

Why Fight So Hard for the Life of a Dog?



By Anna Von Reitz

As many of you know, my dog, an elderly (by most standards) Yellow Labrador Retriever, has developed a mysterious malady that has yet to be diagnosed after four months of trying. He has trouble breathing when he gets excited, and being a Labrador, that means most of the time.

First, I was told that he had lymphoma, a form of cancer that affects the lymphatic system. Next, I was told that he has a rare but by no means unknown condition --- paralysis of the vocal cords, which results in obstruction of the air channel.

Now nobody knows what is true or what to do, other than to sedate him with mild sedatives and try to keep him calm, which is a tall order for a big, happy, always overly-enthusiastic and playful dog. The ongoing tests and consultations with specialists is onerous at best, and cuts into what I have "left over" at the end of the month to donate toward the work of The Living Law Firm --- but what can I do? My "Golden Boy" is a member of the family, and even though at 13, he is old for a Labrador, he is barely middle-aged for one of my dogs. My dogs routinely live to be 18 to 25 years of age, even from so-called short-lived breeds.

Why?

Because I take my contract with the animals seriously.

My dogs never eat commercial dog food except as emergency rations, and I have studied dog nutrition and observed dog habits and needs and oddities from my own childhood onward.

Just like people, dogs function best having multiple small meals of high quality food spaced more or less evenly through the course of the waking hours. My dogs eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner like the rest of the family, and get a bedtime snack meal -- a total of four feedings a day.

And the food they eat is just an altered version of what the rest of the family eats, too. Dogs don't respond well to salt, spices, white potatoes, bamboo shoots, grapes in any form including raisins,

chocolate, and a few other substances we cook with--- but for the most part, a careful cook can make a no salt, no spice, no potato version for the dogs and then add the salt and spices, etc., later.

Having oatmeal with raisins and apples for breakfast? Great. Just make the apple and oatmeal mixture first, take some out for the dogs, and then add the raisins for the "people version". My dogs eat whole grain cereals with milk and fruit just like the rest of the family. The fruit keeps them regular and provides anti-oxidants, and the milk helps meet their calcium demands.

Dogs need a diet of two parts meat, one part whole grains, and one part veggies--- just a slight adjustment from our own dietary needs with are two parts veggies, one part whole grains, and one part meat.

This results in Rover getting the lions share of the meat (proportionally) in the household and may cause some consternation when Hubby first realizes that the dogs get more of the Sunday roast than he does, and its all for the best health of everyone concerned that it works that way.

The calcium requirements of a dog are large and are only partly met by letting your dog chew on bones. To deal with the need, you have to make bone broth for your dogs regularly and to supplement with treats high in calcium.

I just get a rotisserie chicken and share it out for dinner, then boil the bones and make bone broth for the dogs. Instead of buying commercial dog treats I buy them a bag of cheese curds and a bag of dried mangoes which are high in calcium. They get a piece of mango as their treat after breakfast and a cheese curd or two as a treat after lunch.

Other treats include apples, blueberries, raspberries and dried cranberries -- "craisins" --- all of which dogs love and need for the anti-oxidants and other vital nutrients in fruits. We aren't talking large quantities here --- just a couple tablespoons of berries for a large dog, a quarter of an apple, a small handful of craisins once or twice a day.

As for veggies, dogs love and do well with sweet potatoes and yams, peas, carrots, and mashed lentils. They tolerate cabbage, broccoli and even Brussels sprouts, but these veggies are tougher and more fibrous and a dog's much shorter intestinal tract is not able to digest these as well, resulting in gas and other problems --- so I help them out by chopping these vegetables up into smaller, easier to digest pieces or even puree them into a soup--- Cream of Broccoli is always a hit. Dogs also tolerate cooked tomatoes in small amounts, as when they are added to a soup or in a casserole.

So with a few timely additions and deletions, your dog can eat pretty much the same fare as you, and the cost ---except for a little more awareness on your part --- is, in my experience anyway, considerably less than trying to buy them decent dog food.

People often forget or underestimate the water needs of a dog, which are substantial. The Water Dish needs to be cleaned and refilled at least once a day, and I usually do it twice a day, morning and evening. The rule is to keep the water fresh, plentiful, and clean. That includes cleaning the water dish.

Good hygiene with the pet food dishes is also important. Bits of food clinging to the inside of a dog bowl become home to all sorts of bacteria that then infest your dog's teeth and gums along with his next meal. Better that you "do the drill" and wash Rover's bowl after every meal or treat him to having several dog bowls so that he always has a clean bowl to eat from.

Most of all, your dog needs time with you. Dogs have an insatiable relationship with love. They give it and they need it in return like the air that they breathe. If you are going to have a dog, make space in your life for long walks, petting time, "conversations", and play. Every dog I have ever had has cherished time together and needed exercise on a daily basis.

If you will give them this time and consideration and meet their needs, they will give you a lifetime of companionship and unconditional love -- which is a rare commodity in this world.

And you can hope to, on average, double your dog's life expectancy.

So, in answer to why fight so hard for the life of a dog?

1. Because I value life.
2. Because I have a "contract" -- unspoken, unwritten, but still valid, to care for my dog faithfully through all the ups and downs of life --- just as he keeps his contract to guard the house.
3. At 13, my Labrador has no other ailments. He is playful and nimble and happy and able to enjoy life to the full. If my past experiences are any guide, he may easily have another five or more years of good health and good life -- if he gets past this crisis.

I have already had Vets suggesting that I put him down, mainly because of his age and because they haven't been able to come up with a definite diagnosis or treatment. The idea that he is expensive and inconvenient seems to be on the tips of their tongues. It would be so much easier to just put him to sleep.... he's a Labrador Retriever and he is thirteen years old.

Their wisdom is that his lifetime is over but then, they probably never saw a healthy 25 year-old German Shepherd or an 28 year-old Skye Terrier or an 18 year-old Brittany Spaniel. That kind of longevity and health right up to the end is possible for a dog --- certainly possible and common among my dogs.

So they will just have to wag their heads and wonder why I would fight so hard for the life of a dog.

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