

47 Years of Dog

2013

Throughout our forty-seven years of marriage, we have always had a dog, sometimes two.

Growing up, my wife's family had a dog, while in my family all we could do was hope for one – my mother was not a dog person. Period.

We have had black and chocolate Labradors, a Kerry Blue Terrier, a rescued Rough Collie, and now for more than a decade we have had Smooth Collies – first, Clyde for 10 years until he died, and now Fergus, for 3 years and counting.

Bailey, a small 16-year old Poodle, is the new dog-addition to our family Not one, mind you, we wanted or sought out, but one we inherited from our youngest daughter who relocated to Boston to discover a new career.

Why don't you take him with you? She scoffed at the idea: he could never endure a trip across country, it would kill him! We hemmed and hawed a few months hoping another solution would come along. It didn't. Bailey moved in with Fergus and the old folks. Count this as an example of what parents will do for their children - and their dogs.

Speaking frankly – with no offense intended - Bailey was left with us to die, a sort of dog-hospice arrangement He was on his last legs - half-blind, arthritic, mostly deaf and walked with a limp. Just what we needed at our age - another dog death! Thanks to the arrival of Fergus, we had only recently recovered from Clyde's passing.

Surprise! Bailey waddled into our house, took charge, issued commands, reorganized our lives and never looked back! Make no mistake, he is cute and lovable but I have no words to describe how demanding he can be!! The word: No! Forget it! Bailey doesn't accept No! for an answer. The only acceptable answer he responds to is Yes!

Bailey does not bark commands, he stomps them out with his feet, and if that does not get your attention, he scratches them out. The first step is the huffy puffy strut: one front leg at a time lifted and jammed onto the hardwood floor creating a loud click-click, click-click sound with his nails. He demands attention! Ignore him? No

problem. He begins a 3-minute rapid fire click-click, click-click performance, which is sort of cute until it grates. Still no response? OK, hear this! Bailey moves to a close-by door or even a piece of furniture to begin Act Two. First the huffy puffy strut with the click-click, click-click routine followed by a nerve-piercing scraaaatch! Pause for effect, then another scraaaatch! This scratch sound can be favorably compared to one created by scraping your fingernails over a chalk board. Can you hear me now? Had enough?

You little devil! What do you want?

One of our pre-arrival Bailey concerns was how would our three-year old 60-pound Fergus react to a live-in intruder? Were we just asking for trouble? I tear up because Fergus welcomed the ancient Bailey with the utmost deference, respect and caring – we were touched! If Bailey was having trouble negotiating the step to the back yard, Fergus was there to help with a nudge from his long snout; if Bailey preferred Fergus's bed, here mate, it's all yours, enjoy it! I'll sleep on the floor close by. If Bailey went to Fergus' dish during feeding time to see what he was served and to take a few bites, Fergus backed away to a safe distance, no problem! Help yourself! When treats were dispensed, Fergus stood behind Bailey allowing the elderly guest to be first. And Bailey's reaction? This is the treatment I expected and certainly deserve! Truly, we have a 7-pound Alpha dog reigning in our household.

Let me not gloss over the reality of Bailey's situation. He is an old, old dog living out his final period – so are we, I suppose - and already we have witnessed a couple of spells where we were not sure if he was sleeping or had slipped into a coma. Each time, thank goodness, he snapped back, took charge and reassured us that life would continue. A neighbor reported that small dogs like Bailey can live as long as 20 years. If that's the case, he might yet outlive us all but I think not.

Bailey is curled up, sound asleep on the floor close by my feet; he looks as limp as a rag doll without a bone in its body. He is home. He is our dog now.

Epilogue

Bailey passed away on June 2, 2014 and sleeps peacefully in our garden next to the gardenia bush and marked by a stepping stone. He is sorely missed.

