

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
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Life Lessons from an Old Dog
By Susan M. Songster-Weaver



Sue Weaver slows down to explore the Chautauqua Watershed with her dog Misty.

Today, the amazing pyrotechnic “birthday” candles are but a memory and the spent flares a pile of ash. The 4th of July party is over but many of us are filled with a renewed patriotism and can still feel the goose bumps elicited when Lee Greenwood sang “God Bless the USA.” It hardly seems possible that our magnificent country is 233 years young, stretching from “sea to shining sea.” Truly, we are blessed to live where we are free to enjoy our natural surroundings.

I’ve always enjoyed my natural surroundings. Nature and I have a unique friendship that started when I was very young. But, most of my time outdoors has been in rush mode. I’ve always had to hurry back from a bike ride or hike to get some work done or to go to work. Every day, my poor dogs were hurried along on their walks - that is until this past year. My female dog, Misty, is getting old and with that age has come a sense of entitlement and stubbornness. She has decided that she will no longer be hurried or forced to walk where she doesn’t want to. We will go where she wants to go and at a speed she approves of. At first, I was a little irritated but now I realize Misty has the right idea: slow down, smell the daisies and Indian paintbrushes, and listen to the birds.

In the past, we’ve always walked the same route. At the end of the driveway, we turned right, walked down the street, around the community park, across the road to the boat launch and back home. Now, she wants to go left. So, we go left and see a different part of our neighborhood. We’ve seen bright, yellow tulips and swaying daffodils. We’ve smelled fragrant purple lilacs and sweet wild strawberry blossoms. We actually discovered a real “bunny trail” in the early spring when a fresh dusting of snow came in

the night after a few warm days. We've traveled different routes to areas where I've never been in the decade I've lived here and met new friends. One day we walked through a neighbor's unmowed lawn and Misty sniffed out a female mallard duck in the grass. At first I thought the bird had been injured. It laid flat on the ground with one of its wings spread out. When Misty got too close, that female squawked loud enough to scare the dog. As we jumped back, she revealed to us the true reason why she was laying flat – she was hiding her baby ducklings from us!

Also, since we've slowed down, I can take the time to really observe and study different things around my neighborhood. Early in the spring, I watched the skunk cabbage emerge like giant purple teardrops and the pussy willows push forth all fuzzy and soft. While the trees were still bare, she didn't mind if I stopped to look when I heard a scarlet cardinal or a red-winged blackbird sing their melodies. Her days of tugging and pulling on the leash are over. Now she is content to lie down and take a rest when I stop to look or listen. The other day, I had the pleasure of watching a very agile red squirrel scurry across the power lines from one telephone pole to another. Sometimes, I see plants, flowers, trees and birds that I don't recognize and it fills me with an urge to dig out my Peterson field guides to learn more.

One old dog with an attitude has taught me some valuable lessons about enjoying the ever-changing Chautauqua Watershed in which we live. So, if you feel like you are always in a hurry and aren't getting enough American outdoor time, take an old dog for a walk. You'll be amazed at the lessons you'll learn.

The CWC is a local 501(c)(3) not-for-profit supported primarily by membership donations whose mission is to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. To support these efforts, call 716-664-2166.