

Dogs I have known (and loved)

Are you one of 65 million dog owners in the United States? According to Forbes, dogs outnumber cats as pets by more than 20 million households. This is not to dismiss cat owners, for we have had our share, thanks mostly to my wife's love of cats.

But there is nothing like a dog.

My wife Lisa and I are between dogs for now. But, we have four wonderful grand dogs (actually, three that are wonderful and one that is still learning to be).

We have memories of our two late dogs. Our first dog, a Brittany Spaniel named

Coco, lived to be 14 and our sweet, long-haired Chihuahua, named Kiwi, who died in my arms at the age of 12 (suffering a heart attack in the middle of the night). I would not wish that experience on anyone.

But this column is about the wonderful, crazy memories of our dogs—sweet

memories we have that help to soften the blow of their short little lives.

Coco, the Brittany, was not a hunting dog, although all birds would have been safe with her in the area. Poor Coco (“poor” was not her first name, although she was often referred to in this way) was just not quite right.

In short, she was as dumb as a brick (I say that lovingly). She had major anxiety issues which included climbing on any chair or table during thunderstorms. Compiled with separation anxiety, she became a handful. Plus, she had the unfortunate habit of sniffing the backside of any visitors that came to our home, which was as embarrassing as it was troubling.

(In case you were wondering, I tried dog training, but after the second session, the instructor pulled me aside and said it would be best for me to remove Coco from the class).

Lisa would come home from work and find Coco on the kitchen table, pacing, with literally any piece of paper or magazine torn to shreds and family photos on the floor. She thought the first time this happened that someone had broken into our home, with chairs tipped over and the kitchen a mess, but the paper towel hanging from Coco's mouth eased her fears. Even Prozac didn't help (the dog, not us).

Little Kiwi was a beautiful, wild rescue from the county. Her long, black and tan tail flowing behind her, she was a digger, meaning wherever you put her (sofa, chair, bed, etc.) she would dig furiously like she was trying to uncover a bone (that was never there).

One afternoon when Lisa sat down on the couch and heard a noise, she reached down to find a box turtle poking its nose out from under the sofa. My wife did not find this amusing, and we had to fetch my mother's “grabber” device to pull the turtle out from under the couch.

We could only surmise that little Kiwi, at 14 pounds, had dragged a box turtle up the deck steps by its tail and put it behind the couch (perhaps as a ‘friend’ she could play with later?). If the trauma of getting pulled up the deck steps by Kiwi did not rearrange its mind, then Lisa's shriek when she reached down and found it probably sent the turtle over the edge). This compact reptile was released unharmed, but my guess is that it later underwent turtle therapy. I wonder if Prozac would have helped.

And then there was a grand dog Border Collie named Libby. Have you ever had a Border Collie as an “inside” dog? I do not recommend it. If you have a farm (preferably with sheep) it would be ideal.

Libby, who passed at the age of 13, was the wildest of any of our family's dogs. She could not play well with other dogs, and once nearly bit off the ear of one of her doggie ‘cousins’, who went by the name of Lucy.

Lucy was our first grand dog, and was a knockoff, parking lot Lab who kept running after our son-in-law's truck when he would leave work. Finally, Lucy was brought home to her new family of five, and lived a long and healthy life, even struggling through a stroke at 14. She helped to raise her ‘family’ and for that we are eternally grateful.

And then there is little Hazel, who was rescued from a house of dog hoarders, who is part Corgi and part Chow (the black tongue gave that part away). She looks like a red fox when playing in her yard, but she is afraid of her own shadow. Hazel loves her Florida family of four—and is the ultimate sweet, loving lap-dog.

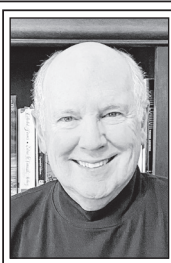
The three newest grand dogs are all Doodles, the fastest growing American breed—a hybrid between a Poodle and choose-your-breed, mostly Golden Retrievers and Labs. These three dogs are known as Dolly, Daisy (both blonde) and Oreo (predictably, a black-and-white, smallish Doodle).

Dolly and Daisy, born only six months apart and who share a common father, are a galloping comedy. Dolly is only quiet when she is standing with both front paws pushing against your chest and Daisy, the younger, heavier, Sheep-Dog-looking half-sister, often eats both her food and Dolly's and will flat out knock you down while she rambles down the deck steps. My son-in-law Bob thinks the loveable Daisy's elevator does not go all the way to the top.

Little Oreo, who is still in the biting, chewing and jumping stage (her vertical leap is nearly Olympian), is quiet only when she is eating and sleeping.

What about your dogs? If you have untold stories, shoot me a note at altmandavidr@gmail.com. We'll share them with our readers.

Dave Altman and his wife, Lisa, currently live in a dog-free home (except when the grand dogs are visiting) in Hoschton. He is a former Georgia Author of the Year nominee and his second book of poetry, “Cold Remembered” (Finishing Line Press), was published earlier this year.



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