Love-coloured glasses

We are such complex creatures. The older and wiser we get the more seriously we're supposed to take life. This is natural - it takes a lot of work to make this world function reasonably, and I definitely hope that happens one day.

Having Fun, though, as opposed to just fun, means learning to see the good things of the world. If you're holding a crystal in your hand, and all you see is your hand, you're missing the point of life. I didn't make that line up; it comes from my girlfriend, and now I owe her another credit in this book. What it means to me is this: if all you can see of life is the work it takes to make the world go round, and not ever see the jewel that life is, you need glasses, and a good smack upside the head.

So how do we learn to look at life through love-coloured glasses? How do we learn to see the good, without losing awareness of the bad?

Naturally, you're thinking right now that seeing the world through love-coloured glasses means ignoring poverty, famine and injustice. That's not what it means at all. Those things will be there, as large as life, no matter how you see them. The object is to avoid becoming so depressed or beaten down by the vile goings-on of the world around you that you subside into cynicism. A cynic contributes nothing, and has no fun. Cynics are people who would rather criticise than do something useful.

If I went to Africa right now, and they would actually let me in, I would doubtless feel oppressed by the poverty around me. If I went to a First Nations village in my own country of Canada, I would doubtless be oppressed by the futility of reserve life. I would feel that I had to do something, anything, to help. That's part of my identity, and it's appropriate. At the same time, I would have to retain my sense of Fun in order to function. Empathy and sympathy need not require sharing of misery. You can shed tears without becoming dysfunctional. Sometimes having Fun is not meant to be fun. Small-f fun is the reward for having Fun.

We need examples we can live by, and we are surrounded by examples; creatures who reflect the best of us back; those creatures who share our spaces with us.

Think about cats first. A cat is a little bundle of motivation, without all the intellectual puffery that makes us human. They want what they want, when they want it, and they do what they please. They are all about emotion: love, trust, desire and interest in the world. We love them because we find the best of ourselves in them: they are strong-willed yet receptive, independent and dependent in turns, both selfish and giving. They know how to play, and how to be alone. They aren't particularly impressed with fences or borders.

There are, of course, negative aspects to their personalities. They eat defenseless birds, torture mice and get into fur-flying fights with other cats. Not only do they reflect some of our best traits back at us, but some of our worst too. We can learn from both sides of a cat; how to be, and how not to be.

I once heard the saying, "Try to be the person your dog thinks you are." I have never had a dog (I won't say owned), and in fact I haven't had a cat for years, because I got tired of the fur, but I love dogs. They worship you, love you and want nothing more than the reward of your time and attention. They love to work, go for walks and play games. They will defend you, rescue you, and comfort you when you're down.

Negatively, they are predators who occasionally lose control and bite. They have a tendency to engage publicly in indelicate behaviour. They're a little to fast on the pee-trigger.

But we're only looking at what makes dogs and cats good for us. We wouldn't love them and keep them sheltered and fed if we didn't like what we see in them. If they didn't have the emotional capacities that they do, they'd be no better than my goldfish, who are ornamental but certainly not petable, or my lizards, who are also ornamental but downright hostile at times. We love our pets, and train them to act in our own images. We love them because they are, in a word, us.

Both dogs and cats know how to wear love-coloured glasses. When something comes up to which they must pay attention, a threat for instance, they react accordingly. The rest of the time, they engage in their own business, bask in the sun, and wait for the love to shower them from the sky. They tolerate a great deal without complaint. They will defend (even cats - I've seen my cat bite an intruder) their homes and people.

Pets are good for people because they give us something to love. We stroke them, play with them, take care of them, because humans (normal ones at least) need to love as well as be loved. Not loving hurts. It's psychically and physically bad for you.

My girlfriend's dog was amazing to me. When I came to the door, she would be right there, whimpering and snuffling anxiously, so desirous of my attention that she couldn't wait calmly for my touch. She didn't even particularly worry about who it was at the door; she acted that way from the first time she met me. When she died, it was sad for me, even though I only saw her a handful of times...it was nice to be so wanted.

But I'm not, as usual, telling you anything you don't already know. Pets are good for us, blah blah blah. What this whole chapter is about is Fun (as usual).

Dogs and Cats not only love to have fun, are all about fun, live for fun, but they live for Fun as well. Loyalty, protectiveness, caring, interdependence...these are some of the Great Aspects of Fun, and our pets have them in spades. They can deal with the negatives of life, even when there is no immediate reward for doing so. They see the world through love-coloured glasses, and still would die for you.

You won't be able to wear your fun-coloured glasses all the time. Life just isn't like that. Pianos, as Sylvester would tell you, sometimes fall on your head. They don't stop you from seeing misery and heartache, but remembering that your pets know how to have Fun, even with their limited intelligence, will give you the strength and inspiration to love without reservation.

And isn't that what it's really all about?