

Please Freshen My Water



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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Water-Freshening	2
3	Tinker Backing Up	3
4	Getting Mama’s Paper	4
5	Eating in Special Places.....	5
6	Treats Before Supper	7
7	Tinker Demanding Attention.....	8
8	Three Dogs on the Bed	9
9	The Early Morning Ritual.....	10
10	Tobi’s Morning Security Check	11
11	Tinker’s Fears	12
12	Allocated Napping Spots.....	13
13	Tootsie and Any Cleaning Appliance.....	14
14	Prologue.....	15

1 Introduction

Before I start, however, I'd like to provide a little information about the presentation. This book is an Ebook/WebBook, since it's partially presented here in a PDF and partially online as web pages. This allows me to include more photos without increasing the size of the PDF, videos, and links to related pages. And, by the way, the WebBook option gives me the opportunity to add more to the story later, so you'll be receiving update notices whenever I come up with additions.

"Please Freshen My Water" is a quote from our Shih Tzu, Mogi (pronounced mo-jee). He of course doesn't really *say it*, but he certainly *conveys* the message. You can read all about it in Chapter 1, *Water-Freshening*.

Anyone who doesn't own a pet and I suppose some who do, would say that the water-freshening story is an example of how to spoil your pet. I think, however, that most pet-owners understand and sympathize with me on this, knowing that our pets quite often "take over" the control of the family. I guess a pet psychologist would tell us that letting them be in control is bad, but I don't see it that way. They give us much enjoyment and they ask for very little, so I think a few minor accommodations aren't unreasonable.

My intent with this book is to relate some of the many idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of our pets. I'm going to start by talking about the 4 little dogs that Joyce and I share our home with, and may later add anecdotes from other pet-owners. I'll decide this as I go along, after I've seen how the book looks with just my stories. I suspect I'll send out a call for inputs from others, just to convince myself that we're not unique and to hear some of the stories of others.

UPDATE: I started writing this in December 2008. On New Year's Eve, Tootsie developed a bad breathing problem due to her collapsed trachea and she passed away on the morning of January 1, 2009. It's now July and I've decided to make another attempt at writing this, although any thought of Tootsie still brings a tear. We miss her terribly, but can still hopefully enjoy and write about the antics of the other three.

UPDATE 2: On March 10, 2010, Tinker was bouncing around the sofa in anticipation of getting a miniature carrot and she fell off onto the tile floor. She died immediately as Joyce tried futilely to revive her. This was probably the worst experience of Joyce's life.

It's now late March and I've decided to just publish this book as-is. I'm going to put large parts of it on the internet, but leave enough in the PDF to "encourage" a few of you to purchase a copy.

So, enough introduction – on with the stories. Each is in a separate chapter, so will appear in the table of contents and be easy to find if you want to show or read it to someone.

2 Water-Freshening

I have no idea how it started, but at some point in our association, Mogi realized that if he stared at his water dish long enough, we'd pour fresh water into it. Now, almost anytime he goes to get water, he'll insist that it be "freshened." How do I know this? Because sometime back, my wife, Joyce, said "Mogi wants his water freshened." I had never recalled hearing that expression when referring to water. I've heard of freshening your drink, generally talking in terms of an alcoholic drink, and maybe even freshening your iced tea, but I don't think I'd ever heard it relative to water.

Well, we now all understand it and Mogi knows how to make it happen. Occasionally, if it's 3 AM, I'll tell him that the water is fine and then I'll turn over and ignore him. In those cases, he'll sometimes grudgingly drink. More often, he'll stand there for as long as necessary, before I finally give in and pour him new water. Since he sleeps at the foot of our bed, going back to sleep and ignoring him is a bad idea. Doing so will only mean that he'll wake me up later to help him back up on the bed. Our bed is about 4 feet off the ground, so he can't jump off (onto the hardwood floor) or get up by himself. He's jumped a couple of times when he needs down quickly, like if the doorbell rings, but I think it must hurt because he generally waits for assistance.

During the day, if Mogi stands in front of one of us and stares, it means one of three things. Usually, it means that he's decided his water needs freshening. This happens if one or more of the dogs has been drinking and it gets a couple of inches down. It can also happen if Mogi looks at it or sniffs it and simply decides that he wants "new" water. Usually, he'll start by staring at the dish and, if this doesn't work quickly enough, he then will stand in front of one of us and give us an impatient stare. Go look at the Chapter 2 on my [Freshen WebBook page](http://www.retirementtips.com/Freshen.html#anchor_48) (http://www.retirementtips.com/Freshen.html#anchor_48) to see some photos I took of Mogi's antics.

Another reason for staring can happen if it's about supper time and he wants his before-supper treat (more about that in a later chapter). Finally, if he's jumping up and down while giving us a furtive look, that means he wants to go outside. He's like a little kid in that regard, as he seems to always wait until the last minute before "announcing" the need to go out.

3 Tinker Backing Up

I don't recall when we first noticed, but it seems that Tinker backs into things a lot. I think it first became most apparent when we noticed that she'd often turn around and back out of the bedroom door in the mornings. That eventually evolved into simply doing a complete turn-around as she goes through the door. She occasionally does the circle before going into the bedroom, but almost always does it on the way out.

At some point after the bedroom door activity, we noted that she has started backing up onto her daytime pillow. We actually managed to get a few videos of that and put them on YouTube. They can be viewed in the Chapter 3 portion of the [Freshen WebBook page](http://www.retirementtips.com/Freshen.html#anchor_49) (http://www.retirementtips.com/Freshen.html#anchor_49). We initially had a cushion off the old sofa that we put on the floor for the dogs, which she soon claimed for her own. Later, Joyce saw a cute frilly pink doggie bed and bought that for Tinker. She uses it now and then, but often reverts to the sofa cushion. Whether it's the pink doggie bed or the old sofa cushion, however, she always backs up.

One of the funnier things that we've seen her do in her "backup mode" is to move Tobi or Mogi off of the sofa cushion. If they're lying on the cushion, often fast asleep, she simply walks up, turns around, and backs up right on top of them. Tobi just gets a surprised look on his face and meekly moves off. Mogi usually gives us an offended look, like he thinks we're going to "save him", then also moves off and gives Tinker her spot (see also Chapter 3 videos).

When we first noticed this peculiarity, Joyce asked a vet about it. He'd never heard of anything like it, but assured us that he was fairly certain it wasn't anything physical. Guess we'd need to get a pet psychic to figure out exactly why she's doing it.

4 Getting Mama's Paper

This is the first of the activities that I put in the “always or never” category. There’s a cartoon that I’ve started reading in recent years called *Pickles*. It involves an older couple and the funny things they say and do. Joyce often calls my attention to one that she claims is “just like me.” In one of the *Pickles* cartoons, the old man was talking about how dogs (and probably other pets) have an “always or never” attitude about life. That is, if you do anything once, like feeding the dog from the table, then they’ll always assume that they’re going to be fed from the table. If you never do it, then never assume it will happen. Thus, if you don’t want to do something forever, you’d better not do it the first time. Good advice and it seems to be very true in the case of our pets.

One such action was my taking Tobi with me to go out and get the paper in the morning. Until I did that the first time, we could open the front door and all of the dogs would sit and look out, but wouldn’t come out. Then one day, I got the *bright idea* that it would be nice for Tobi to let him come out with me in the morning when I picked up the newspaper. I suppose that in the back of my mind, I had this faint hope that I might someday train him to go out and get it alone – like that would ever happen. I don’t believe I’ve ever trained a dog to do anything they didn’t want to. Any “tricks” that they do is either something they learned before joining our family or something they just started doing on their own. At any rate, Tobi began assuming he’d go with me every day when I got the paper. In fact, as soon as I get dressed and come out of the bedroom, he’ll be at the front door waiting to “get mama’s paper.” I call it that because at one time, she’d take the paper on the patio each morning and read it while drinking her coffee. Since I don’t drink coffee and usually start my day checking email, etc. online, the paper was initially dubbed “mama’s paper.”

The “always or never” part really showed up when we cut back to getting the paper only on weekends. We really only read much of it on Sundays, but were offered free daily papers for a while, so were getting it every day. When the free offer ended, we cut back to weekend only. But not Tobi! He still goes to the front door every day and I walk out with him and look at the front yard. In truth, I suppose I could tell him no for several days and he’d probably *eventually* give up, but I figure I started it and he really seems to enjoy that little activity, so ... we continue going out each day and “getting mama’s paper.”

5 Eating in Special Places

I'm going to refer to this as "one of those things that Joyce started." There are several things that we've introduced that I consider to be unnecessary, but that Joyce started and now the dogs insist that they be continued. It also fits into the "always or never" category, like the "getting mama's paper", which I guess is "one of those things that Robert started."

It's my contention that we should be able to put down dog food in one or two locations, and then let the dogs decide when they want to eat. Since they all eat the same food, I'd think that to put a pile in the front room would suffice for daytime eating and a pile in the bedroom (since we sleep with the bedroom door closed) would be for nighttime eating.

At some point in the past, however, Joyce decided that Tinker should eat on the sofa where she sits. She puts down a towel on the cushion next to her, spreads out a small pile of food, and puts Tinker by the pile, and that's where Tinker eats (usually). At least that's where she expects to eat her standard evening meal. When she eats, she's also very selective about which pieces she wants. She generally pokes through the pile for a minute or so, before selecting a piece, carrying it away from the pile, then finally eating it.

Tinker also frequently eats late night meals, which are a real production. She'll go to the pile, take one piece of food, and then carry it to a nearby rug to eat it. For some reason, she doesn't like to eat on the tile floor. With all the selecting, carrying, and walking back and forth from the pile to the nearest rug, these last night meals can go on for quite some time.

At some point in the past, Joyce decided that Mogi should eat on a footstool. As it turns out, we have an extra one left over from a sofa that we got rid of a year or so ago. That has become Mogi's designated eating area for the standard evening meal.

Poor little Tobi, being the last addition to the "family", gets to eat on the floor. As it turns out, he's also the only one that sleeps on the floor (see later chapter about 3 dogs in the bed), but he appears to be content with both situations. He's not much into jumping up on furniture, so eating and sleeping on the floor is probably more to his liking, anyway. There's a little "eating mat" with food and water on it in the family room and one in the bedroom. These are where Tobi goes when he decides it's time to eat, although he's also pretty independent about when he eats. He seldom does so when Mogi and Tinker are eating their standard evening meal, but prefers to eat either later in the evening or in the bedroom after we're in bed.

It all sounds very organized and is, except for the frequent encroachments on the food of others. Mogi is the worst poacher, jumping up on the sofa and eating whatever Tinker left. He'll generally do this when we're out of the room and can clean up all of the leftovers in record time. He also seems to enjoy sneaking into Tobi's food pile, often when he still has food on his footstool. I think he suffers from that "grass is greener in the

other guy's field" syndrome, so thinks that others must be getting something that he's not.

Every once in a while, Tobi will jump up on Mogi's footstool and eat that food, so I guess that greener grass problem isn't unique to Mogi.

All in all, it seems to me that the whole eating process is more complicated than it needs to be. Adding to the complexity is the "treats before supper" ritual described in the next chapter.

6 Treats Before Supper

Here again we have “one of those things that Joyce started.” I’m not sure exactly when it started, but I guess it was one of those times when Tinker wasn’t feeling well and needed encouragement to eat. Every now and then, Tinker gets an upset stomach, so Joyce gets baby food for her. She (and the other dogs) really love that baby food, but we try not to get them into that habit, so change back to regular dry dog food as soon as possible. After one of those episodes, I think Joyce felt bad about simply serving plain old dry dog food, so she mixed in a little bit of a meaty treat that we keep around. It wasn’t long before both Mogi and Tinker *insist* on getting their treats before they’ll even consider eating supper. Usually about 4 or 5 in the afternoon, Mogi will sit in front of Joyce and whine a little, while Tinker (usually on the sofa next to Joyce) will bark in unison with Mogi’s whining. This is their way of letting Joyce know that it’s time for treats and they refuse to think about eating dry dog food until after the treats have been served.

Now, having watched Dog Whisperer and Pet Psychic numerous times, I contend that it’s not good policy to “reward” whining/barking with treats, as that simply rewards their begging. We usually try to wait a few minutes before serving the treats, but that isn’t always convenient. If I put Mogi on his stool and make him stay there, the begging stops and Joyce can then give them their treats and supper. Too often we simply give in and serve the treats to stop the begging ... shame on us ☺

Remember in the previous chapter when I mentioned Mogi jumping up on the sofa to “clean up” Tinker’s food? Well, that’s usually a ploy to get more treats. He’s figured out that Tinker doesn’t always eat all her treats at one sitting, so if we happen to leave the room and he can manage to get up on the sofa, he can get an extra helping of those treats. I’ve noticed he’s been getting a little bit chubbier lately and I imagine those treats are a large part of the reason for the extra weight.

Where is Tobi in all this? Well, Tobi just quietly sits by and watches all of the goings-on, then eats his treats if/when they’re given. He is usually the quiet and reserved one, not partaking in the shenanigans of the other two.

7 Tinker Demanding Attention

Isn't it interesting that the littlest one is always the loudest? When Mogi wants something, like water, going outside, etc., he generally just sits and looks at you. If he really has to go outside, he'll have a frantic expression and maybe even jump up and down a little. But Tinker always barks ... that's her way of letting the world know that she's not happy or she needs something or sometimes it seems she just feels like barking. Moji almost never barks. Tobi only barks when someone comes to the front door or he hears Mama driving into the garage. Tinker, on the other hand, probably barks 4-5 times a day, depending upon how attentive we are to all of "her needs."

The most *interesting* is whenever Joyce sits down to eat something. No matter when it is, if she sits down to eat, all three doggies gather around. Mogi and Tobi simply stare and watch for any food being dropped, either accidentally or intentionally. Tinker dances around like a jumping bean, barks, and just generally puts on a very agitated appearance. I suspect all of these actions are a result of Joyce occasionally giving them table scraps, but she denies doing so.

The other time that Tinker barks is when she's ready to get back into bed. She sleeps on a pad between our pillows and, when she needs to "go", she stands up or sits on her pad until we notice her. If nobody wakes up, she'll dance up and down the bed until someone does and lifts her off the bed and onto the floor. We then generally go back to sleep, because her evening jaunts usually take 30-45 minutes, since she often takes time for a snack, wanders around a while, takes a nap on her pillow up in the office, and just generally "messes around." By the time she finally returns to the bedroom, we're fast asleep. She'll dance around by the side of the bed (on Mama's side) for a while and that's sometimes enough. If that doesn't do it, however, she then lets out a sharp bark or two to get our attention. That always does the trick.

Every now and then, we'll hear a barking off in the distance. We're figured out that means that we've closed the bedroom door and left Tinker in there. When that happens, it doesn't take long for her to start hollering her head off.

8 Three Dogs on the Bed

When we got Mogi, it seemed logical that he should sleep at the foot of our bed. When we “adopted” Tinker and Tootsie, we decided to make room for them in the bed also. Since they were so small, Joyce wanted to put them up near our pillows, so we wouldn’t accidentally roll over on them. We folded up towel to make a pad and put that between our pillows. That’s where they’ve always slept. Since Tootsie is gone now, Miss Tinker has that pad all to herself, but usually curls up under the covers right behind Mama. So much for worrying about not rolling over. Somehow, Joyce never does. Tinker never curls up behind me and it’s probably a good idea she doesn’t. I don’t know how Joyce avoids squishing her, but I don’t think I’d be able to do it.

So, here we were with 3 dogs on the bed and we found Tobi on Highway 231, just South of Montgomery, Alabama in March of 2003. We were in the RV then, and it seemed appropriate to put a blanket for him on the floor at the end of the bed. Did I mention that we sleep with 3 dogs in the RV also? The problem there is that the RV has a Queen-sized bed, unlike the King-sized at home, so there’s not nearly as much room. In the RV, there was no question about where Tobi should sleep, as there really wasn’t much room left in the bed. When we got back home, however, Joyce wanted to make room for him on the bed. After a little discussion, I was able to convince her that Tobi was perfectly happy sleeping on the floor and would probably be “uncomfortable” on the bed (as would I if he crowded in with the rest of us). That’s worked out well now for over 6 years, with Tobi happily sleeping on the floor in the house and in the RV. With Tootsie gone, it’s now 2 dogs on the bed, but Tobi still stays on his blanket at the end of the bed. He’s happy that way and so am I.

It is interesting how pets get into a ritual and never change. When we put Mogi up on the bed, he always goes to the foot. Tinker always goes to her “pillow” and Tobi always goes on his blanket on the floor. All this happens, *unless* I’m not there. Most nights, Joyce goes to bed earlier and watches her HGTV, while I stay in the living room and watch other shows. When she goes to bed, Mogi and Tinker follow, but then the situation changes. Tinker will immediately realize that I’m not there and plop down right in the middle of my pillow. Mogi spreads himself out at the foot, usually covering most of my space in the process. When I come to bed, I simply touch Mogi and he immediately moves over to make room. Not so for Tinker! I have to convince her that I am indeed coming to bed and that I *really* need my pillow. At that point, she’ll begrudgingly rise and slowly make her way over to her sleeping pad.

Tinker always seems to be looking for any opportunity to get more comfort, more space, more food, etc. If Joyce gets out of bed and stays gone for a while, Tinker is always quick to jump over to her pillow. Likewise with me. I don’t know if that gives her a feeling of being closer to us or if she’s just looking for additional comfort. Either way, she’s always the *different* one, making sure that everyone knows she’s around and that she’ll do *what* she wants to *when* she wants to do it. Maybe that just comes from being so little.

9 The Early Morning Ritual

The early morning ritual is something that I started, although I had no intention of doing so and wasn't really aware of what I was getting myself into.

Joyce and I are retired and we like to sleep late. Unlike those we know that get up at the crack of dawn every day, we like to stay in bed until at least 9:30 or 10:00 and often later than that. So, how do the dogs accommodate that? Very well, except for the "early morning ritual."

I'm not exactly sure how it all started, but here's how it goes. Right around 6:30 AM, Tinker and Mogi both pop awake and start moving around the bed. Since that's before dawn, I really don't know how they do it, but it's always between 6:15 and 6:45, and they seldom miss a morning.

So, here's how it goes. I put Mogi and Tinker down off the bed and we all go out to the family room. Tinker goes to her pad and relieves herself, while Tobi goes outside, lifts his leg a couple of times, then comes back in. Mogi either gets a drink of water or simply waits. We all then gather in the kitchen, I give Mogi and Tinker a miniature carrot, and a meaty treat for Tobi (he doesn't eat carrots in the morning). Mogi runs back to the bed and Joyce picks him up, then he lays on the bed and eats the carrot. Tobi eats his treat and returns to his sleeping blanket. Tinker eats her carrot, wanders around the family room for a few minutes, and then also returns to bed. We then all go back to sleep to rise whenever Maw and Paw decide it's time.

I've tried several times to stop this ritual, but to no avail. Now and then, I can feign sleep and they'll lie back down and give up. Also, if Tinker has been up earlier to relieve herself, she might sleep through and then the ritual is averted. Nine times out of ten, however, we're up and about at about 6:30 every morning. The good news is that they'll then return to bed and allow us to sleep as late as we like. Guess we should be thankful for small favors ☺

10 Tobi's Morning Security Check

This is another of those “always or never” pet things. When I’m sitting at my computer in our office, my back is to the front window. Tobi likes to look out the window and used to do so a lot, back when we had a box there for him to sleep on. At some point, Joyce decided the box didn’t look good, so we took it away and Tobi could no longer look out the window. One day, I was in my chair and Tobi was sitting next to me, so I thought it might be nice to let him jump in my lap and look out the window. I called him and he jumped up, then I pulled the vertical blinds over so he could look outside. He seemed to enjoy it and I thought it was neat.

Next morning, I was sitting at my desk and along comes Tobi and looks up at me like he wants up. I turned my chair and up he jumps, then he looks toward the window and I pulled the blinds aside so he could look out the window. Now it’s almost a daily ritual, conducted shortly after we return from getting mama’s paper (Chapter 4). I refer to it as his security check, since he always looks like he’s surveying the yard, checking it from one side to the other.

I’ve never checked the history of the Tibetan Spaniel (Tobi’s breed), but I’d guess they might have been some type of guard dogs. That’s based upon my observation of Tobi checking out the front yard and similar actions whenever he’s just sitting around the yard. When we’re in back on the patio, he’ll lie there and constantly look from one side of the yard to the other, like he’s checking the horizon or something. He actually looks like he’s on sentry duty or something similar.

11 Tinker's Fears

What is Tinker afraid of? Almost everything! Thunder, fireworks, visitors, vacuum cleaners, electric cords, doors only partway open, and almost anything new that she hasn't seen before.

Most of these things are understandable, but some are really strange. One night, I had my laptop in my chair in the family room and was watching TV. I had the electric cord stretched from my laptop to the wall plug on the other side of the room. Joyce put Tinker down off the couch, so she could go get a drink of water from the bedroom water dish (her customary drinking spot in the evenings). She started heading that direction, then stopped short when she saw the electric cord. She wouldn't hop over it or go anywhere close to it, but instead walked back through the kitchen and dining room to come up on the other side of my chair. Even then, she again found herself close to the cord, so had to make a run for it to make it to the bedroom door.

We've also learned through experience that she can't go out of the bedroom door in the morning, unless it's wide open. Opening it halfway is fine for Mogi or Tobi, but that space appears to petrify her until we open the door all the way. Then, she does her backup and turn-around (see Chapter 3) and scoots out the door.

Some of our most unpleasant times of the year are those that *require* fireworks. Independence Day (and the 3-4 days before and after) are obviously one of those times. We spend most of July 4th in the bedroom with the TV playing loudly, trying to drown out those who insist that blowing off illegal fireworks is the appropriate way to celebrate our nation's independence. But then, hey, we also go through it at Christmas and New Years. I'm not sure when it became appropriate to explode fireworks at Christmas, but it certainly has been the case the last few years. Therefore, Christmas Eve is spent much like Independence Day eve, trying to keep Tinker from having a heart attack. She shakes and quivers in fright most of the night, until our neighbors finally run out of fireworks or energy. Tobi also reacts somewhat to the fireworks, getting very nervous and barking at the noise. Can you tell that we don't like fireworks?

Some of the funnier times are when Tinker acts totally terrified and I figure out it's my coke can or something that I've got in my hand that she decides must be alien. I'm often amazed at some of the things she fears, but like Joyce says "she's tiny – if you were that tiny, you'd probably be scared of your own shadow, too."

12 Allocated Napping Spots

Just as the dogs have specific spots that they sleep and eat, they also have spots that Joyce has decided should be their napping spots. The main problem is, they often *disobey* the rules. When we first got Tootsie and Tinker, they came with their own pet carrier – one of those bag-like things with zipper ends and net on the side so they can see out. I recall when we first went down the Ft. Lauderdale to pick them up. We carried them to the car in their “house” and they stayed there curled up in a little ball together all the way home. It took us a while to coax them out and their “house” was always a place they appeared to feel safe when things got too busy or noisy around them. Now, with Tootsie gone, that carrier bag is Tinker’s domain when she wants it. None of the other dogs could probably fit into it, even if they wanted to. So, that’s one of Tinker’s allocated napping spots during the day.

One day, Joyce came home with a little pink doggie bed that she thought would be nice for Tinker. Although with some coaxing, Tinker will occasionally use it, we’ve noticed that Mogi often gets into it. Sometimes, Tinker will then decide that she wants it after all, so will back into it and force Mogi out (video?).

Then there’s the brown cushion off of a sofa that we discarded a while back. We kept some of the cushions as throw pillows for doggie napping in the office. Tobi especially likes one where he spends most of his day, right next to my computer chair. There again, every now and then, Tinker will decide she wants it and will back her way up into Tobi’s face and force him to move off of it.

So, the plan was to have Tobi on the brown cushion, Tinker in the pretty pink doggie bed, and Mogi wherever he found a spot. Now and then, that doesn’t work out. Below is a photo taken when I noticed Tobi on top of Joyce’s shopping bags, Mogi in that cute pink doggie bed, and Tinker on “Tobi’s pillow.”



13 Tootsie and Any Cleaning Appliance

Since Tootsie's gone, I wasn't going to include any stories about her, but one does come to mind – her anger at any type of cleaning appliance. Whether it was a broom, mop, or vacuum, she would immediately attack ferociously. Many a time, she'd be hanging on the broom as Joyce tried to sweep the floor. Whenever the vacuum was brought out, even before it was turned on, she'd start barking angrily and bouncing around the machine. To clean the house, we'd almost have to put her off in another room and close the door, or sometimes she'd eventually decide to run off and go to her house.

I guess now we'd enjoy hearing that barking again, even though it was a bit frustrating at the time. It's been 7 months since she left us, but we still think of her almost every day. We both dread the day when the other three reach the end of their road.

14 Prologue

The water-freshening story is by no means the funniest or strangest of my tales, but just the first one that popped into my mind and the one that prompted me to think about writing this book. Mogi is the largest of our little dogs at about 12 pounds. When I started this book, we also had a Tibetan Spaniel named Tobi that's almost that size and two little Yorkshire Terriers named Tootsie (7 pounds) and Tinker (3 pounds). Since then, we've sadly lost the two Yorkies, so now only have Mogi and Tobi. You can see them all on my [Our Dogs](http://www.RetirementTips.com/Dogs.html) (<http://www.RetirementTips.com/Dogs.html>) web page. All are rescued dogs and joined us after we lost our first Shih Tzu, Panda. We were so affected by her passing that I proclaimed that we would have no more pets ... and that worked well. ☺ If you'd like to read about Panda, you can go to my web page entitled [In Memory of Panda](http://www.RetirementTips.com/Panda.html) (<http://www.RetirementTips.com/Panda.html>). There's also a "companion" piece [In Memory of Brandon](http://www.RetirementTips.com/Brandon.html) (<http://www.RetirementTips.com/Brandon.html>), who belonged to Joyce's son Steve. If you go to read these, be sure to have tissues handy, as you'll probably end up sniffing as you read them. If you want to see the *epitome* of pet-spoiling, read the directions we provided to friends that cared for her while we took a two-week vacation. It's called [Taking Care of Panda](http://MissPanda.Homestead.com/) (<http://MissPanda.Homestead.com/>) and I think it's really quite funny, now that it's way in the past. I can't believe we coddled her that much, even though she was 14 years old, deaf, and nearly blind. Maybe you'd want to read this *after* the "In Memory" pages to cheer yourself up again.