

Lassie

by Bob Found

A story about a dog and two old people

The Beginning

We never wanted a dog, and the subject never came up in the 25 years Barbara and I were together. In 2009 we retired to a coastal property in Nova Scotia and were quite happy working on our acreage and travelling around our new provincial home.

Barbara made friends quicker than I because she joined a women's church group and a quilting club, and made friends with a lady named Brenda who lived down the road. Brenda had similar interests in antique collecting, in fact, she and her husband had a shop in their house where they bought and sold antique furniture and furnishings.

Brenda lived with her husband Ron and a dog named Lassie.

I wasn't aware of their dog until the day Barbara and I went over to Ron and Brenda's for coffee. Lassie pretty well stayed under the table all the time we were there, but would occasionally pop her nose up between my legs, with the table-cover covering her eyes. All I saw was a snout! This was the first time I saw her face. Brenda, of course, thought Lassie was being impolite and scolded her to lie down.

When Ron got sick and had to go into Halifax daily, for chemotherapy, Brenda would leave Lassie at home for pretty well all day, so Barbara volunteered to go sit with Lassie at noon, give her lunch, and walk her outside. She did this for a number of weeks, and then Ron passed away.

The next time I saw Lassie was when we went to visit with Brenda for dinner and I offered to walk Lassie outside. Lassie was so excited, running up and down the kitchen floor in anticipation of going out for a walk. I was told that because of her bad hip I shouldn't go far, but I let Lassie determine how far she wanted to go and we walked about ¼ mile down to Ryer's Lobster and back up the hill to Brenda's. Lassie wanted to go anywhere and everywhere, nose tight to the ground, sniffing like she was tracking something.

Then one day, we were asked if we could take care of Lassie while Brenda visited her son in Calgary for a week. Unfortunately it was in the same week Barbara and I were going to Newfoundland for a 10 day vacation. However a plan was made whereby we would take care of Lassie for 4 days, then take her to the kennel, with Brenda picking her up when she got back from Calgary. After a one-day sleepover to test our "compatibility", we got to babysit this beautiful, lovely dog for those 4 days.

Babysitting

Lassie didn't know what was going on and whined when Brenda left her with us. We had her food and dishes, bed, and some toys to make her comfortable but she was still confused. She jumped on the couch with us while we watched TV and that was fine with us. That night she slept, not on her bed, but at the foot of Barbara's bed. I can't recall much that we did in those 4 days, but at the end of them I told Barbara, "I want a dog".

We took Lassie to the kennel and Barbara cried when we left Lassie there because we felt sorry for her being jostled around like that. The poor dog



Lassie going back home after a test sleepover at our place



was now going to stay with total strangers. Lassie howled and whined as we left the kennel, as Barbara sobbed. It wasn't easy for me either!

We reconnected when we got back from Newfoundland. Brenda said she couldn't take care of Lassie and asked Barbara if she wanted to take her and she responded, "In a heartbeat". It was July 2012.

Lassie the Pup

Brenda told us the story of how she and Ron adopted Lassie in 2001.

Lassie came from an abusive apartment dweller in Digby who tied her outside in the winter, which is how she lost the tip of one ear to frostbite. The male owner was supposed to have kicked her down the stairs from his apartment. The Digby shelter where Lassie ended up was at that time a "kill" shelter, and ARC (Animal Rescue Coalition) took her as her time was up. She would have been euthanized in very short order. Brenda and her husband went to see her at her foster home where Lassie approached them immediately and was very friendly.

Brenda and Ron had Lassie for 11-1/2 years.



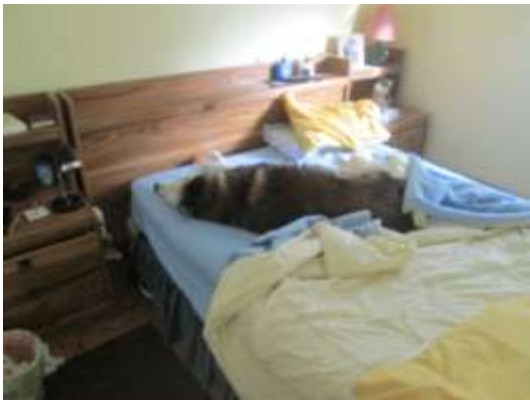
2 year old Lassie on left, Laddie at right, Ron and Brenda's dogs

Daily Ritual Early in our Guardianship



Lassie slept on the couch only for a little while. She did not like sleeping alone in the early days of her care. We put her bed in the living room but she didn't sleep on it and wanted to sleep in Barbara's room. We put Lassie's bed beside Barbara's bed, but she wouldn't sleep there either and (somehow) convinced us that she should sleep ON the bed. I made two steps for her to get up but the bed was high and the steps didn't extend far enough so it was still somewhat difficult for Lassie to get up onto and down from the bed. Eventually, since she spent much time with Barbara in the utility room where Barbara worked at her desk on

the computer, we put the bed down there and that's where she slept every night, except for the few times there was lightning outside and she slept on MY bed. (left below)



We purchased another bed for her, a little bigger than the one Brenda gave us. The latter I put in the back seat of my truck for when we went on long trips. (On short trips, Lassie sat in front, Barbara in the back!)



Walk the dog

Because we have lots of trees on our property and little underbrush, it was easy to establish a walking path which we used extensively. Lassie loved going into the bush, sniffing out any wildlife that may have been there during the night. The walk through our bush, down the driveway of the adjoining property we owned, then around and back to our driveway was about ¼ mile. We did this walk about 5 times a day. But Lassie didn't always want to return home, so we would often walk to the mail box, making it a ½ mile round trip (photo). I was getting so much walking exercise that I stopped using the treadmill and eventually sold it. I figured we would always have Lassie...



Lassie Forest Walk and mail-box route (top). Our home is at bottom left below the trees.

We fixed up the path, establishing its route with wood chips we obtained from the arborists we hired to clean up the bush of deadfall and dead trees. They created a huge pile of wood chips that we had to transport by wheelbarrow (up and down hills) and filling garbage bags, taking them around to the other end of the path with my truck. I'd estimate 30 full wheelbarrows and about 50 bags. That was only the FIRST round. We did this again a year or two later. I had some carved wood signs made that read "Lassie Forest Walk" and installed them at 3 locations. We became a constant fixture in the community, walking down the road and highway with our dog.

Feeding Time

We started feeding Lassie the same kind of food she was used to, kibble, but often, even at Brenda's I noticed Lassie snubbing her nose at it, like she was saying, "Oh man, this stuff again!" So we started giving her "wet" dog food, i.e. food from a can as supplement. We found that Walmart's Ol'Roy brand dog food was her favourite and it was ours too since it was 75 cents cheaper than the other top brands! Ol' Roy also came in about 10 different "flavours" so of course we always had two of each "in stock". When Lassie finished one large can, that lasted about 3 days or 6 meals, we would get a different one for subsequent feedings. I mean geez, I wouldn't want to eat Kraft Dinner every day of my life, why should Lassie eat the same thing?

Dogs are people too!



Lassie's Christmas dinner - 4 types of meat

It didn't take long for Lassie to start getting people food, with the same kind of rationalization. People food, like pork chops or chicken that we boil (so we can cook without oil), I reasoned was better for Lassie than just dog food all the time. I mean, look at the labels of any food, even the very expensive specialty stuff. It's still all meat by-products like brains and intestines and stuff like that, plus tons of preservatives. Fresh meat from our butcher would ensure a healthier dog. One time Barbara and I had Kraft Dinner while Lassie had chicken breast!

I found some beef heart on the meat shelf at the local grocery store, purchased it at a ridiculously low price and cooked it for Lassie who absolutely loved it. When I was a kid, we often ate beef heart, liver and tongue because they were the cheapest cuts that no one else wanted. I survived, Lassie would too. We fed her liver as well and would eat the stuff ourselves, except ours was served with onions and ketchup.

I would plan forays to Halifax so that it would coincide with the necessity of eating at a fast-food restaurant. This is where Lassie was introduced to A&W Burgers, Chicken McNuggets, and Bacon 'n Eggers from McDonalds. We initially brought food for her, but she always wanted what we were having so we ("I") gave in. For the last year of her life, I ate only Chicken Nuggets when I went to McDonalds. I would order 10, take a bite out of each and give the second bite to Lassie so that we both got 5 total nuggets.

I would offer Lassie different foods when she was begging for them, usually at the kitchen table. If I had an orange and she showed interest, I would offer it to her, but of course, oranges she did not like, so she just turned her head, all dejected. Some foods piqued her palate more than I could have imagined though. She was voracious for carrots, broccoli, watermelon, cauliflower, and any kind of pastry like Tim Bits, apple pie, cookies of any kind, and PopTarts. A Tim Horton's clerk once asked me at the drive-through if I wanted a Tim-Bit for the dog and I said yes. Lassie loved it and after that every visit to Tim Horton's included Tim Bits. She got the plain ones, only one per visit though.



Waiting for a bite of ice cream

All dogs, like babies, like ice-cream so I took her to the Whalesback Country Store for a treat. She was so hooked on ice-cream she would step on my feet as I sat on the bench taking a bite for myself, then taking a bite for her and spitting it into my hand where she licked the ice cream off. When Barbara would join us, Barbara would do the same thing, so while we each got half a

cone, Lassie got TWO

halves, or a whole cone! She particularly liked the crunchy cone so I always saved that part for her, with ice cream of course. We later used a small bowl for the ice cream rather than our hands. (This is what I was doing in the photo, above and right.)



Some dogs are lactose intolerant to cow's milk, because it isn't natural for their physiology, but others can tolerate it. So...I would give Lassie some milk in the evening when I had milk with my cereal. Lassie loved Mini-Wheats. I would soak them up with milk, and then give her a few while Barbara was in the other room. I did give her too much milk once though and it caused her some abdominal distress, so I cut it out and only gave her a very small amount, not even ¼ cup on (few) other occasions. No problems.

One day my sister-in-law bought herself and me a double-cone of ice cream which we were enjoying outside on the store's patio, with Lassie sitting beside us. I dropped mine on the ground, (totally accidental I swear!), and Lassie pounced on it like a wolf on a rabbit. I was worried that all that ice cream would create havoc with her digestive system, but there was nary a symptom of abdominal distress the next couple days.

Our contractor, Paul, carried a big box of dog biscuits in his truck and when Lassie would see him or the vehicle, she would approach him, wagging her tail. (photo, right) Paul never disappointed her and always had a biscuit in his shirt pocket.



Lassie was old and "tough-love" diets were not on my mind. Rather, I was of the opinion of having a happy dog for the last couple years of her life. She gained about 10 pounds.

So Photogenic

Our first Christmas was the only time I took a photo of her with both of us. It was difficult trying to get her to relax and look at the camera. The only camera I had that was remote controlled was my video camera that took not-very-high-res photos, but it worked wonderfully for that one picture. (photo left) It didn't look like this when I took it: Barbara's lips were washed out, my arm was in the way, we were too far apart, and the background was a sloping couch. I had it doctored via a website called Fiverr, where you can get simple stuff (for these guys) fixed for \$5.00! The photo at left is the result of that work.



Hundreds of photos and video were taken of Lassie, the 3-1/2 years she stayed with us. I put together a collage of photos and video mixed to music for her First Anniversary with us, July 20, 2013. We invited Brenda over, decorated the kitchen, and had some special food and presents for our girl.

A favourite past-time of ours was putting words in the mouth of Lassie, as in, "Lassie's thinking... 'Why does he keep bugging me all the time?'" When I looked at many of the photos I took, I felt I could speak for her and it became a fun hobby.



Lassie Day Celebration



I see chicken...can I have that?

I posted these photos, with captions, to my website (www.raiderracing.com) and sent individual emails to family members and Brenda. I called them "Lassie Thoughts".

I bought another digital camera that I kept in the truck, just for Lassie, so that I'd always be able to have the equipment if she did something unusual, different, or just plain cute. I had another camera, a quick start snapshot type that took videos as well, sitting on the kitchen table for the same reason. It's no wonder I have 900 photos of Lassie and over 200 videos.

In later years, most notably 2015, she started to be afraid of the camera. When she saw me pointing it at her, she would get up and leave the room.

Barbara thought perhaps it might have been due to my using the flash once or twice that, to her, was

lightning, which Lassie was afraid of. When I used my iPad to take a photo, there no longer was this fear.

I am sure I have video of every “roll” Lassie has ever done... I know I sure have a lot of them! It was the most entertaining thing we’ve ever witnessed and would make us laugh every time we saw it.

Car Rides

Cartoonist Adrian Raeside who creates “The Other Coast” daily cartoon strip often shows his dog Koko behind the steering wheel of a vehicle.



Used with Permission

This was Lassie.

I’ve never seen a dog so excited to go for a ride.



When the two of us would put on our jackets and shoes to go outside, Lassie was excited enough, running back and forth between us, up and down the hallway following us, but when we picked up the keys or jingled them in front of her that she really went nuts, barking and twisting around in the kitchen, running to the front door.

She would bolt out the front door and fly down the stairs at such a clip I thought she would hurt herself. Subsequently, I had to hold her collar to slow her down. Then she would run to the truck and wait by the door. Later, when Barbara would take her in the car, Lassie came to realize the car

was in the garage and would run to the garage door. We alternated vehicles depending on where we were going and what we were doing but the truck was preferred because the back seat had Lassie’s original bed laid out and had a window that could open. (photo) She could also look out through the side windows or sit between the two front seats and watch through the windshield. When we left the truck with Lassie in it, she would immediately jump into the front seat, usually the one with the steering wheel. When she got older, the jump over the console was becoming difficult because of her back leg mobility



issue, so I removed the console.

I have many photos and video of Lassie sitting up in the front seat as I drove down the road. When we would get to Peggy's Cove, her favourite destination, her "Cancun for Dogs", I would lower the window and she would plop her head out, resting it on the window frame. Tourists that I passed would comment "Oh look, how cute!" We got a lot of comments like that from people who saw or met Lassie. In summer the Cove was flooded with tourists and many of them, likely dog owners themselves, would stop to pet her and ask about her breed. The response was always, "Lassie is husky-collie, xx years old."



When Barbara joined us for a ride, she would sit in the uncomfortable back-seat of my truck so that Lassie could have the front seat. When Lassie was much older and not able to compensate as well for turns, starts and stops of the truck, Barbara held her from the back seat, like a seatbelt would. (photo, left)

One day at Peggy's Cove we were walking across the parking lot back to the truck when Lassie pulled me towards a Golden Labrador Retriever that was sitting in the front seat of an SUV. I approached slowly with

Lassie on the leash watching as she put her nose up to the Lab and the Lab put his nose down to her. They touched noses and I DID NOT HAVE MY CAMERA! (It was in the truck!). That photo would have gone viral!

Destinations

We took Lassie everywhere. If we couldn't take her with us, we usually didn't go! Here's a partial list of places we took her:

- Peggys Cove, almost every day in 2015
- Bridgewater (Town celebration)
- Long Lake Park, 2-3 times
- Point Pleasant Park
- Dingle Park
- SS Atlantic Memorial park and museum
- Lunenburg
- Parrsboro, where there was a mineral and gem show. We walked on the beach there.

- Crescent Beach and Museum. I let her off the leash since we were the only people there; Lassie and I were outside waiting for Barbara who was inside. Lassie sniffed her way along and walked in by herself, like she was a tourist. The museum operator was very amused.

- Lawrencetown, Cleveland and Queensland Beaches where I took her in the water. She didn't like it. I let her drink lake water at Cleveland Beach (there's a freshwater lake as well as the ocean beach) and she had diarrhea for 3 days. My bad.

- Three hospitals: Cobequid in Sackville and the QE II Hospital were the two main ones we “frequented” for appointments. Lassie and I took long walks on the grass in the area while waiting for Barbara. The third hospital was a Veterans Hospital where we took Lassie inside where everyone turned their attention to the beautiful dog that just came into their building.
- I went to see my contractor at the expensive home he was renovating and was going to leave Lassie in the truck, but Paul insisted I let Lassie come into the home that had hardwood floors throughout. Lassie went into every room, whether I was with her or not. She was curious. (I took movies!)
- Another time, we were invited to another very expensive home and Lassie tried to get on the couch like the dog that was living there normally did. I told her to stay off but the owner said it was okay if she wanted to. His dog was very short haired, Lassie was very long haired, so I’m sure our dog messed up the couch more than his would have.

Some of the following required rides to get to a destination where we then walked: Mail box via road and King Neptune Campground, Whalesback Country Store, West Dover, Preservation Area, Lassie Forest Walk, behind Halifax Citadel (2-3 times), Peggy’s Cove, Baptist Church, Ollie’s Loop, Paddy’s Head, West Dover village, West Dover cemetery, East Dover Road, Swiss Air Monument. We tried to mix up destinations on a day-to-day basis so Lassie wouldn’t be bored.

I took her into a few stores like Canadian Tire and Rona, but she would get all crazy and want to leave. She just didn’t like going into these places like she had agoraphobia. A similar thing happened when we visited Brenda at her new apartment. Lassie at first was excited, but lost interest quickly when we were cooped up in the elevator. In the apartment she was restless, walking around, barking, wanting to go back to the truck so I obliged her.

We had lots of renovations done, and cleaned up our yards and the neighbour’s, which resulted in numerous truckloads of garbage going to the recycling facility about 15 miles from home. Lassie would sit on the front seat, interested in all the activity at the site, people walking around, big machines making noise, moving stuff. I would dump in the same location every time so the person guiding my truck was the same young guy. Every time he saw us (ie Lassie) he would pet her through the open window. Months after I dropped off a load, the same guy would see her in the truck, come and pet her, remembering her name.

Once when we went to Superstore, it was terribly hot outside when Barbara took Lassie around the back of the store, outside, to do her business. I went shopping, and when I returned, Barbara and Lassie were INSIDE the front door keeping cool. No one complained.

I also took her with me when I went to visit a friend who had a black male Labrador named Parker. Lassie barked at Parker when she first spotted him outside on the lawn, and that got Parker’s attention. They seemed to want to meet each other, so I let Lassie out and she ran around the yard smelling all the places Parker had been. Parker meanwhile was in love,

and followed her like a little puppy. They both got along fine.

We went to the auto repair shop a few times where she remained in the truck while it was getting serviced. One time they put the truck high on the lift with Lassie sticking her head out the driver's side window, curiously looking down at the mechanics. Too bad I didn't have my camera ready for that shot!

I had written the next section as an email to family to illustrate the things we did for our dog, but never did send it.

What We Did For Our Dog:

- Covered hardwood floors with carpets so she wouldn't slip getting up or when excited.
- Filled Christmas stocking with pork, chicken, and beef cooked especially for her.
- Made Christmas Canine Cookies, (photo, right).
- Had to take for a long ride before she would get out of the vehicle.
- One ride per day guaranteed. Barbara wanted to step it up to TWO rides a day because dog was "bored".
- Pizza night, got the crusts. We only bought Rising Crust pizzas because of this.
- Include each meal with people meat: pork chops, chicken breasts, beef heart and/or liver.
- Bought carrots and broccoli just for the dog.
- When she finished her kibble/wet dog food/people-food dinner, she got a treat: usually a small strip of beef jerky.
- She so expected the treat after dinner that she would sit and bark until she got it. If she hadn't finished her dinner and we would point to her bowl, she would empty it, and then get her treat. The games dogs play.
- She got another snack at 9 PM, a Dentastix from me, and then dog-biscuits or crackers from Barbara
- We wished so much for snow this last winter...because Lassie LOVES the snow. (photo)
- 900+ photos of Lassie, plus calendars, mugs, posters, pens, mouse pads, screen saver, log in photo, t-shirts (about 8 so far), photos stuck up everywhere.
- Barbara sat in the back jump-seat of the truck so that the dog could sit in front and have the window.
- Trails made with the snow-blower, just for her.
- Centre console removed from truck to allow Lassie easy access to front and back seats.
- In summer the bedroom air conditioner was turned on so that she could be cool. She often lay in front of a fan when she was in kitchen or living room.



Licking her lips

Peggy's Cove

Lassie loved Peggy's Cove above all other locations, unless it was a brand new location that might have had animals in the area. She loved it for two reasons: the people and the dogs. During the summer months there were lots of tourists, and people would stop and pet Lassie and ask about her. She loved meeting people, spotting them in the parking lot and pulling me towards them so she could be touched. I recall one Polish or Czech mother letting her small daughter pet Lassie who then told her mother something in her language. The mother laughed and repeated it, "My daughter says your dog looks like a WOLF".

Every other person who parked at Peggy's Cove had a dog and these dogs did the natural thing of leaving a urine "pee-mail" for others to receive. Lassie would smell all the rocks, up and down and around, then various places in the grass. She would often contribute. For the "big" stuff, we always had a grocery bag attached to the leash handle and picked up after her.

Health

Before we owned Lassie I took her for a walk and was told not to walk her too far because of her bad hip. As we walked I noticed her initial slight limp disappeared as she got more excited going on the walk, so I just let her decide when it was time to stop. We walked twice as far as I was told to go with no detrimental effects. I recall with my first dog, a German Shepherd named Queenie, how she had problems with her hips and would limp as well, but she never got any exercise when she was older. I thought she was too old to walk (I admit I was lazy), so she never was able to work the kinks out of her joints.

When started walking Lassie, there was no stopping her, as I wrote earlier. Long walks, 5 times or more per day, with no problems. I have a few videos of her running at full speed, like she was chasing a rabbit.

She had a lipoma on the inside of her left hind leg that was the size of a grapefruit. We discussed removal of this big bulge with a couple vets but because of her age and a heart murmur, our veterinarian said the operation might be dangerous. Another vet did a more comprehensive examination, with ultra-sound and Xrays and said they could do the operation, but we felt they had their own interests and not the Lassie so we refused. Her back foot scraped the ground and wore down her nails, a result of old age. Her quality of life may have improved had we gone through with the removal of the lipoma but there were no guarantees since the growth could have been intertwined with the muscle. An operation might have crippled her even more or could have killed her. She would never tolerate wearing one of those "no-lick" collars. (We tried it once and she went nuts).

The first and second years we had her, we were quite concerned when she had diarrhea or was constipated so we took her to the doctor for examination. For constipation, the vet had to take an X-ray to make sure there was no blockage, a test that was quite expensive. We had it done twice, but then later in life, we just accepted it as "one of those things". After all when humans are constipated they don't rush off to get an X-ray, especially if there are no other symptoms that would lead one to believe there is intestinal blockage. I admit we panicked, like first-time parents panic over their child.

Lassie always had a good dental checkup, which we attributed to daily DentaStix snack. The vet was always amazed at how clean her teeth were and commented every time.

We had an ultra-sound done on her heart, which showed a heart murmur, basically a condition where the valves of the heart don't seal perfectly and some blood escapes past the valve. Not a real serious condition but it related to energy, and Lassie's ability to get oxygen in her lungs fast enough. If she wasn't hot but was panting, that was a sign her body wasn't getting full blood flow. Her panting really didn't show until late 2015. She had slowed down in her walking speed and distance throughout the year so it wasn't immediately noticeable. I recall a few times when I walked her and she suddenly stopped and just stood there, not wanting to go further. This I took to mean she was tired and had no more energy so we usually turned around and went back to our origin. Walking was NEVER about us, that is, where WE wanted to go, it was always where Lassie wanted to go and for how long.

Plumbing

Lassie took pills for incontinence but we never saw a problem so when the pills ran out, we didn't renew the prescription and noticed no ill-effects or changes in habits. She never once pee'ed inside the house. A couple times when Lassie had diarrhea, she woke me up 5-6 times during the night needing to go outside. I would put an LED collar on her neck so I could watch her movements in the bush where she went to do her business and sometimes put the high intensity spot light on her. She would rush right back when she was finished.

Eye Sight

We were told Lassie had cataracts, or "dogaracts" as Brenda called them, but I was amazed at how acute her vision was. Lassie could sit on the porch and spot someone walking on the highway, 300 feet away. She would sit up and bark and we would strain to see what she was barking at, and then see that person walking by. She had no problems with sight to the day she passed on.

Hearing

On the other hand, she became deaf. We aren't sure when, if she was deaf when we got her, or if she just slowly became deaf. She could respond to our gestures such as "Do you want to go for a ride?" where we acted all excited and other times she responded to vibrations in the floor, so either of us walking around would get her attention. The vet inspected her ears but saw no visual reason for her becoming deaf.

Scent

I swear this dog would rival any bloodhound for tracking ability. In winter when Lassie would spot a dog or other animal track in the snow, she would put her nose in each step and follow the trail wherever it led. One day I spotted a porcupine sitting under the chair on the deck. Lassie saw it as well, but I was able to get hold of the dog and put her on leash quickly before she could chase it. As a result the porcupine, now aware of our presence ran all around the garage, across the driveway into the trees. When Lassie and I followed it, there was no visible sign of the animal and I had no idea where it had gone. Lassie took up the challenge and quickly ran down the side of the garage, with nose to the ground, across the driveway and to the base of a tree which she circled a few times. I looked up, and there was the porcupine.

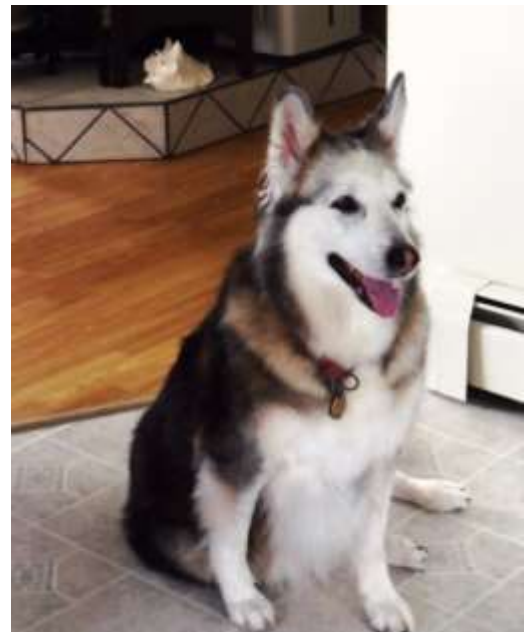
She always smelled good. Doggy smell. I used to smell and bury my face in her fur and kiss her head. I would kiss her nose, the furry part between nostrils and eyes and put the tips of her furry ears between my lips. I loved hugging her.

Grooming

Lassie was a clean dog. She never rolled in crap or even stepped in her own. After she would do her business, you could see her looking back and walking around or jumping over her stool. She did roll in fresh cut grass one time and emerged all green! The only other stuff other than snow or grass that she rolled in was seaweed, one time only.



We took her to be groomed 2 or 3 times to her old groomer, the one Brenda used, near Bedford, just outside Halifax. The groomer worked out of a vet's office and Lassie seemed to like going off with "Peg". When we first saw Lassie emerge from her first "coiffure", she suddenly became a Play-Dog! So gorgeous! The picture shown was taken the day we got her back the first time. We usually had the grooming done in summer and had the long fur on her belly shaved to keep her cooler.



Our poster-child "PlayDog"

Her fur was very long because of her collie heritage and she shed a lot. Barbara would vacuum every 2nd day and fill the vacuum with fur! She would brush Lassie but it seemed like we could never get enough loose hair out. We had 8-10 fuzz-remover rolls "in-stock" at all times, with one in each vehicle.



I took her to a different groomer the last time she had her "coiffure", in 2015, and helped wash her in the big tub. The groomer washed her 3 times with doggie shampoo, rubbing it in thoroughly, and then rinsing. The fun began when a high pressure blower (essentially the exhaust end of a vacuum cleaner) that the groomer aimed at her coat, causing all the loose hair to fly off.

The room we were in was about 10 feet square and every inch of the floor and tables in that room was covered with fur. As I was holding Lassie, I would get blasts of fur flying in my face. I never realized it was this difficult, that there would be so much work to clean up after so I gave the groomer a hefty tip which surprised her.

When Lassie held her tail out, the hair on the bottom would drop about 4 inches. That's how long the hair was on her back end, thinning out as it worked its way to her face.

We anticipate we will be finding tufts of hair around the house for years to come.

She's a Husky

True to her Husky heritage, Lassie loved snow! With the first snowfall, she couldn't wait to get outside to eat the snow and roll in it! The deeper the snow the better, but in later years of course, it was more difficult walking. Despite having a full bowl of fresh water every day, she preferred eating snow. When we realized that the end was coming for Lassie, we hoped and prayed for that one last snow...and we got it.



Daily ritual Later in Life

Our daily ritual with Lassie changed over the years, a result of her mobility issues. When we first got her in 2012, we were walking many miles a day, a minimum of 5 walking excursions. She was always very eager to do this. We would walk in any weather: snow, rain, hot sun, and at numerous times of the day, sometimes as early as 7:30 in the morning and as late as 7 or 8 PM in the evening. In winter when it was dark Barbara and I wore a safety reflecting vest, as did Lassie, when we walked on the highway portion. We needed a flashlight to find our way around. What follows is the typical daily ritual of 2014 and 2015.

Morning: The day would begin with Lassie getting up first around 7 or 8 AM, bursting into my room through the partially closed door, approaching me and nudging my arm with her



nose. Sometimes she would just come in and lay down but when she got my attention, it was usually because she had to go pee. I'd get up and quickly dress to let her outside where she tended to business. I would make coffee and walk to the end of the driveway to fetch the paper while checking out where Lassie was. Early days she would sometimes come with me, but later years she would sit or lay on the porch waiting for me to come back. She would follow me with her head and eyes, as I proved one time by ducking behind

the truck or the garage, then popping up to surprise her. We entered the house into the kitchen where I had breakfast with Lassie laying underneath the table at my feet. When Barbara got up, first thing she did was come and pet Lassie. I was second in line to be acknowledged.

When I had finished breakfast, I would go downstairs to do emails and stuff, while Lassie stayed upstairs with Barbara. Often I could hear Barbara talking to Lassie, “Do you want to go out?” “Are you hungry?” from down in the basement and I could tell where Lassie was at any time by hearing her nails hitting the hard floor.

Noon:

At 11:30 I would return upstairs and make Lassie’s lunch which consisted of kibble, dog food, and some kind of people food: chicken, pork, beef, pasta, from our meal the day before, or something we cooked up just for Lassie. I would make my own lunch, watch the news, then go for the “ride”. 90% of the time, the “ride” was to Peggy’s Cove because Lassie had the best time there, sniffing all the dogs that had visited before her. She also liked Paddy’s Head a lot where she met a pure white male Malamute Husky. If Barbara was home, Lassie would come with us, but often I would take Lassie out alone for her “ride” and pick up the mail at the postal box. In the summer months Lassie and I would sometimes share an ice cream at the Whalesback Country Store.

Upon our return, if Barbara was home, Lassie would stay with her upstairs, lie on the porch, or sleep in my room, the coolest and darkest place in the house. I would hear Lassie occasionally get up and walk about, searching for who might be upstairs. If Barbara wasn’t around, I would



go upstairs to be with her. In the summer I spent lots of time outside on the porch, playing Sudoku on my iPad, with Lassie at my feet.

Dinner:

Around 5 PM, Barbara would make Lassie’s dinner which was pretty well the same as lunch but with more vegetables! Lassie loved carrots and broccoli which we would buy mostly for her. During our dinner at 6 PM, Lassie lay under the table and would often get “food supplements” from me when Barbara’s back was turned.

As soon as I put the utensils down on the plate, or moved my chair back to start cleaning the table, Lassie would quickly jump up and meet me at the counter, sitting there, looking up, waiting for an after-dinner “supplement”. Needless to say, I never cleaned my plate and always had something special for her that she may not have had in her own meal. She would lick the plate as well. Every time she sat there, looking up at me for something to eat, I would kneel, and give her a big hug, with her head next to mine. Barbara would verbalize Lassie’s thoughts, such as “The things I have to do around here to get some extra food!” If Lassie finished all her dinner, she would receive a 3 inch square piece of beef jerky, her favourite treat other than ice cream. If I didn’t offer it voluntarily, she would bark until I walked down the hallway with her in pursuit to get the jerky that we stored in the utility room. Grabbing it from me, she would carry it back to the kitchen, rush under the table and eat it there. In the movie, “Dancing With

Wolves”, the wolf that was given some pemmican by Costner did exactly the same thing, except on the “range”.

Evening:

I would then go back downstairs, while Barbara watched TV, Lassie laying between the couch and the wood stove in the living room. This is where I would find her every evening at about 8:30 PM when I came upstairs. Then it was time for her evening-before-bed-snack which was always a Dentastix. Repeating her jerky routine, she would grab the Dentastix from me and go under the table to eat it. I went to bed and watched TV and read until 11 PM, giving Lassie a hug before I went to sleep. Barbara



Are you going to eat those two crackers?

would have something to eat and would prepare something for Lassie: crackers or dog biscuits. I have many photos of Lassie sitting up and staring at the plate that is holding her food. (above) Perhaps we were feeding her too much, and she DID gain about 10 pounds, but I rationalized it by thinking of her advancing age. May as well make the old dog happy. When I get to her age in human years, all I want is treats!

At 11 PM, Barbara would wake Lassie, asleep on the rug in the living room and take her to her own bed in the utility room. There Lassie would remain all night, in most cases, until the next morning.

Lassie's Last Day Wednesday Feb 17, 2016

This section was not easy to write. It is the part of my life I would prefer to forget, but yet, it was the last time we had Lassie so I want to remember it forever.

A week before this day, Barbara and I went to talk to Lassie's veterinarian in Tantallon about the situation and how it would all go down once we made "that decision". Dr. Hoskins came to the truck to examine Lassie but didn't seem to think there was anything dire about her health, except old age. In the next few days, Lassie rallied and was occasionally seen to be RUNNING and walking fine. Because of this I was reticent on the subject of putting her to sleep but then things took a sudden turn for the worse.

Two days before Lassie's last day we took her to Peggy's Cove. She sat in the front seat, Barbara in the back seat, holding her so that she wouldn't fall forward when I braked. At our destination, Lassie didn't exude her usual excitement about being there and wanting out. (Previously when things were good, I had to block her so she wouldn't jump out, she being so excited.) I picked her up out of the seat and put her down on the pavement. We walked just a little ways, maybe 50 feet on level ground, when she stopped, not wanting to continue. She was having difficulty walking and even standing. We went back to the truck where I helped her get in the cab using the wood step she used the last two years. As we were leaving Peggy's Cove, Barbara asked me if this was "Lassie's last ride". I started to sob and said, "yes". The writing was on the wall. On the way back, Lassie shook for a few minutes, like she was frightened. This added to the inevitability of the situation.

We watched Lassie over the next two days and it was not good. She walked with great difficulty and often fell, staying in place until we could help her up. On Wednesday morning, the 17th, she went down her ramp, had a pee, but then couldn't find the energy to go up her ramp again. I had to put my arms under her chest and her stomach, to more or less lift her all the way up the ramp, where she then collapsed and laid for ½ hour. She could not rise on her own power.

Barbara called the vet that morning to ask him to come to the house after his evening shift at the Veterinary Hospital in Tantallon. Then Barbara went to an emergency dental appointment, leaving me with Lassie. I was with her all that time. I didn't leave her side, even lying outside in the cold winter air with her beside me. When Barbara returned, Lassie came into the house and lay under the kitchen table. Barbara had also called Brenda to tell her about the situation and Brenda drove all the way from Bedford, on the other side of Halifax to come and say goodbye to her former dog. I saw Brenda drive up on the security camera but did not greet her, as I was sure I would be too emotional.

Lassie had no lunch or dinner. She was not hungry, yet had not eaten for the last 4-5 days. She did eat a couple of her dog cookies that I made and one-half of a PopTart but would not eat any of her other favourite foods like beef jerky or Dentastix. I offered her milk and ice cream but she didn't want those either. Barbara came home with some TimBits and offered them to Lassie, who only ate two of them. She was lethargic and just lay flat under the kitchen table. I went to rest on my bed because I was emotionally exhausted and feeling so very sad for what was going to happen in a few hours.

Just after dinner, Lassie went out to do her business, then lay on the porch. There was no snow around for her to lick so I walked down the driveway with a pail and found some snow in the

shady part of the ditch. I dumped the pail on the porch and offered some to Lassie which she bit a bit of and licked, like a Popsicle. We saved that snow/ice mixture in the fridge freezer compartment; the last stuff she touched with her mouth. It is still there.

The vet was late but showed up at about 9 PM after working a shift at the Vet Hospital.

Lassie didn't move when Dr. Hoskins came into the kitchen, something unusual for Lassie who would react to any stranger with lots of barking until she could determine the person was friend or foe. She lay under the table, lethargic, tired. I got down on my knees and petted her on the head, speaking softly to her. Barbara was close to her back end and was petting her as well. Dr. Hoskins gave Lassie a sedative and in about 30 seconds Lassie's eyes closed. The doctor asked for confirmation that the euthanasia would take place and Barbara and I both said yes. We watched as the doctor first shaved Lassie's foreleg, then injected a green colored narcotic in her vein. He took out his stethoscope to listen to her heart and in less than 10 seconds said the words that almost killed us: "She's gone".

I was still petting her head, crying, and as I pushed her skin back, I could see her eyes, like she was still alive. She was still warm as I prayed she was not gone, but the reality set in.

When Dr. Hoskins pulled Lassie out from under the table where she had been laying on a rug, there was a large puddle of urine evacuated when Lassie's heart stopped. I was wiping it up when Dr. Hoskins picked up Lassie whose head was flopped over to one side. I couldn't stand it, and held Lassie's head upright as Dr. Hoskins walked out the door to put her in the front seat of his truck. That was the last time I touched and saw my dog.

Barbara followed us out and Dr. Hoskins wasted no time, shaking my hand, hugging Barbara, then getting into his truck and driving away. The time was 9:45 PM. Barbara and I stood there hugging each other and crying our eyes out.

The snow was gone and so was Lassie.

Epilogue

Lassie was kept at the Veterinary Hospital for about 5 days until the Crematory in Sackville was able to pick her up. We had to pass by the Vet Hospital a few times on our way to Tantallon or Halifax and we sobbed every time we did, knowing that Lassie was in there, cold and alone. While at the Hospital, a technician took a plaster cast print of Lassie's front foot. We picked up Lassie's remains on Wednesday, exactly one week from the time she left us.

It was the roughest two weeks of our lives. We removed all the extra rugs we had put down so Lassie wouldn't slip on the hardwood floor or linoleum in the kitchen. I vacuumed the house to get rid of any of her hair, but I know there are spots I missed and we will find them someday, perhaps under the couch. We put all the dog food in the basement but gave the open bags of kibble and dog treats to a friend down the road for his black lab, Parker.

We put the urn with Lassie's ashes in the living room.. We chose cremation over burial so that we can take Lassie with us when we move. On pizza Saturdays we light up the small tea lights beside her urn.

It was tough walking to get the paper and not seeing Lassie sitting on the porch, waiting for me, watching my every move, something she did every day for the last 12 months. Barbara couldn't leave or enter the house via the front porch where Lassie used to lay; instead she used the side door for about 2 weeks.

Barbara couldn't go into the utility room for over a week, so I had to do the clothes washing and put Lassie's bed away. Her collar, hair brush, leashes, and other stuff was all put in a box. If Barbara found any one of these things (and she did), she would immediately cry. All pictures of Lassie that we had around the house were removed.

I gave our Vet a cartoon book about dogs written by Adrian Raeside who publishes the cartoon strip "The Other Coast". In the book I pasted a collage of photos of Lassie and wrote a little note to Dr. Hoskins "from your favourite patient, Lassie". He was touched. A week later I delivered a coffee mug to his office with Lassie's photo on front and back. I also gave a book to Brenda.

I ordered a fluff toy made in Lassie's likeness and a granite monument with her picture with inscription: "She left paw prints on our hearts". Barbara wants to plant a tree in her memory and I purchased two real nice solar lights that I placed at the location where she peed the most in her last few months of life. That's as far as she could walk comfortably. Barbara is getting a replica in 1/12 scale custom-made by an animal artist who will use hair from Lassie. Barbara is going to incorporate this into a 1/12th scale diorama that she will make.

We spent every moment of our time with Lassie. She was a wonderful companion when either of us left the house for a short while. There was always someone with her except when we went shopping or to Tai Chi, where she would wait in the truck or car by herself. (She would receive a small treat on our return. It became such a routine that she would sit up and nuzzle us wanting her treat.)

I've been writing this story since her last day, and working on a video. I realized also that I might have video of her taken via the security camera I have pointed at the porch and driveway.

I did find a lot, though not of good quality or of any significance except for her Last Day. This video showed when Dr. Hoskins arrived, and when he left with Lassie in his arms. This was incredibly difficult to watch and likely I will never watch it again. I cried when I did, one month after Lassie passed.

Pet Names for our Pet

I had many terms of endearment for Lassie. (I have a list like this for Barbara, too!) I moved this list from the middle to the end of this story, to end on a less sombre note.

Anty,as in ant-eater. I have never seen a dog keep its nose to the ground so often and so much
Barfie, for the few times she barfed on the floor
Big Ears, that's an obvious one
Cutie, because she was
Fur-face, another obvious one. I've been called that when I don't shave.
Lass, her short name. Brenda often called her Lass.
Lassie, Full name, the usual one we called her by
Lass-wee, when she had to go out for a "wee-wee"
No-pee-no-poo, her Indian name. When she wasn't doing her business "on time"
Wolfie, because she looked like a wolf
Puppy, as she got older, her name got younger
Puppykins, same-o
Baby, Barbara called her this, as in "Where's the baby?" or "The baby wants out".
Cutie-pie, pretty obvious
Pupless, as in "no puppies". Didn't use this often because I didn't want to hurt her feelings.