

WORD IN ACTION

The cat and the dog

As I left my Focolare friends, we promised each other we'd try extra hard that week to live for unity, knowing that the key would be how we were able to live and go beyond all the everyday difficulties that came our way.

Jane Evans, from Wallingford relates how cats and dogs don't always live together in perfect harmony.

I arrived back at our fairly new (to us) terraced home to find my husband in some state of distress in our postage stamp sized garden, with, unfortunately, just

one dog when there should have been two. And while our one was calmly hanging around with an air of superiority, Jaspar, the friend's dog (that we were looking after for the weekend), was nowhere to be seen.

A hurried explanation told me all: our neighbour's cat had been taking its usual evening stroll along the top of our fence when she was spotted by Jaspar. I should mention here that Jaspar is a terrier. Those who know dogs will understand immediately that this meant trouble. And so it was.

Jaspar's instant reaction had been to yo-yo up and down in the air as though attached by some invisible elastic, all four feet leaving the ground with each bound, barking hysterically.

The cat had taken one look and shot off – and so, unfortunately, did Jaspar, through the only hole in the hedge that, until that moment, we had no idea existed.

That was problem number one. Problem number two was that we were due to leave the house in fifteen

minutes, duly smartened up, for a meal with people we'd only recently met.

No amount of calling or coaxing had any effect, either from us or from our next-door-but-one neighbour who had heard the commotion and had come out to investigate the cause. In fact all went ominously quiet and still.

I ran upstairs to see if I could spot anything from the bedroom window, threw open the sash just in time to see a familiar, slightly rotund black, brown and white four legged creature squeezing itself through our next door neighbour's cat flap.

Problem number three was that we knew our neighbour was out.

Worse than that, the cat had been his wife's and was extra special to him as she had died of cancer only a few weeks previously. We'd not managed to see him since the funeral and had no idea how he was, but this was absolutely not going to help.

Images of carnage and murder began to loom as a sense of panic began to rise. There was nothing else for it – out with the step ladder in my best clothes. My husband was much taken aback at seeing me teetering on the roof of our small shed, onto the wall dividing our properties, down with the ladder onto our neighbour's side, balance it in his border among the large rose bush and Californian poppies and climb down into his garden.

Fortunately Jaspar, who had meanwhile squeezed himself halfway through the cat flap, was as shocked as I was to find myself with him, and hesitated just long enough for me to grab him very firmly around his

little round tummy and thrust him unceremoniously through the virtually non-existent hole through which he'd arrived. My husband waited anxiously behind the hole to capture him. Then I had the joy of reversing the whole ladder-wall-shed operation.

We were now going to be late for our meal, especially as I had to change again, my skirt being covered

returned to find the cat food bowl in disarray, licked uncharacteristically clean, and worse, much worse – NO CAT.

He left, understandably upset. When we left to go to the meal, we could still hear him calling for the cat. I think that night was the only time we've ever gone to sleep praying for a cat.

Early the next morning we woke feeling very awkward and embarrassed by the situation on several levels – and remembered we try to live for unity, so... 'if your brother has something against you ...' We knew we had to make the first move.

So later that morning, having run out of all the 'avoidance tactics' jobs I could possibly think of, I found myself standing very nervously on our neighbour's doorstep armed (insufficiently it seemed at the time) with a card, a bottle of wine and the belief, that if we embrace difficulties, we find new life beyond them.

I tentatively rang the bell. The door opened and from that point on I don't know who was the more apologetic – me for the incident or our neighbour for his reaction. We smiled and laughed, talked about his wife, her funeral and the cat (who had mercifully returned home).

So, I guess we have to thank Jaspar for giving us a little domestic 'disaster' which then became the opportunity for us to

go beyond our difficulties and enable us to find a new and stronger relationship with our neighbour.

Next step – netting for the hole!!

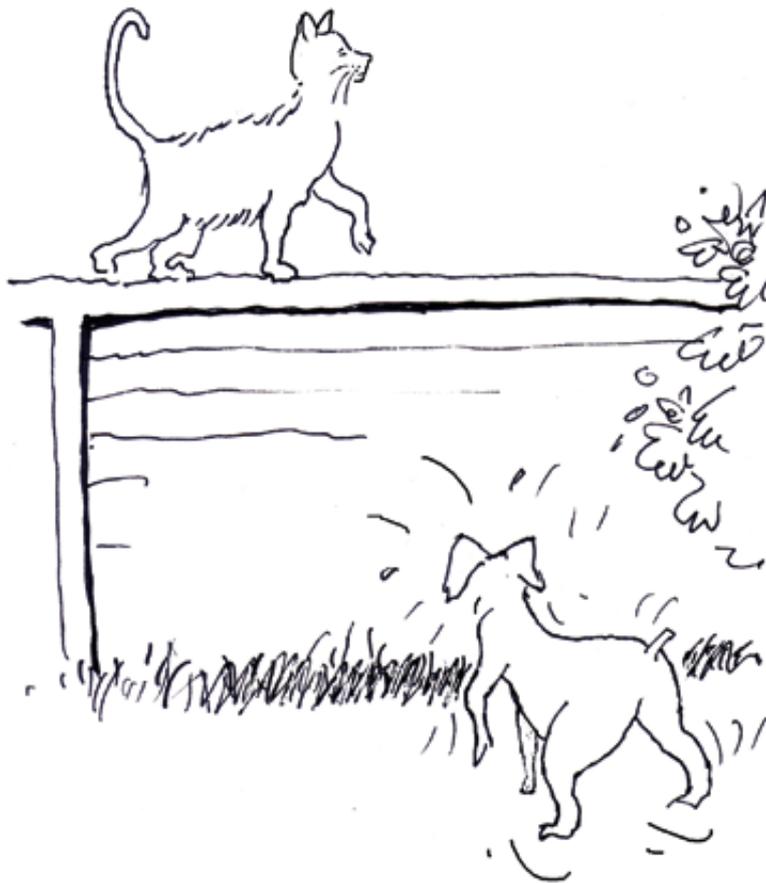


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in garden debris. Just as we were starting to write a note of apology to our neighbour before leaving, the doorbell rang. It was the neighbour himself. Our other neighbour had managed to get hold of him and he had

