

## It's a dog's life, and it can improve when you die

BY GORDON CLARK, THE PROVINCE

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It may have been my imagination, but I sensed last week that our dog Millie seemed to be acting with mysterious kindness toward me. Before I go on, I should point out that Millie would be very offended to hear me refer to her as "our" dog, or anyone's "dog," for that matter. From observing her over the years, I'm convinced she views herself as just another human being in our house, although clearly someone born with a number of genetic defects related to stature and hairiness.

Consider the evidence. She sleeps in our bed, insists on eating people food at all hours of the day and night and has a general aversion to doing chores if there's a perfectly good couch to lounge about on. Given her shagginess and vocal mutterings when grumpy, if it weren't for her lack of height she could easily be mistaken for a teenager, or even me.

Now, if Millie is anyone's "dog" -- and I think she'd accept the term if used in the way a guy might tell another dude on his hockey team, "You're the dog!" -- she's my wife's dog, probably more than even I'm my wife's "dog." How sad is that.

Most days, that mutt basically just tolerates my presence, and even less so the existence of our kids.

If Millie is sitting in my lap -- only to get warm or dry off after being outside in the rain, and never to show actual affection -- and my wife sits down nearby, that nasty little cur will instantly rise and hop off to curl up with her, followed shortly thereafter by an overly dramatic and loudly contented sigh. We laugh when she does this, of course, but I die a little inside every time. Man's best friend? Don't get me started.

And in bed at night, if I cuddle up to her she typically waits until she thinks I'm asleep and then eases away to climb under the covers and curl up in the crook of my wife's knees to doze off.

Anyway, you can see why I was a little perplexed last week when Millie started showing unusual amounts of attention toward me. She stayed in my lap a couple evenings when we watched TV, even after my wife sat down nearby. Once, I think I even caught her looking up at me fondly with those droopy brown eyes of hers . . . sadly, I'm still talking about the dog. Then one night in bed, when I felt a warm, furry little body press up against my back, I knew Millie was up to something -- but what? At first I considered all the attention was part of a fiendish canine plot to take me off my guard before eliminating me and the kids so Millie could live out her life with my wife, her true love, unencumbered by our presence.

Then it hit me. Millie must have heard about Conchita, that Florida Chihuahua, who with two other dogs was left \$3 million US, a diamond necklace, an \$8.3-million Miami mansion, a Cadillac SUV and servants to cater to her every whim in the will of her owner -- er, special friend -- Gail Posner. Another \$27 million was left to Posner's servants.

Brett Carr, Posner's son, got a measly \$1 million, and is, in the great American tradition, suing over all this, but can you blame him?

I mean, what kind of person feels a greater emotional connection to the doggie world's version of a rat than to their own child? Don't answer that. It was rhetorical.

This isn't the first time someone with more money than brains left a fortune to a pet, that, let's face it, couldn't possibly feel the same thrill you or I would at being left a few million clams, hopefully by someone who wouldn't be missed too much.

Leona Helmsley, the infamous New York hotelier known as the "Queen of Mean" left \$12 million to Trouble, her Maltese, when she died in 2007. A judge, obviously one of those stupid cat lovers, stepped in and reduced the figure to just \$2 million to pay for Trouble's lifetime care, which must really have cut down on the chateaubriand, poor thing.

Keep in mind that Helmsley, who was worth some \$4 billion when she died, left nothing to two of her grand-kids, although maybe that's understandable the way some behave these days.

Eleanor Ritchey, an heir to the Quaker State oil fortune, left \$4.5 million to her dogs -- all 150 of them -- when she moved on to the great kennel in the sky in 1968. As with Helmsley, the will was contested, but in this case the award actually grew to \$14 million with interest while various upset humans battled it out in the courts.

Estate lawyer Rachel Hirschfeld mentioned other examples recently in Newsweek, including Doris Duke, who left \$100,000 for her dogs; Natalie Schafer, Gilligan's Island's Mrs. Howell, who left nearly all her estate to her dog; and singer Dusty Springfield who "made extensive provisions for her cat Nicholas, asking that he be fed imported baby food and for a recording of her voice to be played for him at bedtime." It's a wonder Fluffy ever got to sleep with that creepy ritual being inflicted on him every night.

Have you noticed all these cases involved women? Strange. There may be something in that, but I doubt (nutcases) it would be wise to form (crazzzzzy) a generalized conclusion and then (bats) be accused of sexism.

All of these cases are from the U.S., where most states allow people to set up trusts for pets in their wills, something that isn't allowed in Canada, I guess because we're, um, not as nuts as the Americans. And, of course, we only hear about them when an angry relative takes offence at someone making their pooch richer than Scrooge McDuck.

But I'm not telling Millie any of that. I'm enjoying her affections too much, even if she's just doing it in the hope I'll leave her the couch and enough cash to enjoy a comfortable life with the wife when I kick off.

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