

DOWN HOME: At the age of '98,' Betsy knows better

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Betsy has entered her second childhood.

Or maybe it's her second infancy.

Betsy is our dog. She's been part of our family 14 years this week. We got her for our daughters' birthdays when Molly turned 5 and Lindsay turned 8.

If you know the old adage that dogs age seven times faster than humans, and if you're good at your multiplication tables, then you know Betsy is 98 in "dog years."

I'm surprised she's still around. Except for some sprained knees from time to time, and the fact she's nearly deaf, Betsy's remained in remarkably good health.

But she can't-or won't-mind her manners anymore.

One of my first responsibilities after Betsy came to live with us in 1991 was to potty-train her. Someone told us frequent trips to the backyard were the answer to Betsy's problem, which quickly became our problem.

Joanna, my wife, interpreted that to mean every time Betsy cried, she

needed to go “out.” And since only one of us was ever going to go “out” with the dog in the middle of the night, I often stood in the yard with Betsy, pleading with her to do her business so Jo would let us both come back in the house and go to bed.

Well, Betsy was a quick learner. Soon, she figured out how to whack the tiny bell by our back door with her paw, and she started going “out” on her own.

Unfortunately, at age 98, Betsy's decided “out” is only a state of mind. Either that, or she's still mad at me for leaving her 11 days when I went to China this fall.

See, we have this routine in the mornings. We're almost always the first ones up. So, I let Betsy out of her kennel beside my bed and take her to the back door. For years, she has gone “out” for about two or three minutes. Then she's been content to hang out with me in the bathroom, while I shave and take a shower. Then, we both go eat breakfast.

Sounds like the foundation for a beautiful friendship. And to be quite honest, I have enjoyed Betsy's company during those early-morning hours.

But lately, when she's gone outside, she's only pretended to go “out.” First day back from my trip, she came back inside, walked through our bathroom into our closet and pretended it was the Great Outdoors. Two days later, she did it again.

This, of course, is annoying. She's been a trained dog for almost 14 years (nearly a century in “dog years”), and now she wants to act like a puppy again.

I think it's extortion. What she really wants to do is eat breakfast before I take a shower. And I might make her a deal if she'd learn to get up and put on the coffee while I shave. But no. She's a dog and doesn't have opposable

thumbs and pretends she can't make coffee.

While cleaning up one of Betsy's messes, I imagined I understand God a little more clearly. How many times do we, theoretically trained and old enough to know better, make messes God has to clean up?

-Marv Knox

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