



Weather Dogs

by K.S. Mueller

In the student travel industry, part of our gig is to organize (and often attend) the annual "Yuletide in (pick a city)" International Teacher Convention. Since I don't have any kids, and my mother was in relatively good health for many years, I attended the Yuletide Convention every holiday season.

Traveling in December takes a bit of getting used to. The days, particularly in places like England and Germany, are very short in the winter. The weather is gloomy. Stores and museums are closed. Pair that with jetlag and the holiday rush and you have a decent recipe for seasonal depression.

Nevertheless, both prior to and following each convention, I would summon the courage to extend my trip and do some personal sightseeing.

The year I turned 40, I sadly realized I was probably not going to have any kids. To fill the void, I decided I needed another dog. Hobie came into my life in May of 2000. Just five months old at the time, I dubbed him "Millennium Dog", since he was born in January.

I fell instantly and hopelessly in love with this dog – he was the child I never had.

Begrudgingly, I still booked my annual Yuletide trip at the end of 2000. I left my dogs Timba, who was 17 at the time, and Hobie, the newly-crowned leader of our pack, at home with a friend who was nice enough to house and pet-sit.

I left Logan Airport bound for Lisbon, Portugal on December 22, 2000, and quickly discovered that I, not my dogs, suffered from separation anxiety!

It was going to be a long, lonely fourteen days. Our post-convention travels took us to two places that stand out in my mind. The first was Obidos, a very small town halfway down the west coast of Portugal, and very reminiscent of the Cape Cod National Seashore.

The entire time leading up to our visit to Obidos, my friend and I kept repeating "Obidos!" because it sounded like "Hobie Dobe!" my nickname for Hobie.

The second memorable city was the very famous spiritual destination of Fatima, which we visited just two days after Christmas. It was incredible. We witnessed dozens of people making pilgrimages to the Marian Shrine, many of them crawling on their knees as a symbol of their devotion.

The Marian Shrine is known for the Marian apparitions – when, in 1917, three peasant children claimed to have seen an apparition six times, and on July 13, 1917 the apparition divulged three secrets to the children.

While at Fatima, we visited several gift shops. It's important to mention here that when I first adopted Hobie he had a deformed left ear, which later miraculously righted itself.



Hobie Photograph by K.S Mueller

In one of the gift shops at Fatima, just off the highway, I found a section of the store that contained cute little animal figurines that would change color when the weather changed. I remembered having something like that as a kid: it would turn pink if it was going to rain, or blue when the weather was fair, or some such thing.

I've always collected figurines of dogs, cats, and horses, and was feeling the separation from Hobie in particular that day, having then been away from him for about ten days – our longest separation ever. Of course, he was probably home, snoozing, oblivious to my heartache.

And so, I thought, I'll pick up a souvenir - a doggie figurine that predicts the weather. I carefully picked out one that looked almost exactly like Hobie. The tour bus was waiting for us outside and my companions were getting antsy, so I hurried to the cashier.

When she picked up the Hobie figurine, it slipped out of her hand. As if in slow-motion, I saw it crashing onto the countertop, head-first.

I heard my own voice saying "Nooooooo!" in slow-speed. I dove for the figurine, and saw to my horror that its left ear had broken off. Dejected, I just looked at it, clutching the two broken pieces in my hands, the dog itself in one hand and a tiny piece of "ear" in the other.

The cashier spoke no English. I spoke no Portuguese. Yet, somehow, we communicated. She managed to offer, "Go get another one, to replace." I told her, "I want THAT one!" (I had spent ages picking out "the" dog.) She somehow answered, "Keep this one, and take another one, too, and I will only charge you for one." I thought, that sounds like a good idea.

By now the tour bus driver is honking his horn, hollering at us to get a move on.

I ran back to the shelves, which now seemed to carry thousands of little dog figurines! Too many choices! How would I ever find another one that looked just like Hobie? No two were alike. The handiwork was extraordinary. I just grabbed one, any old one, and ran back to the register, paid the lady, shouted "obrigada!" and leapt onto the bus.

Back at our hotel, I opened up my little bag with the two canine statues inside, and much to my shock, they were BLUE! I chalked it up to the weather-predicting materials they were made from, rather than some religious epiphany.

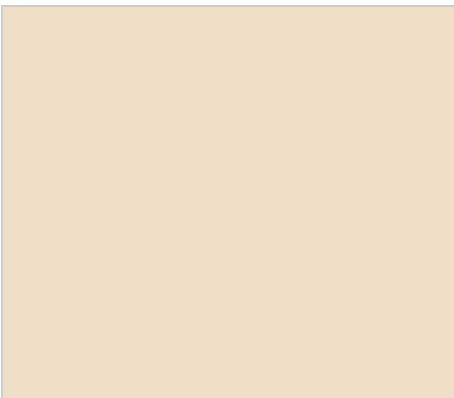
When I returned home to Massachusetts, I put those two weather dogs on my bedroom bureau and more or less forgot all about them. Every so often, I'd notice them change from pink, to blue, to white.

Six months later, Timba passed away, and soon after, we adopted our hound-dog, Hector. One day, I looked at the two weather dogs on top of my dresser and realized they are the spitting images of Hobie and our newest dog, Hector!

There are no coincidences.

It took me eleven years to write this essay about the weather dogs. I finally wrote this on October 13, 2011, having done no prior research whatsoever. It was only afterward that I found out that the Fatima apparitions visited the three shepherd children monthly in 1917 from May through October, and always on the 13th of the month.

The last apparition occurred on October 13, 1917 exactly 94 years ago.





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K.S. Mueller writes short stories about dogs, cats and other topics during her spare time from her "real job" as a travel executive.

Mueller lives part-time in North Eastham and the rest of the time in the farm country of central Massachusetts, with her significant other, Gil, their dog, Hobie, and three cats: Cali, Tux and Newman. Mueller has shared her life with dozens of dogs and cats since childhood, and volunteers for several animal-related non-profit organizations.

In 2010, she discovered a box of letters written by her late parents during WWII, and is currently publishing those letters in a three-volume biography of the Mueller family.

Visit her websites at www.ksmueller.com, www.k2k9.com, and www.fibroworks.com.