

Living with Angel

By Karl C. Priest (with much help from Melody Priest) January 27, 2017 (revised 5-22-17)

In 2000 a short-haired black Labrador Retriever was let loose in our neighborhood. My mother-in-law tried unsuccessfully to locate the owner. She kept the dog when it became apparent the cast-off was pregnant. The father must have been a mongrel because all seven puppies looked different. All of the puppies got homes and one of them, Angel, picked us.

The pups were kept in a puppy pen and when my wife (Melody) would visit the pen Angel would gently lick her hand and soon won Melody's heart with the love only a dog can give. Then Angel let me know she loved me too. I was on the mower when Melody brought Angel to our property. When I shut off the motor, Angel romped across the field and claimed my love. For many years, as I mowed the large yard, Angel would lay in a shady area and watch until I was almost finished. As I got closer to completing the job, she would stand, and start walking toward where my route would take me around the house. Then she would run ahead of me around the house staying about twenty feet in front of the mower as I went to the shed as if she were racing me.

When fully grown, Angel was a large ball of dark chocolate fur with a fluffy tail. She had so much hair, that she looked like a seventy-pound ball of fur with a snout and four paws. The last year of her life we had to keep her trimmed for her comfort (her belly hair would knot up) and for hygienic purposes. That was a weekly chore that all three of us dreaded.

FIRST YEAR

Angel must have been terrified at her first bath which was in a garden tub, but she tolerated it. She did have to bark at the other dog she saw (in the mirror surrounding the tub)! After that, Melody would get in the shower and sit on a stool to bath her. Then we dried her with large towels while she circled the bathroom looking for a way out. The hair dryer wasn't popular with her either.

As a puppy she would chase a bouncing rubber ball down a small hill in our front yard and proudly bring it back. Inside, she would chase it down the hallway.

She also loved to rip the stuffing out of toy stuffed animals.

In the evenings I would take her out to walk after I got home from work. I was trying to get her to stay with me off the leash, when her mother and four siblings came running by for their daily romp through the woods. Angel took off with them. When I went to get her (they always came back to the puppy pen area at my in-laws) she was strongly (but humanely) reprimanded. A few days later it happened again. This time, when I called her she stopped and looked back at me. It was obvious her heart and instincts were in conflict. Her instincts won. This time she did not return to the puppy pen. We thought we had lost her. I even drove for miles along Poca River Road calling for her. She showed up the next morning near the pen and never ran off again.

Early on, we had concerns about her ability to learn to go outside to potty. She would pee when we would reach to pet her. I would gently swat her with a fly-swatter and she would squat and pee. Thankfully, I read that Angel was simply showing submission. After that, we loved on her and soon she was a perfect angel regarding her eliminations. Until she was house broken, we used a crate for her to stay in at night. The crate was stocked with stuffed toys and a super soft cushion. During the day we would put her in a large dog cage in the garage. When we would come home, she was out of the cage. Finally, my father-in-law hid in the garage and watched her crawl up and over the chain-link fenced cage. I installed a roof on the cage.

When she was ready to be left alone with free roaming of the house, we would put peanut butter in a “rhino” and leave it for her to lick after we left. Soon, when she saw us get the rhino, she would go to the bedroom, hop onto the bed and wait to be “tucked in”. Speaking of the bed, she loved to sleep on it lying on her back with her paws in the air. We called it her “radar paws” because she was on guard duty.

The first few months we had her, when outside, she had to be tethered to a cable. The first time she was attached, she took off, reached the end of the cable and did a semi-flip. She learned quickly that there was a distance limit. One of the best things we did was purchase an invisible fence. She quickly learned her boundary and had over an acre to run freely. Once, though, while chasing a deer she ran right through the fence (which was a warning buzz followed by a mild shock).

WALKS

Angel loved *taking us* for a walk. She really responded to the word “walk” and would prance around excitedly. As we walked I would affectionately call her a “friendly-snout, flop-ear, furry-belly, fluff-paw, flipping-tail, fuzzy- butt mutt.”

The walks always included several sniffing stops. Of course, she would run towards a squirrel or rabbit, but never reaching the end of her leash. During one walk she investigated a bee and we had to pull the stinger from her nose.

When she would no longer navigate the steps into the garage when it was time for a walk we would let her out the back door. I would open the side garage door and sit down to put on my walking shoes. Angel would come around the house and walk past me in the garage huffing and puffing, then wait until I put the leash on her. Then, as always (but decreasing in power as the days progressed) she would eagerly pull me down the driveway to lead me on a walk.

Walking changed from leading us with a fairly tight leash to moseying beside us with a loose leash. The last year, we let her walk as long as she wanted and she would head home after about thirty minutes. The last few walks she did not go far and was done in about ten minutes.

RIDES

The first time she went to the vet was her first truck ride. She hunkered down in the back seat of the cab. When she got out at the vet’s she panicked because the noise from the nearby Interstate terrified her and she took off at full speed. The leash could have

severed one of my fingers had I not moved it quickly before she got to the end of the leash. Soon, Angel came to love going for a ride.

Angel had at least a dozen different bandanas and she got excited when she saw one of us get a bandana out to put on her. She knew we were going for a ride. She would hold still until the bandanna was tied around her neck, then with tail wagging at full speed she would run to the door. She would easily leap into the backseat area of the truck cab as soon as the door was opened. During her last couple of years she had to use a ramp and during the last few months, the ramp became too difficult to go up and down without help from both her “mom and dad”.

She did not mind going to the vet. She would go, on her own, to the scale to be weighed then she would hop up on the exam room bench, taking a seat away from one of us. The staff were another matter. No tech was allowed to approach her without getting a warning growl. The clinic put a code on her chart that indicated she was a risk. They would muzzle her when we had to leave her. Angel was all bluff and never bit a single person anywhere. The great vets at Cross Lanes Veterinary Hospital were treated the same way, except for one. Dr. Allison. Dascoli, a petite soft-spoken lady, was allowed (by Angel) to approach and touch Angel. Angel really trusted Dr. Dascoli.

When we passed horses or cows we would say “horsies” or “moo-cows” and she would put her front paws on the arm rest and excitedly look for them usually smearing the window with her nose.

MIDDLE YEARS

After the puppies in her litter got too big to stay in the house my in-laws moved them to a fenced area near a shelter across the farm road from their house. Late one night a terrible thunder storm hit and my in-laws rescued the pups by loading them into the trunk of their car to take them to the safety of their house. Angel must have been traumatized because at the slightest hint of thunder she would leap into our bed and snuggle between us until the storm had passed. In her last two years, she was not affected by the loudest thunder clap. She lost her hearing late in her fourteenth year and went from coming from clear across the house at the slightest crackling of opening a cinnamon Jolly Rancher (which she dearly loved) to not having a clue the candy was being eaten. She went from running to meet us when hearing the garage door open, to having us need to stomp on the floor so the vibrations would let her know we were in the same room. Angel was no longer afraid of the sweeper although she would avoid it. Instead of hearing our loving words she only saw the love on our faces as we continued to speak to her as if she could hear us. Instead of hearing our calls to “go for a walk” she saw our exaggerated hand gestures signally her to “come.”

She had plenty of chew bones, but her favorite chews were rawhide 2 by 2 inch pieces. If she didn't eat it immediately, she would hide it somewhere. It was usually in plain sight, nudged with her nose beside a piece of furniture or up against the wall. Sometimes she would hide them down in chair cushions. She would not do it if she saw us watching, but would move to another room. A great demonstration of her love was when she would go to my side of the bed and nudge one under my pillow. For the last year or so of her life Angel lost interest in all except what we called “greenies” which were supposed to be for dental hygiene.

Angel never acted eager to be petted by strangers. She would tolerate some touching then move away. She allowed lots of petting from us and sometimes (we said her “pet meter” was low) she would nudge one of our hands until we petted her. After she got enough, she would contently lie down.

She was the only pup of the litter who would go up and down a long string of basement steps (8 ½ feet and fourteen narrow steps), but during her last two years, she avoided even two steps and acted confused when confronted with only one step.

When she was about six years old she cried one day when I knuckled her ear which was a gentle way to pet her that she loved. She also refused to eat and would even walk away from a bite of pizza. I built a casket to bury her because it seemed as if she could not be helped. Thankfully, one of the vets at Cross Lanes Veterinary Hospital diagnosed her with Addison’s Disease. She remained on expensive medication for the rest of her life and the casket was dismantled.

Over the years she had two knee surgeries (one on each hind leg) which prevented her from becoming a three-legged dog. The technical name was “anterior cruciate ligament” (ACL) and she got a pin in each leg. After she came home she had to undergo a regimented gradually increasing distance walking schedule.

GOING OUT

She never barked when she wanted to go out. She would come up to us and huff-and-puff or, at night, she would stick her snout into the vertical blinds and rattle them. To come back in she would just stare at the door and expect it to be opened.

When going out off-leash at home and on-leash at the beach, Angel always had to stop and stare through the railing before proceeding on.

She had to go out more frequently her last eighteen months probably due to her kidney problems. Almost every night, at about 2:30 am she got us up. At the beach, that meant going down and back up 42 steps!

During her last year, she would not come up the front steps to get to the front door. She would come around to the back door. I built a ramp so she could get on the deck easier. Since the back light was close to the door, and would draw insects, I first tried solar lights across the deck. When that proved not to be bright enough, I ran a cord and mounted a regular light away from the door.

After we started keeping her trimmed, she wore a fur coat if it was cold or a raincoat if it was raining when she went out. She would patiently wait on us to get the coat attached.

When we saw her flounder by trying to jump onto the deck, I erected a fence that left her only two safe options to get on the deck. Sometimes as she walked along the fence she would stop and stare, obviously confused about what to do.

For her first thirteen years she loved to chase (never catching) deer, birds, turkeys, and cats.

TRAVEL

During long trips, Angel would either look out a window or lie down on the cushioned floor we prepared in the back of the truck cab. About every thirty minutes she would nudge Melody with her nose so that she would be petted. This happened even when Melody was napping. For some reason, she never bothered me when Melody was driving. She must have just needed some Mommy love.

We had a special travel watering “dish”, but found that Angel preferred us to get two cups of water from McDonald’s and sit them in the console drink holders for her use.

The first time she saw the beach, after a nine hour ride, Angel ran full-speed circles around me as I revolved the 15-foot leash over my head and spun with her. She loved to chase shore birds during beach walks and knew just how far she could charge before she ran out of leash length. She enjoyed splashing and laying in tidal puddles. Her last year, she had no interest in even going down to the beach. She much preferred the air-conditioned condo.

One time, returning home from the beach, she began crying. We had to exit the West Virginia Turnpike. Her pain was due to a burr she had picked up that just then had moved to where it hurt her.

Once we took her to eastern Pennsylvania when I did a two day [program for a camp](#). On a second trip to PA we attempted to go up and back in one day for a family emergency. On the way back, late at night, we got tired and got off the Interstate. We pulled into a motel just to ask for directions to a pet friendly location. The kind clerk gave us a room on a back hallway near a door we used for Angel’s entry and exit. She was a prefect guest!

Another time Angel accompanied us to South Carolina. I went to a meeting and she stayed with Melody in the motel. When a food delivery came, Angel went into a protective mode and barked so viciously the delivery man had to carefully pass the food through a crack in the open doorway.

When we traveled, Melody packed a separate suitcase for Angel and always took along Angel’s medicines and detailed medical charts.

LATTER YEARS

As she got older she would pace around the house for several minutes. Her vet informed us that she was probably in pain. Medication helped with that. Her last few months, we logged into the security camera and found that she paced most of the time we were gone. Our guess was it was due to separation anxiety since it did not occur when we were home.

During her last year and a half she got frequent urinary tract infections which required expensive medication, filtered water, and special food. Dr. Dascoli thought that Angel may have a tumor, but we opted not to proceed with that because of the trauma that would result in conjunction with Angel’s advanced age. Angel was three years beyond the average (10-12 year) life span of a Lab.

For almost sixteen years everything we did took Angel’s well-being into consideration, such as: How long we would run errands; planning trips (including a list of pet friendly

motels and rest stop intervals); making sure she got her meds, fresh water, and food; going to bed after she had been let out; where we walked in the house; and which doors we had to keep closed.

In order to extend her life we rigged up a diaper apparatus consisting of three Maxi Pads in a colored doggie diaper cover attached to her harness by a Velcro loop and a strap intended to hold bedsheet corners. If it was not for the diaper (she lost control of bowel and bladder about 40 percent of the time) we could not have kept her with us for her final almost two years. Angel seemed to understand that it was necessary for her to be diapered so she stood perfectly still each time we put it on her. Every time Angel came in from a potty trip Melody would clean Angel's behind with a Wipe 'n Dipe moist towelette.

She had difficulty standing for several minutes. Her hind legs would bend so that the upper part was almost parallel to the floor. When she began to show obvious signs of wobbly walking we purchased a Ginger Lead to help with her stair climbing limitations. At the beach, Angel had to climb 42 steps. At first, I built two folding ramps covered with carpet. One unfolded into an 8 ft. ramp and the other into a 7 ft. ramp. The first landing required both of them. Angel could not make it up the slope, so we did not use those ramps and went to Plan B. Going down was not too bad. Coming up, I went beside her lifting her min-section with the Ginger Lead and Melody assisted from behind by gently lifting Angel's rump with her hands. She would rest on each landing and let us know when she was ready to climb another flight.

At night, we had to let Melody go down first in order to shine the light on the dimly lit lower rung of stairs. We also would shine a spotlight in front of her as she walked outside to do her business.

Because of her UTI's we would count how long she peed and note the color of her urine. We would remove the diaper at the bottom of the stairs and Melody would follow her with a pan to catch the urine if Angel could not make it to the dog-walk area.

Our house has several areas of hard wood floors and all of them had to be covered with rugs because she could not stand on them.

The last year of Angel's life we noticed she would often shake as if she were wet although she was totally dry. Some research revealed that such a behavior indicated a dog was possibly confused or probably feeling joint pain.

Angel's sense of smell remained keen all the way to the end. We had to be resourceful to get her to take a pain pill. That involved hiding it in Vienna sausage, fudge, steak, or a ball of wet dog food. It was amazing how she could use her mouth parts to eat most of the good stuff and spit out the pill!

We looked on the Internet for "when to put your dog to sleep" and found several helpful articles. There were "quality of life" ratings. Angel's was 2, possibly 3, on a scale of 10. Some of that was due to pain medication. Something that stood out to us was the stress dogs feel when they cannot control their eliminations. An important consideration for us were the questions, "Whose interests, besides those of my pet, am I taking into account?" and "Am I making this decision because it is best for my pet, or because it is

best for me because I'm not ready to let go?" We had to face the fact that letting Angel go on until she could not walk or was in obvious pain was mainly to sooth our own consciences. An encouraging comment was, "Putting your dog down is hard, but it could be the most loving thing you do."

The statement that tipped the scale was, "It is better to be a week early than a day late."

The night we made the decision was almost complexly sleepless. As we lay awake we discussed the mostly wonderful memories.

MEMORIES

>Joyfully digging water out of a baby pool.

>Romping in snow and jumping to catch snowballs.

>How every morning Melody would greet her with, "Good morning sunshine!" as she petted her.

>Her vicious barking when the doorbell rang. She sure scared some strangers to protect our home!

>How great Angel was at pre-cleaning food plates before they went to the dishwasher.

>The UPS man figured out she was all bark and no bite when he started bringing a dog treat to give her when he made his delivery.

>Mooching food: We allowed her to approach the table and she would simply stare with her big brown eyes until she got a tiny bite of human food. As we ate, we would consciously pick out strategic bites of food just for Angel. She preferred ketchup on fries.

>How we sometimes had to make a hasty exit at night when the sprinklers came on in the dog-walk area.

>Angel would fixate whenever dogs or horses came on the TV and hold her nose close to the screen.

>How she could judge where to lie down so the lounge footrest would not hit her when it was lowered.

>Keeping a bucket and ash shovel just outside the garage door to pick up her piles.

>When we had to come home from the beach early due to a family emergency. It was when there was a gas shortage in North Carolina. Our tank had about 20 miles worth of gas left and we had a large dog wearing a diaper when, thank God, we finally found a station with gas!

>When mooching a bite of a hard-boiled egg, Angel would only accept the yellow part.

>Angel would leap into our two-foot deep kiddie pool and allow Melody to put her on a float raft.

- >How she loved to go rip-roaring loudly woofing ferociously after rabbits.
- >When she ran to go up the garage steps, slid on the slick concrete floor, and cracked a tooth. We only found out the tooth was damaged when we took her to the vet because she was not eating.
- >The time, during Angel's last year, she went out wearing a raincoat. The hood on the raincoat blocked her peripheral vision and she circled the house a couple of times before I went out and showed her where the back entrance was located.
- >Her nose prints all over the inside of the storm door
- >How sopping wet Angel's paws got when she went out during or after a rain. We had to individually dry them when she came in.
- >When she had a bowel movement, she would take off running as if she did not want to smell it. During her last several months she would squat for the first piece then walked along leaving a trail of the other pieces.
- >She loved sleeping on our bed during the day. After each of her surgeries we had to make sure she was healed enough before she could jump up so I made a barricade around the bed. It consisted of 4 by 8 pieces of cardboard held up by laundry baskets.
- >How we kidded that she just tolerated other dogs because Angel thought she was human.
- >She went to alert when you told her we were going to Mee-maw and Grandfather's.
- >Often she would hop into bed with us at night. After curling up between us for about five minutes, she would hop down. We said that she was tucking us in. Most of the time, she curled up in a corner at the head of the bed on Melody's side. Later, probably due to pain, she would lie in the center of the room in view of Melody.
- >How much shedding of her beautiful hair she did throughout the house.
- >We tried to trim her nails and got into the quick. We let her go out and saw blood when she stepped in the snow. From then on Dr. Dascoli did Angel's nail trims.
- >When an unleashed dog attacked her at the beach and I had to beat the dog off with a 5-gallon bucket.
- >Sometimes, at night, she would make noises as she slept and sometimes move her feet. We could only imagine that she was dreaming of chasing a deer off her property or attacking a dangerous intruder.
- >How she would stroll around the crawl space every time I went under there to do a chore. Angel was so brave. ;)
- >How soft her silky ear flaps were. How we cleaned the insides with Q-tips.
- >Her eager lapping of the tuna flavored water that we used to get her to drink enough during her urinary tract infections.

>How we called her “baby,” “baby dog,” “momma’s baby,” “daddy’s dog,” and “our little girl”. After watching the movie “Old Yeller” we added “Ann” to her name and often called her Angel Ann.

FINAL DAYS

Angel kept on living and loving until she nearly used up all of her life and love.

We knew we were doing the right thing, but it was still very difficult.

By setting the date for her departure we were able to quit worrying when she was going to either become unable to stand up or reach the acute pain stage where she was crying out in pain. Also, we did not want (for all of our sakes) to have to take her to a strange vet should the time come while we were out of town. We wanted her to be as much at ease as possible and with people that loved her.

We were able to show her much attention and affection and provide her food that previously had been a “no-no”.

We read about the process of the actual euthanasia to prepare for the final event. We had done it before, but had put it out of our minds.*

The morning of the last day we gave her two packets of a delicious wet food that she loved. Also, since she loved sweets, we crumbled up some of Melody’s homemade Christmas cookies and let her eat those. She gobbled it down. The last bite Angel had, before leaving for the vet’s was a piece of her beloved cinnamon candy.

When the time came, it was difficult for me to put one foot in front of the other. Her loyalty never ceased. She really wanted just to go lie down in the house, but obediently let us put the Ginger Lead on her to take her to the truck.

At the vet’s Angel trustingly laid down on her blue sleeping rug that she loved. She looked into Melody’s face as Melody laid on the floor beside her. I petted her the entire time.

Melody, Dr. Dascoli, and I cried as Angel closed her beautiful eyes and took her last peaceful breath.

AFTERWARDS

The first few days everywhere I looked I saw Angel. Not literally, but my mind would remember where she would be or what she would be doing as I went about the house. My heart literally ached as I thought about her. While eating, I would automatically think about a good piece of food to set aside to give her.

The night of the day she was put to sleep we had heavy rains in the area. The next day it was bitter cold with about three inches of snow. The bitter cold lasted several days. There was a brief respite followed by several days of rain. It comforted us somewhat to know that Angel did not have to go out in those harsh conditions.

When I picked up her ashes a few days later I set the container on the seat beside me and said, “Daddy is taking you home sweetheart.” During the coming weeks we found that having Angel’s ashes with us was very comforting.

On January 26, 2017 (the eve of her 16th birthday) we went out on the beach in Surf City, NC where she would look at, but never did go down onto. We let tufts of her hair go. The breeze carried the hair tufts up the beach that her paws had never touched and it made us think of her running free. We could almost see her paw prints in the sand. One of the tufts (amazingly) went straight into the water! Oh, how Angel loved the water! We could just see her splashing with joy.

Adding to what I wrote in [“The Love of a Lady”](#):

The Bible provides comfort for Christians who love their pets. According to Isaiah 65:25 animals will be in the new heaven and earth. God knew Angel. “For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.” (Psalms 50:10-11) Heaven will be wonderful, but seeing Angel with the angels would surely make heaven better. “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” (I Corinthians 2:7-9)

Having full faith in God’s goodness, we know we will see Angel again.



Angel Priest January 27, 2001 – January 3, 2017.



PATROLING



TRAVELING



LOUNGING AT THE BEACH

MORE PICTURES BELOW

*Mego was the animal shelter dog we had while our children were growing up. He lived fifteen years before having two strokes which caused him to lose the use of his hind legs. For him to move, one of us had to put a towel under him as a sling and go with him. We had just sold our house and were being forced to live in a temporary house for several months. Mego had to be let go. Our adult children joined us in the room where the veterinarian administered the medication. I held Mego's head as he passed on. I cried like a baby. Because of the chaos from the move, we were more able to cope with Mego's passing.

Notes

(1) An in depth biblical based answer to the question read [Do Animals Have Souls?](#)

A scripturally sound article answering the question: [Do Pets Go To Heaven?](#)

(2) As an idiom, "You're an angel" [means](#) that "you are sweet and or/perfect".

(3) Cross Lanes Veterinary Hospital made a baked clay paw print which we will always cherish.



FIRST BATH 1



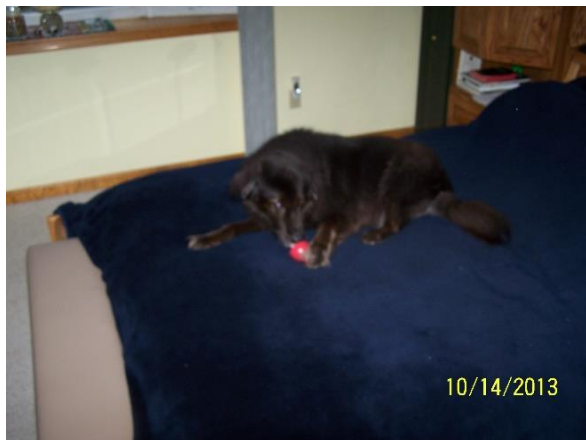
FIRST BATH 2



DE-STUFFED TOY



MID WAY UP HER CABLE RUN



10/14/2013

GETTING TUCKED IN



08/17/2012

RADAR PAWS



SNOW DOG 1



SNOW DOG 2



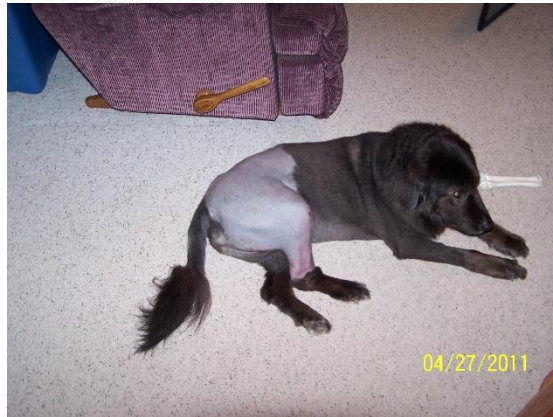
DIGGING IN BABY POOL WATER



POOL DOG



AFTER GETTING SPAYED



AFTER A KNEE SURGERY



MOMMY DOG 1



MOMMY DOG 2



MOMMY DOG 3



MOMMY DOG 4



LOOKING OUT WITH MOMMY 1



LOOKING OUT WITH MOMMY 2



ENJOYNG A TIDAL POOL



LEADING A BEACH WALK



LOVING THE OCEAN



IN MOTEL WITH DAD



GUARDING DAD



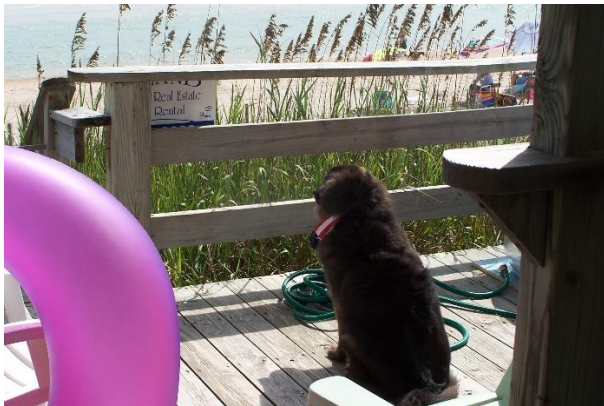
“HIDDEN” RAWHIDE



AFTER “HIDING” RAWHIDE ON COUCH



GOING TO HIDE RAWHIDE



LOOKING AT THE OCEAN



LOOKING OUT OF PORCH RAIL



HELPING MOMMY



UNDER DAD'S PRINTER



DADDY DOG 1



DADDY DOG 2



ON BLUE RUG AT BEACH



CHILLING WITH MOMMY AT BEACH



CHEWING 1



CHEWING 2



AFTER WE BRUSHED HER



PRE-CLEANING JOB



PACING 1



PACING 2



GUIDED BY THE FENCE 1



GUIDED BY THE FENCE 2



GUIDED BY THE FENCE 3



SNIFFING DEER SCENT



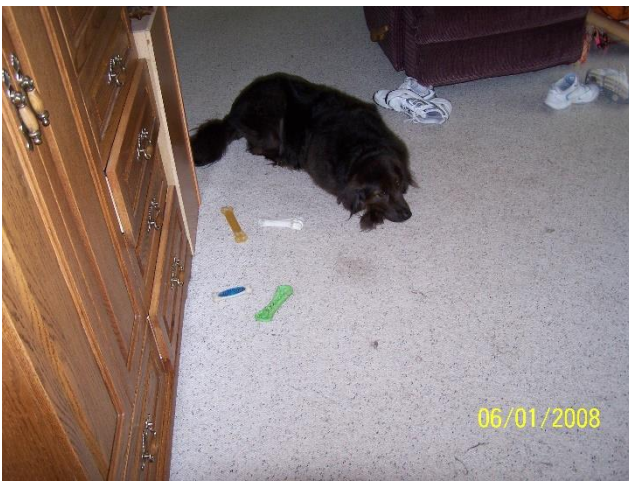
DOOR OPENS WHEN SHE STARES



IN RAIN COAT



IN DIAPER



PLENTY OF CHEWIES!



LAST MEAL—COOKIES



WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER THOSE EYES