

A Tale of December

"It was the worst of times and the best of times". Apologies to Charles Dickens. You might well ask "why such an opening to an article around Christmas time?"

It just seemed appropriate to me when reviewing last months events. Dealing with "the worst of times" first we lost Sophie early in December after almost 13 years of companionship and freely given affection. She had been ill for some time but with drugs, medicines and extra special care we had hoped to be together until spring or early summer. It was not to be and Valerie and I ended up with a hole in our hearts.

It is difficult to describe the relationship with concomitant affection and actual companionship that can develop between a dog and its human partners to those of you that have not had the privilege of sharing some of your life with a dog. For those of you who have, words cannot express the feeling of loss that the pets death causes.

A good friend and neighbour made a casket for Sophie and she, with her toys is buried in our garden. While she is no longer here, we feel that she still shares the property she loved for so many years, with us.

We were bereft. We listened to advice and wise comments from concerned friends as well as our grandchildren who loved Sophie, and acquired a new puppy; another Bichon Frise named Eugenie Buffo (for the French flavour) but who will be called Buffy, of course. She is not to replace Sophie, who will always own a part of us, but rather to develop to her own part in our lives over the coming years.

We have become quickly aware of the sheer energy of a puppy and the frustration of training, things we had forgotten, but I'm sure it will all work out.

Now, to "the best of times". At first, because of the weather and other things we did not develop much of a Christmas Spirit through the early part of December. But as the days rolled on and we were caught up in being extremely busy with this and that, some festive thoughts began to percolate away in our minds.

Christmas Spirit". Let me assure you that this "feeling" in Valerie does not extend to willingly listening to Ann Murray sing Christmas Carols but to almost anything else.

I must explain this problem to you before all of you begin to write letters to me about one of the most beloved Canadian Singers.

It was a number of years ago and we were in the habit of visiting Niagara on the Lake in late November. We would stay at the Pillar and Post, see the local Santa Claus parade and visit the local wineries to buy supplies for the coming year. Some of the product is in such limited quantities that you cannot buy at the L.C.B.O but must visit the winery.

One year in the hallways of the Hotel, dining room, lounges, bar etc. the music playing was Ann Murray and her Christmas Carol album. After 3 days of incessant Ann Murray, Valerie asked, as we were checking out, if that was the only record they had. Seems that the machine had stuck somehow and tape played 24 hours a day. They changed it but music by the Mannheim Steamroller just as we were leaving did nothing to restore Valerie as a fan of Ann. Yes of course we have a CD by Ann but its never played.

But back to getting the Christmas Spirit, we were getting prepared for the of son and wife and two granddaughters, Anjelica 5 1/2 years and Danielle 3 1/2 years. I have discussed with a number of people, the visitation of grandchildren. Most assure me that there are two distinct phases of joy associated with the visit. The joy when they arrive and the joy when they leave to go home. Let me state that based on experience and serious study that I believe there are at least 5 stages of joy in children and grandchildren's visits.

Stage 1 anticipation of the visit, planning all the food, special treats and all the other seasonal adventures for them to participate in and buying the gifts.

Stage 2 the actual arrival; the hugs and kisses, getting them installed and noticing how they've changed since you saw them last.

Stage 3 The joy in their eyes as they hang the stockings over the fireplace when we all return from church on Christmas Eve. Helping them place the milk and cookies for Santa Claus. The almost overwhelming happiness on Christmas morning when Santa makes a personal visit to the house, talks to the girls and gives them presents; the trip downstairs where they see all the gifts and filled stockings.

One day, Valerie said to me, "I think I'm now getting the

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