvelous leap from the hall step and the light footed grace of the landing. Having gained a few pounds as the years wore on, her spindly little front legs were no longer up to absorbing the shock of a sudden return to earth, and the former perfection of the two-point landing gave way to a more awkward three-point touch down involving 2 paws and a nose. It always reminded me of the gooney birds of New Zealand who flew with unique grace, but were absolutely hilarious, and ineffective, in their take-off and landing efforts. Marbles late life landings were just like those of the gooney birds. Her nose would snag that carpet every time, and she would experience her rump overtaking her head and shoulders, whereupon she would roll head over paws a few times, before righting herself and continuing the circuit. Bless her heart, she was inimitable in her demeanor.

Her aging also brought on a bronchial condition which caused her bark to sound something like a laryngitic whooping crane. It also effected a constant ear-rattling snore when she slept, which without fail, removed the secrecy from her hiding place beneath the piano, constantly reminding anyone in the house of her presence. By this time, though, it took a cold, cold heart to rouse her from such a sound sleep and order her outside! We did so less and less, as she became older.

Marbles was brave to a fault, but it didn't take much to convince her that her bravery was not commensurate with her

ability to defend herself. She would confront intruders to her turf by lowering her front shoulders, stretching her front legs in front of her until their full lengths lay flat on the ground while raising her rump to maximum height, and barking as if trying to warn the whole world of an impending nuclear attack.

She would maintain this posture at length, unless and until her adversary made even the slightest hint at challenging her. If a challenge was issued, Marbles was instantaneously in a retreat mode. This was borne out by the fact that all of her combat injuries suffered in disagreements with other neighborhood dogs, one ruffian in particular, were inflicted to her rear half, leaving little doubt as to which way she was headed when attacked.

She once held a plumber at bay in his service truck for some 10 minutes, until he decided to test the waters by opening the door of his truck just slightly, at which point Marbles lost interest and went to check her food dish. To this day, I'm convinced his bill was \$ 30.00 higher than it would have been otherwise.

Perhaps this was a small price to pay for having seen fear on the face of a plumber, since a plumber's bill always scares me to death. Thanks Marbles, for helping me to gain a measure of revenge.

John's friends seemed to be fascinated by the name, and the croopy bark, as well as the many tales of her mis-adventures. One or two of them, who were adept at impersonation, would announce themselves by sticking their head

in the back door and giving a most credible verbal impression of the gravelly bellow. We never knew until going to the door whether it was man or beast.

And folks were concerned about Marbles welfare. Many of our friends inquired much, more often about Marbles well-being than about ours. By the time John was in high school, he felt that she had attained legendary status among his friends, and that he had gained stature with his friends simply through association.

I knew exactly what he meant. I hesitate to tell you this, but a member of this society, whose name I dare not divulge, was extremely fond of making personal phone calls to Marbles frequently. On the few occasions when she consented to accept the calls, we respected her enough to allow the conversations to be private, and so I cannot comment on their content. I mention this last fact only to give testimony to her magnetism, for I assure you it was mystical and powerful.

In spite of all her klutzy traits, though, this mixed beagle had a certain faithfulness about her that earned our love and admiration. Hardly a day passes the we don't, in some way, recall an incident or two that further endears her to us.

Sometimes, as I arrive home in the early evenings and pull my old Chevrolet into the carport, I can swear I hear a raspy bark or two, and I open the door just a bit, and peer down toward the ground, thinking she might be there, sitting on her haunches, welcoming me home!

Joy starts out on an afternoon walk around the

neighborhood and, I'm sure, many times thinks of her former companion who accompanied her every step of the way. Even in the late years, when Marbles eyes and ears had failed her, and she had to be watched to keep her from walking in front of a car, she was still ready to walk beside either or both of us as we exercised. Granted, she might think better of it after a short while and take a short cut back home, but still she was there and willing to share the burden of proper exercise with us.

She would come and sit quietly beside us to commiserate or rejoice with us, as dictated by our mood. She was excellent company, halitosis and body odor notwithstanding!

Sure, we had other pets! George, the Guinea Pig, who expired from a case of the "wet tail" after piggishly devouring a whole box of hamster treats instead of his normal healthy pellet and lettuce diet, many numbers of tropical fish who quickly learned to float upside down on the surface of the water in the aquarium, a stupid cat named Cat who chose to remain with us all through a \$ 250.00 broken rear leg recuperative period, and then chose to leave before the cast could be removed, and Liz, a pure bred Labrador Retriever who slobbered constantly and terrorized the neighborhood, even though kept penned at all times.

None could hold a candle to Marbles. None were ever able to develop a personality even half as magnetic as the little maiden-turned-matron, who stayed with us of 17 years. Even her longevity was legendary.

Her personal physician estimated her age at almost 19 when she died, and if we can believe the experts, that's almost 133 in human equivalent years. In the summer of /89, Marbles succumbed to pneumonia compounded by massive chest tumors.

I just know that when she reached the set of pearly gates marked "Canines," the gatekeeper surely said something like this:

"Well done, good and faithful servant. We have prepared a place for you. You will live for eternity in a big house, with no slick floors, with a piano which is truly grand, under which you may sleep and snore to your heart's content. There are no rivals or adversaries awaiting you outside. You'll find no fleas, no ticks, no wet concrete here, no lettuce or pepper cheese."

"You'll never get dirty, and there's an eternally full bottle of Scope in the medicine cabinet. No one will whack you on the rump when you enter the big house, and there will be no thunder and lightning to scare you."

"An angel will be at hand to scratch your belly and stroke the top of your head when you desire, and we'll teach you to flap your ears, so you'll not need wings up here."

"Your bark will be restored, and your swayed back and bandied legs well be straight. If there is anything further that you desire, just let us know!"

I hope it happened that way, I really do!