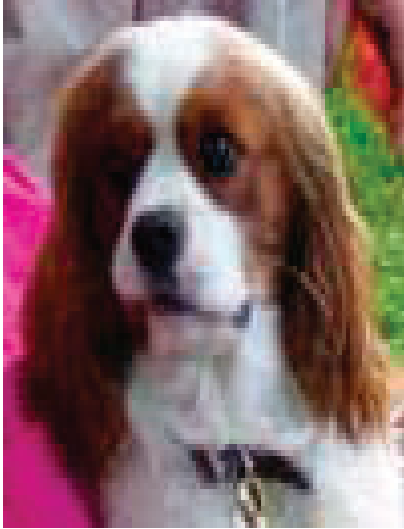


Living in the Animal Kingdom of God



Charlie's Family Reunion

By Ray Smecker

...Dogs have eternally been linked with mankind...especially shepherds of sheep... and since I'm a shepherd of three sheep, Hanna, Charlotte and Ashley... Shepherd dog stories are very special...

...and since it was my Shepherd dog Charlie's family reunion...just outside the City of Philadelphia...attending it was absolutely essential...I wanted to meet his other family members...so when we arrived:

"Ray and Megan," said Charles N., the host and breeder of Charlie and his brothers and sisters, "I must admit, your dog Charlie is the most lovable and largest and most beautiful of all the dogs we have bred..."

..."Bet you say that to all of your patrons," I joked. "...He's named after you...we call him Sir Charles..."

"Bet I don't," he said back. "...Charlie is a very special dog..."

"...A Franciscan friend of mine...sent me an email after I told him a story about Charlie...said he was a special dog, quoting me a passage from a book ...about a dog St. Francis of Assisi..."

Here - let me read you his e-mail - I brought it along:

Dear Ray, A touching story about Charlie and Doris. Here is a quote from the book The Secret of Francis of Assisi - A Meditation by Christian Bobin: 'This dog is in the Bible. There are

whales, lambs, birds, serpents, but very few dogs. In fact you know of no other dog but that one, roaming the roads, following the two masters; laughter and silence, playfulness and grace. The dog Francis of Assisi.'"

...It was late when we got home...and Charlie jumped joyfully onto my lap as I sat down to rest. I turned up the reading lamp that hung over my favorite chair and then I reached for "The Challenge" (a newsletter from a spiritual friend, Fr. Phil Dabney, C.Ss.R. of the Redemptorist Order...their Vocational/ Spiritual Director...) ..."Well, Charlie look at this...there's a picture of (Shepherd) Fr. Kevin Murray, C.Ss.R. and his dog Nellie...and listen to this Charlie, ...Father's part lab, part German Shepherd dog serves as hostess at Sarnelli House in West Phila. She takes her job very seriously, standing in the entrance hall waiting for guests (the most abandoned) to arrive. *A friendly pat on the head is her reward...*"

"...see Charlie," I said as I patted him on his head..."*This must be a Redemptorist dog of St. Alphonsus Liguori. Shepherds and their Shepherd dogs do...have a preference for the most abandoned...Charlie looked up at me with his large brown eyes...*

"It's getting late, Sir Charles; time for some prayers," I said and patted his soft chestnut and white head...

"Oh look, let me read this special prayer to you from Father's Newsletter from the same article..." ..."*To those who pray, God gives with no sparing hand, but God's riches are infinite, and the more He gives the more He has to give, and therefore, He gives abundantly with unsparing Hand, far surpassing aught we can ask.*" St. Alphonus Liguori

"Now Charlie...see...it's just like St. Augustine teaches...you and Nellie must be ...creatures ordained to serve God's inviolable decrees...the angels."

God Bless ...the dogs of St. Francis, the dogs of St. Alphonsus Liguori, and all of God's ordained creatures.

Epilogue: A story "Charlie Did It" is published in [Dog Tales for the Soul](#) and his picture is a part of the back cover. A portion of the proceeds goes to help out some of the most abandoned in a no kill animal shelter in Butler, PA.

Use What He Puts Out in Front of You...

By Ray Smecker

...St. Martin de Porres - a Dominican religious brother was much like St. Francis of Assisi. They often made animal welfare and the well being of God's creatures paramount ...and...their spiritual messages were (spiritually) imbedded in their nature related tales about the creatures in God's Beloved Animal Kingdom....and... this famous quote was often highlighted, "*When you seek the Holy, use what He puts out in front of you..*"
St. Francis of Assisi

...We (two), Megan and I, have spent much (grace) and (soul mate) time together in the Animal Kingdom of God, seeking to naturally bask in their defining messages. Here are three of those *Holy Seeking* stories...

Four Legged Rosary Beads

...We were on an overnight (Spring) trail ride, and Megan and I were sleeping in a mini nylon pup tent on a woodsy mountainside that bordered the riding trails that we had been on for most of the day. There were four other couples along and, also, inside their mini tents. We all had our horses tethered to a long bull rope that we had tied between two giant oak trees. It was very late, and everyone was in their pup tent - just like us. I searched for my rosary beads...gone...lost again...once again I had seeded the landscape...so now what do I do?...use my fingers??? I unzipped the tiny tent flap and peeked out. What a serene sight: the smoke from the dying campfire was still wafting skyward, leaving a pungent incense smell. The moonbeams were cascading indiscriminately through the forest canopy, leaving shadows in their wake. The night creatures were all about and prowling. The crickets were chirping and the horses were snoozing. Five on one side of the tether rope and five on the other side...Ten horses...all knotted together and glistening in the moonlight... So I used what He had put out in front of me.

Saddleback Soul Mates

...Megan and I are saddleback soul mates too. One day we were racing our Morgan horses, neck and neck, up the long hill and heading home. The autumn breezes carried the fall fragrances and many of the multi-colored leaves into our path. And then it happened; our horses stopped on a dime...and we held on tight. They reared up high, their manes were flying in our faces: And then we saw what they had sensed - a gorgeous Red Fox, one of God's most illustrious sable colored and silent creatures, the sleuth of the wild dog world. He was standing up on his hind legs, and there we all were...eyeballs to almost eyeballs. Three of God's most beautiful creatures were posturing for the same space. The majestic color of the sleek fox matched the color of my wife's horse, Brandy, and my black mare sparkled as the sunlight bounced off her lathered body. It was one of God's many magic saddleback soul mate moments. The horses finally came down to earth and we did too and they veered off to the left. The gallant fox vanished to the right, his sleek red coat melting into the distant fall foliage.

The Sheep Hole

...We rode down the long winding and dusty hill. Our horses were panting under our weight and under the heat of the late June sun. So we steered them to "The Sheep Hole" in the nearby fast flowing stream below. ...We saw the top of "The Hole" shimmering in the sunlight---"The Hole" that Nature had some how camouflaged from mankind in automobiles that very often lurked nearby. You could only see it from atop a horse; and we saw it and our horses saw it and they raced up to the edge of the cool pool and watched as the minnows scurried for the cover of the nearby red rock ledges. Our horses plunged in with us on board...And then we were all swimming with the fish and minnows and bugs and all the water creatures that inhabit this secluded "Sheep's Hole" kingdom ...watering hole...and we all joined up - sharing the moments in this paradise...with all of God's Creatures...that inhabited His hallowed ground. "*Hallowed be thy Name...*"