

Tobias Learns About Brains

By Jean Bennett

Tobias was a happy puppy, playing all the time, exploring the world of dirt and strange smells that floated past his nose. He loved everything and everything loved him right back.



Tobias's Aunt Rosey took care of EVERYTHING, so he didn't have to think about ANYTHING. He didn't have time to worry because he was having so much fun chasing everything that moved, rolled, hopped or crawled.



A few months went by and Aunt Rosey started sending Tobias to the farm down the street. "To school", Aunt Rosey had said. Tobias liked going there, but, there was something that made him feel sad when he was there. He wasn't sure what it was, and he was having fun, so he ignored it. Tobias was learning and growing, and having a wonderful time.

A few more weeks went by and he was at the farm more and more. He was learning all sorts of fun things, like how to act when there was a lot of people around, how to cross roads, and how to carry things to people--"fetch" they called it. It was so much fun! AND, they kept telling him how good he was at it.

Still, that sadness was there every now and then. Tobias had no idea why. It was very confusing because he really liked going to school at the farm. It seemed he had no reason to feel sad. "What WAS it all about?!", he yipped to himself.

While sniffing his way home, Tobias decided he would ask the Wise Old Dog who lived next door. So that night he stopped at his house—Wise Old Dog said, "Well, Tobias, good to see you. I understand you are going to school. What are you learning?"

Tobias answered (he was a little excited to be telling Wise Old Dog all about it, so it all came out at once), "All sorts of fun things and they tell me I'm good at it and they gave me a yellow vest with writing on it and I like all the other puppies and the people too!"



"Oh, wow," said Wise Old Dog. "What does the writing on the vest look like?"

Tobias happily picked up a stick and made the marks of the writing in the dirt...S.E.D. "What's it mean?" he barked with an excited yip sound.

“Oh Tobias! That’s wonderful!” Wise Old Dog said showing his teeth with an old dog grin. “You’re going to be a Seeing Eye Dog. That’s a very important job. You will have a lot to learn. Say, Tobias, you don’t usually drop by at this time. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Yes! I feel sad sometimes when I am at school, but I like it so much...this is very confusing. Can you tell me why?”

Wise Old Dog answered, “Well, you know dogs have two brains don’t you?”

“Two Brains?”

“Yes – a thinking brain and a feeling brain. Your thinking brain is telling you one thing and your feeling brain is telling you another. That is what seems confusing.”

“How can I get them to tell me the same thing?” Tobias’s fur was all wrinkled between his ears because he was thinking so hard.

Wise Old Dog scratched his chin with his back foot as he thought about the answer. (After a minute Tobias wondered if he would ever say something again.) Wise Old Dog finally answered, “Come here again tomorrow night with the answer to this question: What pops into your thoughts when you’re feeling sad?”

Tobias pricked his ears up, “Huh? I don’t get it.”

“What do you THINK of at the same time you’re FEELING sad?” Wise Old Dog woofed.

“Oh, okay! When I feel sad tomorrow I’ll pay attention to what I’m thinking of most, and I’ll come by tomorrow after school and tell you.” Tobias was so excited that he was going to get an answer that he did his little puppy run all the way home and didn’t smell one thing!

Tobias was especially excited to go to the farm school the next day because now he knew—he was going to have an important job some day and he had a lot to learn! And, he didn’t forget about his assignment from Wise Old Dog.

About half way through the day, there it was—he felt sad. He remembered his assignment and paid attention to what popped into his mind. “What am I thinking about?” he asked himself, wrinkling his skin between his ears again.

He was thinking about Aunt Rosey and it made him sad to do that. “But I love Aunt Rosey. Why would that be sad?” he thought, and then he was confused all over again.

That night on his way home he told Wise Old Dog what he thought about when he was feeling sad. “I was thinking about Aunt Rosey. I’m still confused because I love her. Why would that make me sad?” he asked.

Wise Old Dog said, “Think more. What did the sadness FEEL like.

Tobias thought and thought, and finally said, “Like I wanted her with me.”

Wise Old Dog said, “Does it feel like you miss Aunt Rosey?”

“Yeah,” Tobias whimpered.

“Okay,” Wise Old Dog said. “Your thinking brain is starting to match your feeling brain, but you’re not quite there yet.”

“Why not? What else is there?”

Wise Old Dog thought for a long time again before answering in his low growly voice, “Because, when you miss someone you love, there is ALWAYS another reason that comes with it. Someday you’re going to have an important job and you’re going to have to figure out these feelings on your own. So, I’ll help you practice how to do it.

“First, summarize what we know so far: You love your farm school. You love Aunt Rosey. And, they are not in the same place, so you miss Aunt Rosey. Do we have this right so far?”

“Yes. I think so,” Tobias said slowly because he wasn’t really sure yet.

Wise Old Dog answered even slower, “It’s my experience that puppies get so excited about learning new things that they usually don’t miss anybody, so it’s up to you to figure this out. One way to figure it out is to make both of your brains work at the same time.”

“How do I do that?” interrupted Tobias.

“You make both of your brains work at the same time by THINKING about your FEELINGS. One way to do this is to ask yourself questions, then pay attention to how you feel when you ask.

“Oh, dog! This is soooo hard!” Tobias howled.

Wise Old Dog said, “I’ll help you. Once you do it a few times it gets easy.”

“I’m not sure I can do this....I don’t understand,” Tobias was really whimpering now.

“I’ll help by asking the questions, but YOU need to think about how they make you feel. You can do this! Okay, here we go....Why do you miss Aunt Rosey?”

Tobias whined, “I don’t know, I just do.”

“That’s not turning on your thinking brain—that’s staying stuck in the feeling brain. Take your time and try again with another question. Remember to pay attention to how you feel when you answer the question.

“Are you afraid to be away from Aunt Rosey? ”

Tobias was thinking so hard he was flat out on the ground with his ears flopped in the dirt. He repeated slowly so he could think about it, “Am I afraid to be away from Aunt Rosey?”

“NO!”, he started to perk up. “I have fun when I’m away, I like it. I’m not afraid at all!”

“Did you feel sad to think about that question?”

“No. I felt good.”

Wise Old Dog said, “Very good! That’s how you use BOTH brains at the same time.”

Tobias said, “Okay, I think I get how to do this. Ask me another question.”

“Are you afraid you’ll make a mistake and Aunt Rosey won’t be there to help you?”

Thinking about how he felt about the question for a minute, Tobias answered, “No. I make mistakes all the time at school. My teacher, Professor Rex, says that’s how we learn. He’s a great big dog with big teeth, but I like him.

“I felt good answering this question. This is not so hard after all. Ask me another question.”

“Do you feel Aunt Rosey misses you?”

Tobias didn’t have to think very hard about this one, “Yes. She tells me she does all the time.”

“And do you feel sad thinking about that?”

Tobias very softly whimpered, “Yes.”

Wise Old Dog wagged his tail so hard it shook the ground. “YYEESSS, Tobias. You did it! You found your answer!”

Shyly Tobias whispered, “I don’t understand.” He was still feely sad from thinking about Aunt Rosey missing him.

Wise Old Dog quieted his excited growly voice and said, “You feel sad sometimes because Aunt Rosey said she misses you—not because you miss her when you’re at school. Is this correct?”

Tobias is starting to understand better now and replies quietly, “Yes.”

Wise Old Dog continues, “There is still more thinking about your feelings to go, but your almost there. Are you ready for the next question?”

“Woof,” said Tobias with his tail wagging. His thinking brain was working again so he wasn’t feeling the sadness as much and he was ready to find out more.

“Do you feel you need to stay with Aunt Rosie so she doesn’t miss you?”

Tobias had to really think again about this. “Yes,” he said, “I feel bad because I’m leaving her all by herself.”

Wise Old Dog continued, “And you can’t be in two places at once, so you can’t fix this problem. Correct?” Wise Old Dog did not wait for an answer. “Really take your time and think about how you’re feeling when I say the next thing. Ready?” Tobias thumped his tail once. “You can’t be in two places at once, and Aunt Rosey misses you when you’re gone, so you think this makes her sad.”

Tobias whispered to himself what Wise Old Dog said. He did it very slowly so he could pay attention to how he felt when he said it, “I...can’t...be...in...two places...at once...and Aunt Rosey...misses me.” Then he exclaimed the rest real fast because he already knew how he felt, “I think this makes her sad!

“I feel good when I say it.”

Wise Old Dog said, “That was EXCELLENT, Tobias. You now have both your thinking brain and your feeling brain telling you the same thing. So now you can fix it.”

Tobias whined, “I can’t fix this...I can’t be in two places at once!”

Wise Old Dog said, “You’re feeling without thinking again.” He paused before continuing, “Why don’t you just ask Aunt Rosey what you can do to help her feel better?”

Suddenly something felt different for Tobias. He felt GOOD, because now he knew why he had felt sad at school, and he KNEW Aunt Rosey would have the solution. His whole body knew that this was right, too. His tail was wagging so hard his ears were flopping all over.

He was so excited to find out what he could do to help Aunt Rosey, he romped and yipped and yapped all the way home.

“Aunt Rosy. Aunt Rosey,” he barked loudly as he flew in the door.

“I’m here!”, she answered. “Why are you so excited?”

“Wise Old Dog taught me about our two brains and how they may not tell us the same thing. If they don’t tell us the same thing we don’t feel right. You said you miss me when I go to school, but I still have to leave you, so I can’t fix it. That made me sad. I want to know what...”

Aunt Rosey didn’t let him finish. “Oh, Tobias. You don’t have to worry about me. I say I miss you because I love you so much, and loving you can never be sad for me. When my feeling

brain thinks of me I feel sad for a little bit, but then my thinking brain thinks of you and how happy you are, and the sadness is gone. My heart is full of love when I see you so happy scampering off to the farm school.”

Tobias asked, “You mean, to help you, all I have to do is be happy?”

Aunt Rosey smiled, “Yes. I will always miss you, but I will be happy at the same time because loving you is the best happy there is.”

Tobias understood and he knew he would not be sad anymore when he went to school. His thinking brain and his feeling brain were both telling him the same thing: When Aunt Rosey said she missed him, it really meant she loved him and love makes us happy.

The next year Tobias graduated from the farm school with great parties and congratulations from everyone. Professor Rex assigned him his new job—it was with a person that could not see, named Sam. Through his time with Sam there were many things that confused Tobias, so each time he used questions to help him THINK about his FEELINGS. It always helped him find the answers. This helped Tobias be VERY good at his job of helping Sam.

Sam and Tobias grew to love each other very much, and sometimes when apart they would miss each other. But, Tobias already knew what this really meant.

It meant...“I love you.”



The End.