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Self-Help

Woofs to the Wise: Learning to Lick at Life and Chew on Civility
Mary M. Mitchell
Nessa Forman
Oatley Kidder, illustrator
TMO Press
978-0-9852532-1-9
(December 31, 2012)

What can we learn from a French bulldog about manners? Surprisingly, quite a lot. In a series of email exchanges between Mitchell's French bulldog, ZsaZsa LaPooch, and her long-time friend and "sister-of-choice," Forman, the two strive to share life lessons about manners, civility, and common social interactions. ZsaZsa explains to Forman why she needs to play more, while Forman instructs ZsaZsa on how to be a diva, a subject she prides herself on being an expert in after a lifetime of practice.

In the foreword, Letitia Baldrige, the White House social secretary during the Kennedy Administration, an expert on manners herself, vouches for the soundness of the advice Mitchell and Forman offer. Mitchell has also already established her credibility on the topic as author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Etiquette*.

The idea for the unusual correspondence was borne out of a moment of tension that could have potentially led to friction among the friends. Forman, who lived in Philadelphia, was anticipating a visit to see Mitchell and her husband in Seattle. Feeling overwhelmed by Forman's need to plan every detail of their visit weeks in advance, Mitchell began to communicate with Forman through ZsaZsa, who encouraged her new friend to be more easy-going about the trip, and life in general. She urged Forman to learn to be "in the moment."

The early interactions between ZsaZsa and Forman are amusing and functional. ZsaZsa inquires about Forman's favorite breakfast foods, shampoo, and desired comforts of home, and through their humorous banter, Mitchell learns of her friend's preferences and prepares for her visit. Later email messages cover practical advice about how to be a good hostess and houseguest, and how to deal with the dreaded unannounced guest, as well as more serious subjects, such as how to maintain relationships, why it's important to apologize, and the need to

be tolerant of others' faults.

The scenarios discussed are everyday, relatable events, which will appeal to a wide range of ages. The book is geared mostly to women, who often take on the role of organizing social activities among friends and family, but much of the advice can also apply to work settings and to any interactions between people of different age groups.

Kidder's pencil sketches of the characters scattered throughout the book help to establish a playful tone. And when it is revealed that the correspondence had actually served a very important function while one of the women faced a serious illness, earlier exchanges that had initially appeared to be carefree or trivial take on new and profound meaning.

Readers who are willing to go along with the premise of ZsaZsa participating in the discussions will find practical etiquette advice presented in a unique and heart-warming way.

Maria Siano