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*A Dog's Life*

*W*hat is it exactly that makes us humans envious of a dog's life? Is it because deep down inside we know that our dogs lead happy, simple lives? That they don't need to seek a wise man on top of a mountain to find themselves, because they know exactly where they are? That they have no worries to speak of—no bills, business meetings, final exams, or power lunches? That they're not interested in impressing a new girlfriend or boyfriend and they're not angry if you missed their birthday?

We could learn a few things from our dogs. I know I could. One of my dogs is always telling me to take a break and enjoy life. After all, what could be easier than living in the moment?



## Live Spontaneously

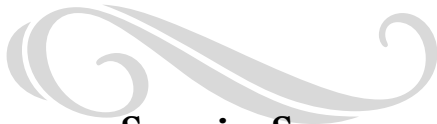
Boomer, a yellow Labrador Retriever, greeted us with a big smile. He carried a stick that was much too large—nearly as long as his body. First, he gave me the stick to throw. I threw it and he leaped after it. He caught it neatly in the air, then brought it back and gave it to my husband, Larry, to throw. Larry threw it as far as he could, and Boomer scampered after it and brought it back to me. And so it went.



Boomer didn't know us, but he clearly decided it was more fun to make up his own game on the spot than to just hang out. Perhaps he was waiting for his owner to arrive as he brought each stick back—first to me, then to Larry. Anyway, we all had fun.

***Kodiak says . . .***

**It's never a good idea to let dogs run loose. A dog can bother the neighbors or be hit by a car.**



## Surprise Someone with Something You've Learned

*H*aegl the Malamute peered into the bathroom window. His mask and dark eyes made him look like a bandit as he peeked in. He wagged his head from side to side in a doggy grin.

I was washing my hands in the bathroom when I saw him—the *upstairs* bathroom! I rushed outside to see him balancing on a ladder that lay against the side of the house. It had snowed recently and the

*Haegl says . . .*

**Don't leave things out that dogs can get into. We'll surprise you with our ingenuity.**

snow had anchored the ladder in place. Earlier that day, we climbed the ladder to knock the snow off the roof and Haegl watched. Maybe a little too well.

He had put one foot on each rung and had climbed up far enough to peer into the bathroom window.

“Come down from there!” I said. And Haegl hopped down, laughing as he did. It was a great joke!

## Be Who You Are

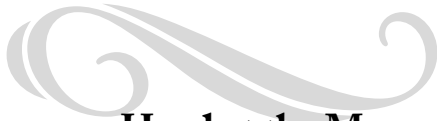
Conan was a black Newfoundland-Samoyed mix with long hair and one ear that would stick straight up and another that would flop over. He hated obeying commands but loved to pull, just like his sled dog ancestors.

One day I put a sled dog harness on him. He hung back, eyeing me curiously, thinking I would correct him for pulling. Instead, I



encouraged him. He began a little prance with his front feet, tossing his head like a horse who has finally been given enough rein. He laid his ears flat and pulled. And pulled. And pulled. When we stopped, he turned to me with a big smile.

He was good at this! I let him be who he wanted to be, instead of trying to make him something he wasn't. He needed to follow his own way, not mine.



## **Howl at the Moon**

A lone howl rose, carried on the wind. The moon was only partly lit and peeked through the autumn clouds. Another howl, then another rose.

The song came first from the coyotes along the bluffs of the valley, their silver muzzles and yellow eyes gleaming in the bright moonlight. One by one, the dogs answered the call. Cody's shrill tenor mixed with Razor's deep baritone as the Huskies began their wild serenade. The dogs across the valley picked up the call: a Collie, two St. Bernards, another Husky, and a mixed breed all lifted their heads. They sang with pure passion for the song.

When it was over, they wagged their tails and pranced in play. No reason, really, for all that howling. Doing something for the passion of it is sometimes all that matters.

## Take a Siesta

It's midday and my Alaskan Malamutes are quiet. They're all taking a siesta.

Kira lies with her legs in the air and her lips drawn back in a smile. Kodiak lies on the cool tiles, his eyes half shut and his toes stretched ever so slightly. Haegl snores beneath my desk, his ears occasionally twitching. Lazy dogs? Hardly. They know how to beat the summer's heat.

Dogs sleep twelve to sixteen hours a day. Naps are a way to recharge. As soon as it gets a bit later, and cooler, they'll be active and ready to go. Sometimes a nap is all you need to regain your energy.





## Stick to a Schedule

Dogs are creatures of habit. It's comforting to know when things will happen and it gives them something to look forward to. Look at your dog. He knows when it's dinnertime. He knows when you go to work, when you come home, and when you walk him. Whether it's playtime or dinnertime, dogs know.

*Haegl says . . .*

**Walk your dog every day. It's healthy for both of you.**

Haegl wakes me up around eight o'clock every morning. Kira knows breakfast is at 8:30. If Larry's home, it's long walk day. Afternoon is siesta time. Dinner is at 5:30. Last time out is at 10 P.M.

Establish a schedule. Things are less complicated.

## There's Safety in Numbers

*B*reeowowerrrr!” Cuawn barked. The blue merle Australian Shepherd stood by the fence with his hackles up. Beside him stood Conan, the Newfoundland-Samoyed mix; Shadow, the Keeshond; and Mirin, the Siberian Husky mix.

The scary man approached the fence. Cuawn looked from side to side. Conan had puffed himself up—a veritable wall of black fur. Shadow yapped loudly—how dare this man try to enter the backyard! Mirin glared at him with her icy blue eyes. Alone, Cuawn would never stand his ground, but with four buddies, he was not afraid.



The man backed down and went around to the door. I heard the doorbell and peered out the window.

“Can you get the meter readings?” he asked sheepishly.

As I walked around to the back, my four protectors followed me. Cuawn strutted beside me, proud of having made that man back down.



## Hang Tough

Sandy Whelchel told me about her dog, Ebony, a black Labrador Retriever, and the strength some dogs have. Ebony was six months old when she got out of her yard and ran in front of a car in their rural neighborhood in Colorado.

“It wasn’t just a small car,” Sandy said, “but a full-size Nissan.” Sandy saw the whole accident happen, and the car ended up on top of Ebony. “I could see from the house that she was still alive, but I was heartbroken because there seemed no way she could survive that and I felt sure I’d have to put her down.”

Sandy’s husband, Andy, ran out with a jack and cranked the car off the dog. Ebony leaped up and raced around the outside of the house three times before waiting for Sandy to let her in at the back door. Sandy quickly rushed Ebony to the veterinarian.

With the exception of a couple of gashes—one that was eight inches long—the vet pronounced Ebony fit. Sandy cared for Ebony. Each day, Sandy washed her wounds with antibacterial soap and Ebony stood stoically without whimpering or snapping. By the end of a week, the wounds had healed perfectly.

“That dog taught me a lot,” Sandy said. “Ebony taught me how to hang tough.”



## Whining Works

Squeak, squeak!” said Shadow. He stared out of his crate. It was morning now—why wasn’t his owner coming upstairs to let the dogs out?

The other dogs waited patiently in their crates as Shadow squeaked. Conan exchanged glances with Cuawn. They knew the game.

“Shhh!” came their owner’s voice.

“Squeak, squeak!” whined Shadow.

“Shhh!”

“Squeak!”

“All right,” said his owner as she appeared to let them out. “Yes, I’ll take you for a walk.”



## Love Is Stronger than Death

I don't believe in ghosts. I've never gone to a psychic. I scoff at *Sightings*. I tell you this up front because I don't have a good explanation for what happened. But maybe, just maybe, the bond between a person and a dog can be so intense that it can reach beyond death.



“Kiana has bone cancer,” Jim announced. Jim had been my vet for a long time, and I trusted his diagnosis. “It’s not arthritis like we thought. The problem is where the cancer is—it’s not very treatable and the prognosis isn’t good.”

I stared in shock at Kiana, who lay there in pain. Kiana was a white Alaskan Malamute and had been my best friend for thirteen years. She had a handful of agility and working titles and did everything I asked of her.

The symptoms had started innocuously enough—a small limp. But she was thirteen—old for a Malamute. We had treated her with anti-inflammatories and, for a while, the limp had gotten better. But now she was in terrible pain.

“We’ll treat the pain,” I said, feeling awful. “When the pain medicine no longer works, I’ll put her to sleep.”

The pain became too intense after four days, and Kiana and I saw Jim again.



After the euthanasia, I tossed Kiana’s collar in my SUV. I didn’t want to think about her death and I didn’t want to think about her. Instead, I threw myself into the book I was writing. But little things kept reminding me of her. At night, I’d dream of her (something that never happened with other dogs I’d had to euthanize), and when I looked at her empty crate, for a brief second I’d see a white Malamute standing there. I thought I was losing my mind.

Then, one evening when I got home and was opening the front door of my house, my parked SUV started moving toward me. I leaped out of the way, then opened the car door to find the gear lever had been knocked into drive. I put the gear into park and put the parking brake on.

*Funny, I thought. Kiana used to knock cars into gear all the time.*

The next day I received a phone call from the vet telling me that Kiana’s ashes were ready to be picked up. I drove down to the vet’s office, occasionally glimpsing something white in the back of my SUV in my rearview mirror. I took the ashes and drove home.

When I got home, I took Kiana's ashes out and then decided to fold the seats up so people could sit in the car again. As I folded the car seats up, I stared at the gift Kiana had left in the car for me: a big gourmet biscuit I had given her about a month before. I usually don't buy these, so I recognized it immediately. I had watched her eat it the day I got it for her. And yet, here it was.

I picked up the biscuit and then searched for her collar, finding it on the passenger seat. I took the collar, ashes, and biscuit and lay them on my desk, where I spend a large portion of my time (and where she used to lie under at my feet). The odd occurrences and glimpses of white fur stopped. I had one more dream about her, in which she was happy to be beside me once more.

I suppose I could explain all the strange things away: I left the car in gear, Kiana didn't really eat that biscuit, and I was imagining she was here when she wasn't. Even if those incidents can be explained, I'm not going to try. There are some bonds between humans and dogs that need no explanation. And there is a love that reaches beyond even death.

## Try Something Scary

Splash! Sadie the Pit Bull mix stared at the wading pool, quivering. She was terrified of the water, but there was something about the pool she found irresistible. She edged closer, watching the light dance on the patterns beneath the water. The sunlight glinted, making the surface shimmer and dance.



She poked her nose at the water cautiously. There they were again: pretty shapes beneath the water. They rippled and moved each time

***Ranger says . . .***

**Baby pools are great, but big pools can be dangerous. Keep unsupervised dogs away from big pools and teach your dog how to walk out of the pool on his own when you're both enjoying it.**

she touched the water. She stuck a paw in tentatively. And again. What were those things on the bottom?

She stepped in and began to paw them, no longer afraid of the pool.



## Be Curious

Waves rumbled over the sands as Serena the Collie walked along the beach. The sun was setting, and while the sand was still warm, it had cooled enough for her tender paws. She spent some time chasing the waves as they rolled in and out again.

The briny smell of the ocean filled her nostrils, along with another smell she wasn't familiar with. Something odd. She walked over to a pile of sand to see it scuttle away. She blinked, not believing her eyes.

Serena caught another movement in the corner of her eye. What was that? A lump of sand scuttled away from her again. It was a ghost crab—a crab the color of the sand, which only comes out in the evenings and at night. The crab scurried into its hole.

Serena now saw the game. She chased all the crabs back into their holes. What a great game! And she wouldn't have discovered it if she hadn't been curious.



## Taste Everything

Ferdi, the Shetland Sheepdog puppy, was curious. He was in his new backyard and there were all sorts of unfamiliar and exciting things to smell and taste. He tried a little of the grass clippings, then the leaves and some pine needles. Munch, munch. Everything was new.

These things aren't necessarily good for a puppy, but Ferdi learns about them by tasting them. He's open-minded about things and will decide by experience if he likes them or not.

Thankfully, we have more sense than a puppy, knowing what is safe and what is not, but we've lost a bit of our adventurous spirit when it comes to eating things. Maybe you've never tasted caviar or sushi or tofu. Like Ferdi, you'll never know if they're tasty until you try them.

### *Kira says . . .*

**Dogs don't know what's poisonous. Keep all dangerous items out of reach and don't use lawn and garden chemicals that can be licked off or absorbed through the skin. Certain foods and beverages are dangerous to dogs, too. These include chocolate, onions, raisins, grapes, alcohol, raw salmon, and anything with caffeine.**



## Be Amazed

Conan stood perfectly still, looking up into the sky. He had never seen such a strange sight. The gray sky was filled with white flakes, falling down thick and fast. They covered his black fur, turning it white. The swirling flakes fell into his eyes, making him blink, and melted on his tongue. What was this marvelous stuff?

I laughed as I saw him, and scooped up a handful of the fluffy white powder and tossed it at him. The snow exploded in his face and he hopped back for a second. He nosed the snow and found that it moved. It tasted good, too.

I tossed a snowball into a drift and he ran after it, throwing himself in. He found himself swimming through a sea of white. Turning around, he bounded back and I threw another snowball for him to chase. Around and around he went, laughing as he did.

He had discovered snow!

