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## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light – 12<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – “ Dogs make our lives a little cuter, a touch crazier and a lot happier”**

Neurotic, traumatised, nimble with a touch of forgetfulness- no I am not talking about my PA or myself for that matter! I am talking about our one remaining Sydney Silky/ mini foxy cross dog, the lovely Lola. My brother Tim called around last weekend, looking revoltingly trim with his two Schnoodles Schnauzer/poodle cross. Although they were kept outside little Lola, was panic stricken, shivering uncontrollably, while the Schnozefrs (let's just call them that) stood on their hind legs peering through the ranch sliders looking like an identical pair of Hairy Maclarys. Lola quivered in fear. She even continued to shiver when we fed her dinner. (She managed to quaff it, nevertheless). We think she has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from when she got chased by a Rottweiler and a Blue Heeler when we first moved to Ruakaka. Although Lola is one of the smallest dogs I've ever seen, she can run like hell! She outran the Rottweiler and Blue Heeler, and just kept on running. She was missing in action for hours, finally she came home in the middle of the night, scratching at the door. The tables were kind of reversed when the Schnozfers broke through our garden gate. By the time Tim raced after them they had vanished from sight. Tim yelled his one-word, all-purpose modern-day command "Bah!" and they eventually bounded out of the nearby stream, thrilled with themselves.

Now, I had been watching a very serious and cute doco about dogs and their minds on Netflix. It informed me that dogs are one of the most diverse breeds of all animals. If an alien compared Lola to a Great Dane, they would think she was of a totally different species, even though 99% of every dog's DNA is pure wolf. It also pointed out that as far as species go dogs are remarkable survivors- and that they have survived by being the friendliest not so much the fittest. Over thousands of years dogs have developed the ability to open their eyes wide mimicking the way humans relate to each other, or in other words, "looking at

me with puppy dog eyes.” Reality was, however, betraying this theory. Neither runaway Schnozfers nor our trembling, snapping Sydney Silky-Foxy were giving me much hope.

In the doco, cognitively blessed and super friendly canines were winning the day. The brightest of the bunch were becoming support dogs for a range of individuals with impairments, including a super cool pooch who would wake up a war veteran having traumatic nightmares, by pulling on his bedspread. Yes, service dogs are a whole different breed (excuse the pun). The doco showed them performing an awesome array of nifty tasks-opening doors, opening fridges, turning lights off and on, pulling off clothes and picking things up. My wife floated the idea of me having a service dog- putting on my socks and carrying kitchen ingredients, to relieve her efforts. Could Lola be trained? Well, no, not after this display. I also just don't think either Lola or I have the patience to stick to the rigour of training. Motivation is key apparently, and while I am pretty keen, my socks are clearly not motivating her. Maybe, a larger than dog-apparently Golden Retrievers are the best- could help me? Nah- I don't think I have the disposition to be that bonded with a dog that's any larger than 1 ft by 6". I have had many a bad experience with big dogs. When big dog owners say, "just relax- he/she's friendly" - this should actually be translated as "they can smell your fear. Even a guide dog growled at me once! The outlook for my wife's relief from these tasks is not looking positive.

We really ought to applaud those who work hard to train and adapt the real Monty Service Dog. They are indeed a rare breed – both the dogs, the trainers and the service users. They all work so hard to channel that apparently instinctive friendliness and urge to help that these clever dogs have and make such a profound difference to the lives of the lucky ones that get to benefit from them – those far more deserving than me. So, I'm quite happy to admire from afar and get some laughs from my more familiar, slightly Scooby-doo-ish canine relations – Schnozefrs, Sydney Silky Foxies and all. What they all have in common is that they all make our lives a little cuter, a touch crazier and a lot happier.

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