

Life Lessons from Doug Koltavy

Author of *The Legacy of Beezer & Boomer:*

Lessons On Living and Dying From My Canine Brothers

By Jennifer M. Brauns

Rarely have I been so awed and inspired as I was by the book *The Legacy of Beezer and Boomer: Lessons On Living and Dying From My Canine Brothers* by Doug Koltavy. This book is transformational in a way that words fail to describe. Although two of Doug's dearest furry companions became ill and died in the course his story, the sorrow is overshadowed by the sheer joy of having shared this special journey together. Few people truly learn how to live in the moment and glean all that each precious day has to offer. Although Doug believed for many years that he was his dogs' teacher and superior, in an ironic twist, he learned that his dogs had come into his life with specific intentions of changing his misguided ways. With the holidays upon us, this true story about the soul redemption of a Denver dog lover reminds me in many ways of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Doug's experiences are a priceless gift to us and I hope that all of our readers will gift themselves and their dog-loving friends this season with this must-read book. I caught up with Doug recently to discuss the lessons that he had learned.

Before Doug's experiences with Beezer and Boomer, he was very much in control of his emotions—a guy's guy. "I took immense pride in never crying. Nothing got to me. I created a system to manage away pain, at least I thought I did. The more control I had, the better I was. Truly, on a molecular level, I believed that any problem could be solved with hard work," said Doug. When his dog Beezer was diagnosed with terminal kidney disease and given 90 days to live, it all blew up in his face. He devoted 110 percent of his energy to "fixing" Beezer's illness and it didn't work. He told me that he realized that his entire way of living was wrong. It didn't work. He lost his bearings and no longer had any idea of where he was in life or how to live. It was terrifying for him.

"Before my experience with Beezer and Boomer...I looked at everything like a military battle, but this time my troops, infantry and howitzers had been decimated and I had no idea what to do. I gave up. Not on Beezer, but on my battle campaign. I realized that people don't change, so instead I allowed change to occur. I dropped my resistance for the first time ever. It is resistance to change that creates distress. I hadn't been enlightened enough prior to this moment to understand that my efforts to control everything had been a complete waste," said Doug. As it turned out, he wasn't really in control of anything. As a result of the stress in his life from Beezer's illness, Doug's health was failing and he realized that if he didn't change his ways, he would wind up in the hospital and not be by Beezer's side when he died. "I learned that the more you let go, the more in control you are. What a fabulous paradox," he said.



Photo of Doug and Dory by Jaime Rowe

As Doug was learning to let go, there was no time to waste. Beezer's disease was too aggressive. "I took a leap of faith. For the first time I knew that I couldn't stop the disease. I had to take a different approach. I had reached a fork in the road," recalls Doug.

The following is an excerpt from the book about contacting two different animal communicators for the first time, which had been recommended by two different veterinarians:

Sharon (Callahan) telepathically dialed in to Beezer and he communicated some eye-opening words of wisdom, which she said he had been trying to tell me on his own. She said he told her that I should live in the present—if I could do that, I wouldn't have to fear about his dying—or about anything. I wouldn't have guilt. He knew I wasn't dealing with dying well and wanted me to understand how natural it was. He said that dying wasn't sad for dogs.

Later in the week I called (animal communicator) Terri O'Hara. During our first phone conversation, I got confirmation on Beezer's message. If I had been a bit doubtful about animal communicators' abilities, they were laid to rest after Terri's conversation. She told me things she could not have known about my dogs. She also explained that truth would come forward if I would just allow the boys to talk to me, and then listen. We all have the ability to communicate with animals, she said, if we would open to the idea and slow down enough to hear and sense the animals with our hearts, not our minds. That's how animals

Continued on page 12

Life Lessons From Doug Koltavy

Continued from page 11

communicate—heart to heart... I was soon to discover that the souls of my dogs had been reaching out to my own.

By working with the animal communicators and truly listening to and communicating with his dogs, Doug learned some life-changing lessons. “I learned that in death, as in life, that pain is mandatory but suffering is optional. I believe that these dogs, with their short life spans, were sent here to teach us to love unconditionally and let go. The dogs also taught me that the same love I showered upon them was the same love that I withheld from myself. They deserved that love, but so did I. It is so important to me now to live in balance. Now when I cry, I don’t wipe the tears away. If I wiped the tears away, I would have to wipe the smile away too and I need both. I’m happier now, I’m more in control and more able to deal with life on life’s terms,” said Doug.

Book excerpt:

Up until now, your illness had created one specific reality in my mind. This reality involved death and fear. Was it possible to attach a different meaning and significance to your illness, which would make me feel better? I looked deep into your eyes and asked you what you thought.

Your response came directly into my soul. It sounded like a mantra: Living in fear is living in the future. Fear is always an emotional response to a conditional future event. It may or may not happen, and if it does happen, it will sometime down the road. So to live in fear is to live in the future.

Wow.

I kept staring into your eyes, asking for more. You also said: Living with guilt is to live in the past. The guilt was water under the bridge and I should just let it go. I thought about that for a minute. When you were diagnosed with the kidney problem, I failed to take action. You quickly corrected me. I had taken action. I took you and Boomer to the vet. My decision had come from a place of caring, you reminded me. The fact that I had additional information later on didn’t affect the past. I had made the best decision possible with the information available at the time. You assured me there was nothing to feel guilty about.

“Is there anything more?” I asked. I heard: To live in fear or guilt means missing out on the gift of today. Over and over my mind heard the phrase: Just trust me and I’ll show you.

I felt a great weight begin to lift. I moved forward to embrace you. Just then, you lifted a front paw in an offer to shake hands. “Of course,” I replied.

Then it hit me. I was witnessing you teaching me about living and dying. Lessons I’d been unable to learn on my own. Circumstances I’d been unable to deal with singularly. What if it had always been meant to happen this way? What if you had been sent to Earth to teach me these lessons, as the animal communicators had suggested?

But what had I taught you? To shake hands. The realization traveled through me like electricity. I turned red and covered my face with my hands. Good God, I’d assumed all along that, as

a human, I was the superior being. What if even that wasn’t the case? Teaching you to shake hands wasn’t much of a contribution to the collective experience, especially given the curriculum that you were offering.

Horrified, I began to apologize profusely to you. I leaned on your shoulder overwhelmed. You had a bit of a “gotcha” look on your face. Stick with me, young man, you said, and I’ll teach you much.

Because of all that Doug had learned from Beezer, when it was time to say goodbye to his furry friend, it was an amazing experience. “For as sad as I was, I was really okay with it at the same time. It was extraordinarily difficult to call the vet and say that today was the day. It was like pulling teeth to say those words. Once I got the sentence out of my mouth, I felt better—enough to measure. I remember looking at Beezer and letting him know that we would be together again. I told him he was free to let go—that I would take the pain so he would be free to go. Beezer sent back completeness and told me that I had learned everything that he was sent here to teach me,” said Doug.

Beezer passed away on May 1, 2005. Doug discovered the following spring that one of Beezer and Boomer’s siblings had also been diagnosed with kidney disease, then later several of their brothers. There were only three from the litter that hadn’t been hit including Boomer. Doug inquired on numerous occasions during his communications how Boomer’s kidneys were. He always answered “my kidneys aren’t the problem” but he never said “my kidneys are fine” which left Doug to wonder what it all meant. Boomer subsequently showed signs of kidney disease, but so far with his special diet, they had held it at bay. On December 15th, Boomer was diagnosed with bone cancer. The oncologist told him that if he did nothing, Boomer might live for four months. The type of cancer he had would grow and metastasize quickly and cause increasing pain. Amputation would eliminate the pain, but probably not change the course of the disease or the time he had left.

At every turn along the way, Doug faced new challenges, but he had learned from his dogs how to deal with the inevitable and how to live in the moment and enjoy every last moment that he did have. This year instead of cancelling Christmas like he did when Beezer was sick, he and Boomer had a really wonderful holiday. Doug wrote a letter to read to Boomer on their morning walk in the huge holiday snow that had just fallen.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank Doug for sharing part of his journey with our readers. Although there are some sad moments in his book, I found myself frequently laughing out loud. Despite the challenges that Doug faced, his journey is also filled with many joyous moments and a beautiful account of love and loyalty between a man and his best friends. There is so much more to this book than our short article can possibly convey, and I do hope you will read the entire story. For more information or to order the book, please visit www.beezerandboomer.com.