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Note – This essay has been adapted from a guest post for my friend, **Karen Ranney's Warm Fuzzies! blog. <http://karenranney.wordpress.com> If you love dogs like Karen and I do, are keen on Scotland, and interested in writing, you'll love her blog. If you love Scottish historicals, you'll love her books. She writes Scotland with class and style and I highly recommend her: <http://www.karenranney.com/>*

10 Things I've Learned About Writing By Walking My Dog

Loving dogs is something Karen Ranney and I definitely have in common. Just as Flash rules at her house, so does my little Jack Russell terrier male, Em, run the roost at mine.

He may be small, but he's king of my world.

Em gets several walks a day and the following are writing wisdoms that have come to me when walking him. I often solve the most complicated plot issues on our outings. Something about fresh air and exercise allows ideas to flow. They don't always have to do with a deadline project. But they usually are writing-related.

These points can be applied to many things. And they show that dogs don't just offer us unconditional love, but also teach us so much.

Here's my list...

- 1) Do it every day. It's really true: use it or lose it. Just like a dog should be walked every day, it's important to get in those daily pages.
- 2) Practice makes perfect. Similar to nr. 1, making the walks a habit is a good thing. In writing, this means that the more you write, the more you'll learn and improve.
- 3) Weather, what weather? Don't let rain keep you inside. Your dog looks forward to his walks and needs the fresh air and exercise. Writers, too, must work through all weathers. Deadlines don't wait.
- 4) You should still be prepared. I always take along water and a small bowl for Em. If it looks like rain, I'll carry a jacket. There's also a little towel in the bag I wear slung over my shoulder. Whatever comes, I'm ready. Writing well also needs preparation. Don't write in a genre you don't know or aren't willing to research.
- 5) Expect the unexpected. I wish I had a dollar for each time the sprinklers burst to life just as Em and I stride by. We've been doused. And I do mean *doused*. Fellow writers know what I mean: those kicks-to-the-shin blows are wicked. And they

always come out of nowhere. They're a given in this business, so learn to shake them off and keep going. *(or carry a little towel like I do, see nr. 4)*

- 6) Take time to smell the roses. Or whatever other interesting things you encounter along the way. If you just concentrate on your destination, you'll miss the fun of the journey. Writing is an adventure. Don't lose sight of the joy that started you on this path.
- 7) Accept that dogs come in all sizes. To me, Em is a king among dogs. As a Jack Russell, he's also pretty small. The parallel to writing is obvious. No matter how great you think you are, someone bigger is always going to come prancing along. And when they do, barking at them isn't going to help. It's best to just swallow it and keep going.
- 8) Roll in the grass. Em loves to do this and he does so with total abandonment. For writers, this means celebrate the good times. This is a tough business that can bruise and maim if you let it. So live it up when you triumph. You deserve the reward.
- 9) Heed those I-want-a-walk looks. Dogs don't live forever. Oh, how I wish they did! So when your four-legged friend gives you the look (dog lovers know what I mean) get up and take him out. In writing, this is your world outside writing. Don't forget its existence. Deadlines are holy. But so are those you love. Be there for them.
- 10) When the walk is over, it's veg time. Em is zonked after our walks. I am drained after deadline. Be sure to give yourself time to recover and refill the creative well between books. Your muse will thank you.

**Bonus point from Em's pov: Wag your tail. When people smile at Em or stop to tell him he's a handsome boy (he is), he always wags his tail and looks so happy. Remember to be gracious and always thank people who help you or take time to tell you how much they love your books. It's good to be nice.

**Bonus point from my pov – Accept that you can't please all the people, all the time. Em usually loves other dogs. But there are days when he spots one from afar and the two dogs hate each other on sight. Hackles rise, growls rumble, teeth are bared. I don't let it come to blood. I lead Em in another direction before the scene can get nasty. In writing, too, one must learn to turn the other cheek and just keep walking. Life is too short for fusses. Your nerves will be better for avoiding trouble.

To every dog lover reading this – here's wishing you and your companion many happy years of walks, tail wags, and sloppy-wet canine kisses.

To the writers reading along (dog lovers or otherwise) – much success! And remember: no matter what happens, keep going.