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Sunday mornings are special at McMillan's House O' Fur. They're the one day of the week when I'm not wading in the dark through a sea of spinning wolfhounds to go to work at 4 a.m.

Sometimes we sleep on Sundays until 7 a.m. Instead of just two gulps of coffee, we have French toast. We aaaalllll have French

toast. Usually, my four dogs end up with more of it than I do. It's only fair. I'm outnumbered. And I've learned to watch what's fair nearly as keenly as they do. They're tireless teachers, my hounds.

Dogs have a keen sense of fair play, just like human siblings. They keep count. They weigh the value of the treats all the other dogs got and you'd better even the score with them or eventually you'll lose your rapport. They grow resentful, they shut down, and something precious is lost.

Most seasoned dog parents know this, but a study at the University of Vienna in Austria firmed it up. Researchers tested a group of dogs who already knew basic commands like "sit" and "shake" and responded with enthusiasm. Then, some dogs were given food treats for obeying. Some were not. Soon, the have-nots began to hesitate before responding to verbal cues. Eventually, they turned away and ignored the commands altogether.

"Animals react to inequity," said Friederike Range of the University of Vienna, Austria, team leader in a test of animals at the schools Clever Dog Lab. "To avoid stress, we should try to avoid treating them differently."

So, either don't treat, or if you *do* bring out the treats, make sure every member of the pack gets his or her due.

It's a rule my wolfhound Oona doesn't worry about much. Essentially, Oona's a pirate. What's mine is hers and what's hers is hers. If it's in the house... hers. It's simple to keep straight. The other dogs don't complain. Oona has the bulkiest muscles and the best stink eye. And, Oona **knows** she'll get her share because I'm crazy about her. The other dogs can cut their own deals with the old guy as best they can. So, it's up to me to maintain balance so *all* the dogs get a share like Oona's. A pirate's share. Yeah, they're a merry little band.

My training began when Oona was a juvenile. She slid up and sat patiently while I ate my french toast one Sunday. She was two inches away. Her head is bigger than my own. The puffs of hot breath on my chest were reminders that I really should be impressed by her self-restraint. Naturally, I pulled off a pinch and gave it to her. And so it began.

Puppy Oisin joined the family and the que formed. He did everything Oona did. And he was such a winsome little guy. He got a pinch of toast, too. It became our Sunday ritual. Soon, Oisin was taller than his aunt and rowdy. He started shouldering her aside because he knew she wouldn't actually eat him no matter what her hellish growl said. Actually, she didn't really care. She knew me. I reached over his head and gave Oona the first helping. And then Oisin got his.

One day, stretching on my tippy toes to reach over Oisin, my eyes were drawn to our two rescues, Sully and Bentley, down the hall behind the baby gate, watching the French toast orgy. They stood like lifers on Devil Island, eyes sullen and bleak. It sucked the savor right out of breakfast for me. I didn't think the two little guys had been watching. Turns out, they'd been keeping a running tally.

The next Sunday, we freed the prisoners. And Oona, Oisin and Sully lined up for toast. But Bentley was in a tough spot. He was a deposed ruler. Oona had taken the reins from his tiny paws when she was 13-weeks-old. He never lived it down. Still, Bentley had his pride. He wanted toast, too, but it'd be unbecoming for Little Caesar to actually *ask* for some. While the others slurped and snorflled, he sat in with living room with his back to us. But I saw his eyes click sideways every time I tore toast. He was just too stubborn to allow a tear roll down his cheek.

The dogs finished their toast. They licked the plate clean. Then I

took Bentley his stack, exactly four pieces, just like everyone else got...

Bentley came to us from my daughter, who worked for rescue group in Nashville. He'd been found on the roadside as a juvenile, and had been in four or five homes because he suffered separation anxiety so bad when his new owners left for work that he grawed holes in walls. He was a victim of a self-fulfilling prophecy. When my daughters other dogs didn't get along with Bentley, Peg and I took him and I was determined that he'd never feel abandoned again.

I was nearly undone by toast.

But when I squared the books with Bentley that day, he smiled back at me with sunshine in his eyes. All was well. I'd treated him with the respect *he* thought he was due.

At McMillan's House of Fur, I don't even pretend to make the rules. I just try to understand them. And comply. Every dog has his story. Every dog has his needs. They're all worth my respect. And my toast...