

THE STORY OF
MERLIN DA WUNDA DALE
A.K.A.
SAM'S DANDY DALE MERLIN
BUT BEST KNOWN JUST AS
MERLIN
AS TRANSCRIBED BY HIS LOYAL HUMAN
BILL

FOREWORD

This is Bill, the proud former possession of the mighty Airedale, Merlin, a.k.a. Sam's Dandy Dale Merlin. (You know I really wanted to stick the word "beautiful" in that name, but was outvoted 2 to 1, and so the name stuck as stated.) Sometimes I think that Einstein might have been a better name, though. But was Einstein this loyal? Somehow I don't think so...

For some reason I will probably never understand, on April 23rd of this year (it was a Wednesday, and it happened at 1:48 PM, if you're wondering) I was sitting at the computer when I started writing. I don't know where the words came from. And I still don't know why I wrote them then. Here they are.

Lord, my best friend crossed the Rainbow Bridge today.

He was the kindest, gentlest, most loving, and most loyal friend I have ever known ... and (quite likely) will ever know.

Today he crossed the Rainbow Bridge and he will need your help. He has never wanted to stray from my side, and now -- for a time -- he must. I shall be along to be with him someday if that is allowed, but for now he is there with you with you while I am here.

Please make sure he has a good bed and lots of toys to play with, and some other Airedales to keep him company. He will probably miss his favorite squeaky hedgehog, so if you can find him one like it, I am sure he will really appreciate it. He is not a picky eater, but he would appreciate some extra treats now and then, especially vanilla cream-sandwich cookies.

He has not been perfect. He likes to sleep on the human bed and to lie on the human furniture. At times he has torn up things, and he did not always come when called. Sometimes he sheds, and (infrequently) he even had "accidents" in the house. He has even brought mud, dirt, "critters," and "things" into the house. But I would not change even one thing that he has ever done. For while he was doing all of those so-called "bad" things, he has tried as hard as he possibly could to "be good" and to "do what daddy wanted."

So Lord, please take care of my friend, for I am no longer able to do so. Please give him lots petting, some back scratching, and lots of ear-rubs. He already knows it, but please reassure him that "daddy" loves him and misses him as much as I already know he does me. But he will probably miss me, and maybe this reassurance will help him somehow.

*Thank you,
One of your other creations,
Bill*

As I said, I don't have a clue from where in my head that came. I only wish it hadn't been prophetic.

On August 24th 2003 at about 5:15 in the afternoon, Merlin crossed the Rainbow Bridge, in pain and dying from the advanced bladder cancer which was spreading rapidly through his body. He breathed his last at his favorite vet's office, lying on a stretcher with his head in my hand looking at me. He loved me – he loved everyone – to the very end.

MERLIN'S TALE

My human, daddy Bill, always said, "You can tell just by watching him: Merlin always tries to be good."
He was right. I always did.

MY HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

A long time ago, way back in 1996, I was born on a farm, way down in South Georgia near ... what is the name of that human town ... oh yeah, near Moultrie. My Airedale daddy was Yankee Doodle Dandy Dale, and my mommy's name was Sweet Savannah Sam, and she had the best milk in the whole world. There were seven of us in our litter, and when we were three days old, the humans took us to a veterinarian to have our thumbs taken off and our tails docked. (I always missed my thumbs, but I got used to the short tail idea. I thought it made me look sorta' dashing.) The vet human told our human that he was supposed to bring us in when we were three *days* old, not three *weeks*! That was funny – we weren't that old; we were just big puppies. I had 5 sisters and one brother, Beethoven. He was a lot bigger than I was, but we were great buddies.

Beethoven and I had a boys' club on the back steps of our human's house, and we used to like to lie there in the sun while the girls did whatever it is that girl puppies do to stay busy all day. As I said, Beethoven was really big. When we were all 8 weeks old, I weighed 10½ pounds, but Beethoven weighed 13. But my even bigger sister, Beethoven, weighed 13½! But I was no runt, and I was the boss.

I was the first one born, the first one to get my eyes open, and the first one to learn to bark! I ate solid food first, and I learned to play with all the toys first – and all of my brothers and sisters usually let me have whatever toy I wanted to play with. So my humans there nicknamed me "Merlin," because I was full of magic. And I was the ring leader ... I owned our puppy house, and I was the first one to escape from the puppy "nursery" and the first one to start digging out of our pen. Now our pen was funny, because it had 6-foot high chain link fence for walls, and more chain link over the roof (they said my mommy, Sam, loved to climb out and go on adventures), and our humans had even buried the chain link fence down a foot deep under the ground.

How do I know? I dug down and checked of course. Daily.

And I got all my sisters and my brother to help me, too.

I was the boss, the alpha in my litter, and I was also the most independent. I would take charge and head somewhere and all 6 of my litter mates would follow along right after me. It was fun being a little puppy on a great big farm like that and being the boss, too! There were kitties there, and we all liked to play with them. I liked to play with them more than any of my sisters or my brother did, because I was the bravest – sometimes those kitties liked to swat us with their fingernails, but I was a mighty Airedale puppy and I was tough, so I just kept on playing when the others gave up.

One day, mommy Sam and daddy Dandy took us all down for a swim in the creek. We were all big 7-week-old puppies, and all Airedales love to swim. Or at least that's what they want you to believe. I fell into the creek and couldn't get out. If my humans (OK, they *really* belonged to my mommy and daddy, but I still thought of them as "mine" at the time. After all what did I know – I was only 7 weeks old) had not come and saved me, I would have drowned. After that for the rest of my life, I have never, ever, EVER liked to get in the water. Never. No way. Niet. Nein. Nimmer. Non. Nie. Not at all., thank you.



One Friday night our humans washed up all of us puppies real squeaky clean and made us look very pretty. They were excited about something – but they also both seemed a little sad, especially my human mom. For that matter, so did my human dad, and he looked a little worried, too. (Did you

know that when my mommy Sam had our litter, my human mom took a three-month leave of absence from her work just to take care of us. She really loved us a lot. And I really loved to play with her.)

The next day, two or three cars full of humans came to see and admire us. We must have been extra popular. Let me just tell you what we did. Being proper mighty Airedale puppies we went right up to those humans and tried to steal their shoelaces; yes sir we did! And we did a pretty good job of it, too. We almost got away with the boy's laces, but the human lady stopped us (so we got hers instead). But I got bored with this game, so I headed off into the woods on an adventure all by myself.

Now, the great big human man who had come to admire us seemed mostly to be interested in my brother, Beethoven, and me. For some reason he mostly ignored my sisters – though both he and the nice lady petted them, and picked them up, and loved on them a lot. But he kept watching me and Beethoven, and he kept wanting to touch us and to pick us up and hold us. Well it didn't take me long to get a belly full of that! So again I marched right off into the woods again. But this time, the big human man followed me.

Then it happened.

I don't know *how* or *why* it happened, but it happened anyway.

That human man and I stood there looking at each other for about 3 or 4 minutes – just looking, and neither of us moving. It felt like 3 or 4 days to me. All of a sudden, I knew that *he* was *my* real human, and not the humans belonging to mommy Sam and daddy Dandy. He was the one I wanted to keep.

So I walked right over to him and put my paws up on his knee and he picked me up. So I nosepoked him on *his* nose and licked his ear to let him know that I had picked *him* out.

Now even though he really doesn't look all that bright, he got the message anyway: he didn't put me down, but instead he carried me over and talked with Sam and Dandy's male human. Before I knew it, I was in my new human's car and riding away from my brothers and sisters. What an adventure! I don't think I knew then that I would never get to see my mom and dad or my brother and sisters again, but for me this was the start of a great adventure!

We rode *forever* in my new human's car, and there were two other humans in that car with mine. One was a nice lady, and the other was a boy (later I would learn that he was still a “little” boy, but he was so much bigger than I was that the thought never occurred to me then). I sat in the back seat with the boy, but I never took my eyes off my new human in the front seat. He couldn't hold me, because he was holding the steering circle. But several times, he reached back and touched me, and I knew that I had picked the right one.

Well I quickly learned that my new human's name was “Bill” and that the nice lady was named “Cathy” and that the boy was named “Nicholas”. Now that's a funny name, and it's too long to bark ... but more about that later. I think I heard the lady Cathy tell my new human that I was supposed to be for the boy Nicholas. But they got lots of other things wrong, too, so that didn't bother me much – or even make me laugh too hard.

After riding forever, my new human, Bill, stopped the car – without being told, he knew that I had to go pee. Now one funny thing is that these new humans had brought along a box for me to ride in, but I was not just a mighty Airedale puppy, I was a *big* mighty Airedale puppy. I was a *lot* bigger than the box. And they had also brought the halter and leash which belonged to their kitty, too, but the halter was way, way, way too small for a mighty Airedale puppy. Finally they unwound it, and it made an OK collar, so they put it on me and we got out so that I could go for a walk and go pee.

Now this place where we live, Georgia, has some strange rules. If you want to go pee, your human has to put you on a leash with a collar and go with you whether he needs to pee or not. Talk about silly. But I figured that if my new human wanted to go with me, I'd let him. I even surprised him by walking on leash like I had been doing it forever – even though I had never even seen a leash before. Probably it helped that I trusted my human. I could tell that this Bill human would never do anything to hurt me or to be mean to me, and if I played my cards right I could teach him to do almost any trick I'd want. So I walked on leash really nicely and went pee, and I even pooped a little, too, just to see what my human would do. He did something funny though – he took out a little bag and he *stole my poop and hid it in the bag*. I wonder if he still has it, or – if he doesn't – what he did with it?

After this I got to have a drink of water and a little snack, and we all got back into the car and rode some more. Now the boy, Nicholas, still thought I was going to be *his* Airedale – I had heard my human say something about that to the lady Cathy human. Yeah, right. The Nicholas boy didn't have a chance from the start.

You see, in the first place, *he* might have been *my* human boy, but the other way around just wasn't going to happen. Mighty Airedales don't belong to humans – it's the other way around.

And anyway, I had already picked out *my* human, the one making the car go. He was nice, and I thought he might even be useful with proper training.

My New Home

FINALLY we got to stop the car and get out at my new house. I think my new humans said that it was about 250 miles from my old house to my new one, but I'm still not sure how far that is ... I just knew that I probably would have to rest a couple of times if I had to run back home to tell mommy Sam or daddy Dandy something. I miss them sometimes, and I sorta' missed them a lot just then. But I was very independent, and I had some exploring to do. So I walked right into the front yard and found an enormous bush to crawl under. There was even a good, big hole under it that smelled like moles! Heaven!

But that Nicholas boy (who was still confused about who was in charge and who could own whom) followed me under my bush, and another boy from next door – I think his name was Michael or something – came right in with him. Time to clear out. After a while it began to be time for my early-late-mid-afternoon-pre-early-evening nap, so I found a good spot to sleep under another bush, and I curled up right there to doze off. Big mistake. The nice human lady didn't want me lying on those flower things for some silly reason, and so they picked me up and took me inside for a nap there. I don't think I'd ever tried “aire conditioning” before. It was almost as good as a fresh mole hole.

When I woke up, they had some of my favorite food and a couple of toys for me, so I humored them and played a little and got a snack. And then I found out they had a KITTYY!

Now make no mistake: I absolutely LOVED kitties! I wanted to play! But this kitty, whose name was Fredd Thunderfoot Pig Stinkbomb didn't like mighty Airedale puppies – not even extra nice ones, and not even after I let him hiss at me and slap me with his hands and didn't hurt him back.

You see I knew it immediately, but I still don't know if my new humans did: Fredd was dying with cancer, and so I was always very sweet, and very, very gentle to him, and even when I was about 5 times his size, I never once hurt him, or picked him up in my mouth and played rough with him, or anything. Nevertheless, he was not very impressed, and he definitely did not like me. He would hide from me any time I tried to play, and although I never gave up on him, after a few months he just started ignoring both me and the humans. And then one day several months later he went away for a while in the humans' car, and then the grown-up humans came back acting real funny, and they took him and buried him in the back yard. And they wouldn't even let me dig him up and play with him. But I'm getting all ahead of myself.



The next day daddy Bill (which is what I decided to name my human) said that I would have to be good for a little while, because these humans had to go ride in the car and go to something called “church.” (I still don't know what this “church” thing is but it must not be fun, because you have to wear clothes you can't play in). My human didn't have to worry, though, because I *always* tried to be good, and even when I was not successful at it, he could still tell I was trying. That's because we mighty Airedales are also very, very smart in case you don't already know it.

They said they would be back in just a little over an hour, and the boy, Nicholas, didn't want to go at all, but they made him anyway. They set me up in what they said was my new “room”. I have since learned that “room” is not another human word for prison, but I couldn't tell at the time. So they put my in this “room” thing, and put a baby gate over the door. They gave me lots of toys to play with and some good smelling stuff to chew and enjoy (I think some of it was even supposed to be food), and a very nice bed with lots of extra towels for a blanket. They even got the kitty Fredd to come stay with me for a while (but he mostly just sat in the window and looked at me). And they left.

I had fun!

The first thing I did was what I had first learned from mommy Sam: I climbed out. It must have taken me almost that whole hour to do it, but I went up the stairs where my human and the other two had gone. And when they came back, I met them at the back door, wagging my entire body because I was so proud ... and the boy, Nicholas, said I was doing “the happy wag dance.” I think they were pleased and very proud of me for solving that puzzle and escaping, because they set up lots of other, progressively harder puzzles for me to escape from as the weeks went by.

Every morning, I would play with the humans – especially *my* human, daddy Bill, but usually the boy Nicholas as well – and then eat some food and water and (of course!) try to get *their* food and water, too.

Eventually I finally figured out that they don't like to share food the way we Airedales do. I wonder if its bad breeding or just a bad upbringing that causes this?

Then after going outside to go potty, I would run down to my room – pretty soon I had the world's largest collection of toys in there, not to mention bones, my dad's old belt and 3 shoes to chew on – and sleep until one of them came home at lunch time to visit me. Lots of days my human, daddy Bill, would do something called “working from home” but I still don't know what that means. All I know is on those days, I got to stay with him and play! Play! PLAY!

TIME FLIES BY

Well when you're a mighty Airedale puppy – especially a *very* smart one – time can go by pretty quickly. There were so many things to see, so many things to learn, so many table legs to chew off... You know what I mean. And on the days when he had to go to that office place (I always wondered what it was like there) every day at lunchtime daddy Bill would come and take me outside for a while and play with me, and every afternoon he (or the boy and the lady Cathy human) would come home early and get me out of my puppy room and take me outside to play. Then I would come back into the house and pee or poop somewhere, and this always resulted in my going back outside again.

Gradually I learned that it made my human, daddy Bill, very unhappy when I did this, though, so I started working on not pooping or peeing in the house. Let me tell you: for a mighty Airedale puppy this was a hard idea to remember at first. I was finally successful, but it took me a couple of months.

At the very first when I was still trying to sleep in the human boy's room with Nicholas, every night they would put out what was called a “puppy pad.” It smelled a little like poop, so naturally I didn't want to poop or pee there – the nice vinyl floor was much easier and smelled better – I wanted to play with that “puppy pad” and to chew it up. So they started putting down newspapers, too. What a game: chew up the puppy pad (which one of the humans started calling a “poopy” pad) and hide it, and then poop or pee where it had been. Or find a place with no newspapers. I just loved all the noise they made the next morning when they found out what I had done as a surprise for them.

One bad thing happened along about now, though.

The humans had intended for me to the boy's Airedale (I know, stupid, stupid humans don't understand who is the master and who is the pet – we already covered that...), but it turned out that he was so allergic to me that I couldn't ever sleep in his room. When I did, he would sneeze a lot and then wheeze and then get very, very sick. I even thought for a little while that the humans might have to send him away (but they never did because although the lady human wanted to because she was worried about the boy, the boy and my human didn't want to). So sometimes I slept downstairs in my “room” and sometimes upstairs in the bathroom near daddy Bill's bed. That was like Heaven, because he'd come in to check on me 4 or 5 times every night. I gave him lots of hugs and licks when he did that.

And sometimes he'd even leave the door open accidentally and I'd escape and have an adventure... but that's a story for another time.

It was not fun when I had to sleep in my room in the basement, because by now the door was blocked shut and my friend Fredd the Kitty couldn't get in to visit me or try to kill me or anything. So about this time, I figured I'd better stop pooping in the house, and I did.

Now early on daddy Bill and the other humans had tried to decide what to name me. But they finally figured out that the name Merlin seemed to fit (I'm *still* magical, you know, even now) and so they filled out some paperwork and registered me as “Sam's Dandy Dale Merlin”. How silly of them. I already knew that my name was Merlin, but it took them *days* to figure it out.

Now when I first moved in to my new house, I heard my human say that I was going to be a big Airedale when I grew up (Hmmp! I thought I was big already, a mighty Airedale puppy). And so every day he and the human boy worked with me on things like coming when called, and on a funny command they worked out, a command called “DROP IT”. I think it's like a game. You get something really neat to chew in your mouth and then one of the humans yells DROP IT! And then you're supposed to put it down – or let one of them pry it out of your mouth. Like I really wanted to. Did you know that the Airedale has about the strongest bite of any of what the humans think of as “dogs”? Even as a puppy, prying something out of my mouth was not easy if I didn't want them to.

But I wanted to please *my* human, and pleasing daddy Bill made him easier to train. So I started dropping whatever I was destroying whenever he told me to DROP IT.

We worked on other commands, too, and after a while I would sit whenever my human asked me to, and I could even shake hands and speak when asked.



Sometime about now, I learned about pine cones. They are delicious. I would get one and chew it to pieces, and then get another and start all over. What a neat game. But none of the humans (not even mine) wanted me to bring them into the house. They must be superstitious or something. So I had to sneak them in.

Now we mighty Airedales have BIG mouths. One day I was sneaking a pine cone into the house in my mouth, and Bill stopped me at the door and said DROP IT. I looked up at him and tried to say “I don't have anything in my mouth.” But have you ever tried to talk while keeping your mouth shut and your lips completely closed? It didn't work. It sounded more like “mmmmmmuh mmmmmmmuh muuuuh.” He didn't buy it. He told me to DROP IT again, and so I spit it out. The next time I went outside, I tricked them. When I came to the door, the pine cone was sticking out the front of my mouth, and daddy Bill said to DROP IT. So I did and started into the house. But my human gave me a funny look and stopped me (maybe he was a little more perceptive than he looked... no, he was just lucky). Then he said, “Now the other one. DROP IT.” How did he know I had hidden another one in there? Well I had to drop that one, too. This was *not* fun. So the next time I came in, I was ready.

I got to the door, and daddy Bill said “DROP IT,” and I did. Then he said “Now the other one. DROP IT,” and I dropped that one, too. But you know, my human *is* a lot smarter than he looks. I guess he'd have to be, because he waited a few seconds and then he said “The third one, too. DROP IT.” This was not fair – he had cleverly figured out my trick. And I couldn't easily hide four pine cones in my mouth at once, so I knew that pine cones would have to be a mostly-outside kind of toy to chew on.

MY FUZZY FRIEND GOES AWAY

As the weeks went by and the leaves got ready to fall off the trees in our yard, my friend, Fredd the Kitty, started getting weaker and weaker. He stopped trying to steal my food, and he hardly ate his own. Mostly he just sat looking out one particular window in the kitchen, because he couldn't get to his favorite window down in the basement any more – he couldn't jump that high any more. And then one day he couldn't walk any more, either. The doctors said that Fredd's cancer had come back, and that he was in a lot of pain. So he he couldn't walk or eat or drink any more, he went in the car for a ride with my human and the lady Cathy.

When they came back they brought back his *body*, but *he* was gone someplace else.

He had told me once that he was over 15 years old – that's like forever in Airedale years. He also told me that except for about 3 or 4 nights he slept under the covers curled up in a little ball next to *my* human's tummy every night. And I think my human was especially sad then, because he made funny, sad sounds and had water coming out of his eyes. I tried to make him feel better, but he just held me and sat there being sad.

Then he and the lady Cathy and the boy Nicholas went out into the back yard and dug a big hole right next to Fredd's favorite window and they stuck him in there and covered him up with dirt. I wanted to dig him up and check on him to see if he was OK, but they wouldn't let me. I think my dad still misses him all these years later. I know I do, and every time I meet a kitty, I still have to go check to see if it is my friend Fredd.

A NEW ADVENTURE

One day I went to the vet doctor, and he stuck a needle in my behind. They said it was a “shot.” It hurt a little, but it wasn’t as bad as when my friend Fredd the Kitty had stuck me with his fingernails a few hundred times to make a point about *his* food versus *my* food. And don’t even ask me how they took my temperature – I don’t want to go there right now. Well after this they gave me a little tag that I wear on my necklace, and said I could now go to school.

I got to go to PUPPY SCHOOL!

What a concept! In my opinion puppy school is right up there with steak for dinner and lots of toys to play with. Every Thursday night, I got take my human with me in the car and go the PUPPY SCHOOL, where I got visit 15 or 16 of my new puppy friends. Then several times every day my human or Nicholas would take me out and try to do what the teacher at the puppy school had told us to do. This wasn’t very hard, because I knew that my human wanted me to do those “exercise” things, and they really weren’t hard for a mighty Airedale – we’re smart. I had a special friend at the puppy school, too. His name was Manson and he was a Doberman, but he had beautiful, natural ears. Somebody stole his tail, though, and when he wagged, he had to wag his whole butt, because his tail was just a little stub. We played a lot and became very good friends. I wonder what he’s doing these days – I always meant to look him up and go visit him sometime, but I just never got around to it.

At first before I met Manson, I had another friend in the class, a Rottweiler named Bruno. Or I thought I did. He was the biggest puppy I have ever seen. He was about 3 years old and weighed almost 200 pounds. (Luckily for me, he never tripped and fell on me, because he would have squashed me.)

Bruno lived only about 3-4 blocks from my house and sometimes we would get together to play with our humans. But then one day when I was 11 months old and weighed about 65 pounds, we were playing when something bad happened. We were having fun, when suddenly Bruno “snapped.” One minute we were playing, and then the next second he growled and tried to attack me. I still don’t even know *why* he attacked me. But I was a mighty Airedale, and so I ducked under his head (not hard – he was tall!) and grabbed his whole throat in my mouth (which by now, the humans were jokingly calling The “JAWSOFDEATH”). I picked him up (he was heavy!) and threw him over on his back and just held on, keeping him on the ground. I must have held his throat a little too hard, because some blood came out there where I was holding him down. Bruno’s human got real excited and sounded scared, but I kept wagging and watching my human’s face to see if I was doing the right thing. You see, it all happened so quickly that I don’t think he had figured out what was going on yet.

Bruno’s human started yelling something very excited at mine, and then Bill looked at me, and told me the worst thing that he ever said to me.

He said loudly “BAD DOG,” “DROP IT,” and then “COME”.

So I dropped Bruno and came to Bill and did a perfect AROUND and SIT to show him that I was really trying to be good. After all, it wasn’t my fault that Bruno had attacked me. And I kept wagging the whole time.

Both Bill and Bruno’s human were very worried. It turned out that Bruno had attacked a large German Shepherd the year before, and so maybe he was not as nice as I had thought – I don’t like fights at all and although I had won my first (and nearly only) fight, I just didn’t want to have to have any others. And that week Bruno stopped coming to the puppy school – which was OK with me and my friend Manson – and I never saw him again. I think Bill said that his human moved away that year, too, so maybe that’s why he stopped.



But puppy school was lots of fun. We learned to COME, to SIT (which was silly because I had been doing both of those whenever daddy Bill asked for months), and to HEEL. Now this one is hard – the human gets to decide where you go, and you have to walk right at his left heel and sit down really quickly if he stops walking. But I got pretty good at it and still was the last time we tried it.

Best of all we also got to run and jump over things called “gates” and to go through this long tunnel thing, and even got to learn how to climb ladders and walk over little bridges. Now just as in my litter, I was the alpha here, and I was the best ladder climber, the best tunnel diver, and the best bridge walker in my class.

One thing that was a little bit funny happened in practicing for Puppy School. I had been doing the SIT and the HEEL and the STAY commands forever, but I didn't really understand the DOWN command that daddy Bill asked me to do. Well maybe I really did understand it, but I never liked it so I could always forget it very easily. But one day my big human brother, Nicholas, had an idea and he told my human what to do. Daddy Bill had both Nicholas and me do a COME right to him, and before either of us could sit, daddy Bill looked at Nicholas and said, “SIT!” And Nicholas did a perfect SIT. Then it was my turn, and when asked I did a perfect SIT, too. But then daddy Bill looked at Nicholas and said, “DOWN!” and Nicholas threw himself into a perfect DOWN position. So when he looked at me and said, “DOWN!”, I looked at him for a minute and then I cocked my head to one side... and then it hit me like a light going on. I *knew* what daddy Bill wanted, and I threw myself into a perfect DOWN position. We repeated this a couple of times more that day and once the next day, and I never forgot what “DOWN” meant, even though I still never liked it.

I also learned how to do what is called a “DOWN STAY,” which is when your human makes you sit and wait while he goes off and does something else. It's pretty boring, but I was really good at it – I think my longest DOWN STAY was about 15 minutes in the class (but one time I did one for over an hour because somebody got hurt, and my human helped and forgot to tell me “FREE” when it was supposed to be over). I did this because I loved my human a lot, and he loved me. I could always tell that he would not be mean to me or hurt me, and I really wanted to please him. Always.

One time while I was at my puppy school, my human told me that we were going to be in a contest that week. It was a lot of fun, and during the long down-stay, a golden retriever got up and came over and barked at me. But I yawned and pretended to be asleep because daddy Bill had told me to stay there and I wanted to please him, and the retriever finally went away.

After a while I did something called “graduating” at puppy school, and I got some kind of paper called a “C.G.C” award (I think that means “Canine Good Citizen” or something). Then we got to go to a new puppy school, one that was bigger and better. But my friend Manson decided not to go any more so we didn't get to have any more adventures together there.

At this puppy school, we got to go to even bigger puppy contests where all of the puppies have been to these puppy schools and they see who can HEEL or do agility tricks the best. I remember my first one the best. My favorite thing was something called the “dog walk” which is like a little bridge I was used to but was high up in the air. They asked my dad if I had done one yet (I was still pretty young) and he said yes. But I had only walked on one that was sitting right on the ground – this one was really high up in the air. So I did it like I had been doing it my whole life. And there was this scramble thing like a little ramp up and down. I did that, too, and it was fun. They said I wasn't perfect on that one though ... but I still won the contest and they said I got first place, whatever that is. I did that two more times in different puppy contests, but in the third one, the bridge (“dog walk” – but I don't like that name because we Airedales are not just “dogs”) fell down when I was on it. It hurt my right arm and although I didn't want to let my human see that it hurt, I think he figured it out because we didn't get to go to any more puppy contests where they had those bridge things.

See-saws were never my favorite at puppy school – there was this mean lady in our second puppy school class who tried to yank me around on one and it scared me. But my human dad got me away from her and let me do it my way. I could do it pretty well – I just didn't enjoy it.

Overall I think that my favorite thing about the puppy schools was going there every week to show off to the other students how much I had taught my human that week and to run around on the course with Bill. This was like heaven.

SOMETHING BAD HAPPENS

One night it was very stormy, and my dad had to work late on the computer. He kept the radio on to listen for what he called “weather reports”. That’s funny to me, because I could tell what was going on without the radio. I guess humans have bad ears as well as bad eyesight and very bad senses of smell. But I digress.

As usual, I sat next to him and put my head in his lap – but finally it got so late that I had to lie down and take a few naps. About 1:15 in the morning a man came on the radio and said that a tornado had touched down about 6 miles from where we live – and that it was heading in our direction at about 50 miles per hour. My dad said that we had to go to the basement, so I grabbed his arm in my mouth and started dragging him in his swivel chair to the basement door. But he said, “No Merlin! We have to get mommy! Go get Nicholas!”

Now when we mighty Airedales are happy, our tails are straight up in the air, and our ears are up and all perky. But this was really serious! I put my tail down and my ears and head down, and I ran up the stairs barking as loudly as I could. I ran into my human’s bedroom and woke up Cathy (Hey, daddy Bill was *my* human, but I loved *her* too, and the boy Nicholas as well. Nobody dared to hurt my humans when I was on duty.) – it was the middle of the night – and tried to pull her out of bed by her sleeve. But before I could get her up, my human came opened the door to Nicholas’ room, so I ran in there and tried to jump up on the upper bunk, still barking. Now even for a mighty Airedale, a bed five feet up in the air is not an easy jumping target, not flatfooted anyway. So my human told me, “You get Cathy, and I’ll get Nicholas,” and so I ran back into their bedroom and finished getting her out of bed. Then we all headed down to the basement to wait.

Well while we were on the way downstairs, the tornado turned and went south of us, so I went back up to the kitchen to get a drink and some food. Then I went down to tell them that it was safe to go back upstairs. But being humans, they didn’t figure it out for almost a half hour. Silly humans with their pitiful sense of smell, limited hearing, and poor eyesight – I felt a little sorry for them.

But after this, I heard the human lady Cathy (I was starting to think of her as “mommy” by now) talking to my human.

Because I was too big to be in the Airedale beauty contests (the judges like those little bitty Airedales who were half my size), daddy Bill and Cathy had been talking about getting me ‘fixed’ – another silly superstition, probably, because I really wasn’t broken at all. OK “housebroken” but that’s the limit). Daddy Bill didn’t want to, but he seemed to think that we ought to do it anyway for some reason. (As I said – silly human superstition.) Well after the tornado incident, I heard mommy Cathy telling my human that they were not going to get me “fixed” (found out later what that means. Ugh!) but instead were going to find me a “Mrs. Merlin” and that we would get to have puppies.

Make no mistake, I knew what this was, and I was really looking forward to it.

SARAH

A few months later, my human and Cathy and Nicholas got in his car and went off for a while and when they came back they had a little, baby girl Airedale with them. Her name was Sarah. Miss Sarah Endipity Dale was really headstrong because she had not had a good puppyhood up until then.

The humans who were owned by Sarah's mommy did not know how to take care of puppies properly.

While I was born on a big farm way down in south Georgia, Sarah had been born in a house in Atlanta. And instead of playing with the puppies constantly and letting them go outside and stuff, they were kept in a dark bedroom and they had to poop and pee on newspapers. When Sarah and her brothers and sisters were 4 weeks old they were what those crazy humans called “weaned”. That meant that they took all 6 girl puppies and put them in one big box and put all 5 of the boy puppies in another big box and they just left them there in that dumb old, dark bedroom, and they fed and watered them and changed their papers twice a day. But the rest of the time, nobody played with them.

And then when they were only 5 weeks old (TOO YOUNG!) those bad humans put an ad in the newspaper and started selling her brothers and sisters like animals!

Sarah told me most of this, but I heard my human say that he wished he could have kidnapped all 11 of Sarah's litter. That would have been fun... sigh.

Well because Sarah had such a “deprived” childhood, she didn't really know how to play – she mostly just wanted to bark at me. Or bite me. Or try to kill me, mostly. She was the girl alpha in her litter, you see, and she thought I would take orders from her. Yeah, right.

By this time, I was a big, full grown, 85 pound mighty Airedale, and Sarah was a 5-pound 5-week-old *tiny* mighty Airedale puppy with the worst case of worms you would ever want to see. (No make that “never want to see.”) When she would bark at me and not stop, I would finally have to put her whole head in my mouth to get her to stop. And then she'd usually keep trying to bark anyway. But when she wasn't trying to bark at me or to attack and kill me or otherwise do me bodily harm, we got to be friends – best friends, in fact.

We had lots of fun. My humans have this thing called a coffee table, and it is very short. Sarah would stand under it and “chase” me around the edges of it barking her head off while I ran around and around the table until nobody could count how many times I had done it. Or sometimes I'd be lying there, and she'd sneak up on me and bite me, and then run as fast as she could to get under the table for protection. This was funny, because I was pretty big and couldn't get at her very easily under the table. But one time when she did this she forgot that she was growing, and she hit her head really hard on the bottom of the table. She was always very careful about the table after this. Come to think of it, I don't think she's gotten under that table except to retrieve toys or treats for years.

When she was very little, Sandy Claws came and brought us all some neat toys. I think the humans got some, too, but I'm really not sure. My favorite was a Kong, which is a big rubber thing that I've been chewing on for over 5 years without destroying it. My human would put peanut butter in it, and I would like in the big end and Sarah would lick in the little bitty small end. And we even chewed on bones together.



I think I left out the fact that the previous year I had eaten a wasps' nest and had gotten stung pretty badly. And the next day I was so on edge from all of the stings that I practically ate a new wing-back chair and a new loveseat. I had not chewed anything up for months before that, though. Well I don't know if it was that, or the huge hole I made in the new wall-to-wall carpeting or some of the other things I ate (like my mom's glasses, one of Nicholas' shoes, ... you know the kind of irresistible stuff I mean), but one day nearly a year before we got Sarah, my humans went to the puppy store (one of my favorite places!) and brought home this “crate” thing.

Let me explain: to me “crate” meant “solitary confinement”.

They put the crate in the den next to my human's chair, and I had to sit in it with the door locked. I have only one word for this one situation: "Aaoooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!"

It was not fun. So they tried other places. Same result. You see I had had the run of the house during the day for months before the wasp-carpet-glasses-shoe-chair-loveseat-other-stuff incident (OK, so maybe I wasn't quite perfect. Yet.), and I did NOT like this cratey thing.

But I got used to it in a few months, and I even liked to take naps in it later.

Well the day they brought Sarah to be my friend, they got her a cratey, too. Did she hate it? No, she loved it. It was the most room she had ever had to sleep, and she had all kinds of neat toys in there. And of course, my human came home every day at lunch to play with her (and me! of course), and she had water, and food, and probably a stereo in there, too. She even had a box in her crate that she could "hide" in so that she could feel secure. And even though by now I was not locked in my crate, I slept in my crate right next to her all day so that she wouldn't be lonesome.

So her cratey thing wasn't too bad after all. Sometimes Sarah and I would swap and take naps in each other's crates at the same time. We loved each other and were best pals, and that made it even more fun.

AMAZING AIREDALE FEATS? NO, JUST TYPICAL

After a while with Sarah, everything started to blur together – she was growing fast and learning lots, but there was a little problem. Because of her “deprived early puppyhood,” as I like to call it, she didn’t learn as fast as I did. But then, that might be unfair to Sarah, because I was extra smart, even for an Airedale. You want to know what I mean by that? Here’s an example:

One day, my daddy Bill was trying to leave for work and to take the boy Nicholas to school. But he kept on not leaving, and he was running all over the house looking for something ... but what? Finally when he was downstairs and Nicholas was telling him that they were about to be late, daddy Bill said to Nicholas, “We can’t leave yet – I can’t find my keys.” Quick as I could run, I dashed upstairs to my human’s bedroom and sat down right in front of the television. Then I started barking as loudly as I could. When daddy Bill came upstairs to see what was going on, he looked under the clean laundry which someone had stuck on top of the television the night before, and there were his keys, right where he had left them. That’s how I always tried to be helpful. Usually I understood exactly what daddy Bill wanted before he even did himself.

That’s the kind of smart thing I used to do almost all the time. But Sarah never caught on to this and – whether it was her bad early environment or whether it was because I was so smart, she just couldn’t keep up with me thinking-wise. So I had to help her, sometimes a lot. Now sometimes, yes, I did play tricks on her, like when she was little and would try to take a stick away from me in the yard. I would hold it out one side of my mouth – the left usually – and get her to chase me. I would run slowly so that she could keep up. But then would run right by a tree, directly on my left side. Almost every time Sarah would run right into the tree rather than give upon that stick. Poor Sarah never had a chance with me.

I was a lot bigger than she was – when we were both full grown, I outweighed her by 25 pounds and stood almost 2½ inches taller than she did. And I was a *lot* stronger, too. I could easily pick up things that she could only push around. So naturally Sarah always thought she should be the boss, the alpha.

It used to make her very mad with me, because I just treated her attempts to be the boss as a joke.



One day, though, I not only took her seriously, I was very glad to have her around. We used to have this rather mean-sounding lady who had two enormous black, shaggy dogs. They looked sorta’ like what you’d get if you crossed a Germy Shepherd with an Irish Wolfhound. Well, she used to walk those two dogs every afternoon through our neighborhood, and she’d come right down our street. I understand that daddy Bill and the lady Cathy finally stopped trying to speak to her, because the only time she answered back was when she told them to keep back because her dogs were “highly protective.”

Ha. They weren’t protective – they were just vicious and poorly socialized like their owner.

Well one morning when Sarah was about 6 months old, daddy Bill let us go out into our back yard to play while he took a shower. (Why do humans take showers – don’t they like the way they smell? We do – they smell great, especially daddy Bill. But I digress.) Well he had no more than gotten upstairs to take his shower than one of those two mean dogs came into our yard and headed straight for Sarah. Now make no mistake: in my entire life I had only two fights ever. The first one was with my former friend, Bruno, and this was the other one.

As I said, he headed straight for Sarah, and I had to protect her, so I headed for him. Do you know what Sarah did? While I headed for him she circled around behind him and headed for his back legs with her sharp puppy teeth. About the same time that I grabbed him by the throat, Sarah grabbed him by the back leg. He tried to get away, and he sounded like a dozen dogs fighting, but he never laid a tooth on either of us. And after a minute or so he just lay really still in the position I heard my daddy Bill call “the please don’t kill me” position. On his back, with his feet down, and not resisting.

Sarah, who had just learned a week earlier how to do her “big Airedale bark” (as opposed to her puppy bark), finally stopped chewing on his leg – those puppy teeth are sharp, and he had lots of bite marks and blood on his leg – and sat there doing her big Airedale bark and calling daddy Bill to come see.

In a minute, he came running out of the house looking really funny. He must have just about gotten into the shower when all of this started, because he was wearing some jogging shorts on backwards, and he had on one flip-flop and one house-shoe. And his T-shirt was wrong-side out.

He found us – I couldn't call him, because my mouth was full of neck and throat – and went back into the house. When he came back out, he had a big pot of hot water and a baseball bat. He threw the water at the bad doggy and he told me to COME. So I went to him and did a real good SIT at his side. That bad doggy got up slowly, and he started to growl at all of us. So I obligingly growled back and he suddenly remembered that he had to run like mad for his house and to get out of our yard. We never saw him again.

I was glad to have Sarah there for this one, because that's the day I found out that even though she wasn't quite a smart as I was, she was just as brave if not braver. We became the best friends in the whole world from that day for the rest of our lives together. Nobody (except maybe daddy Bill or the lady Cathy or the boy Nicholas) could hurt Sarah without facing me. *And* vice versa.



You know, we Airedales are always more perceptive than our humans, and I was no exception. One day a few months before we got Sarah, my daddy Bill told me he was going to work from home the entire week. While this was a special treat for me, getting to stay with him 24 hours a day, I knew that something was going on, something unusual.

On the weekend before the staying-at-home week, my daddy Bill and Cathy and even Nicholas tore out the entire kitchen in our house. (I even got to help, because they let me carry out a few sticks and a big board that I chewed on for a long time.) No more sink. No more cabinets. No more cooktop. No more ... Well you get the idea. If they had torn down the refrigerator, too, I would have been sorta' worried – that's where they kept the people food and my best treats (which are also people food, I guess. Do humans eat hot dogs, too?)

Well on Monday, these other people showed up and started installing new cabinets and new counters. They didn't install the oven, though, because its cabinet had gotten smashed when it was being shipped to us. But that was OK, because daddy Bill figured out a way to make it cook anyway sitting on a roller-thing that we had. But the people didn't install the counter tops, and I was confused: where would they fix my dinners and my treats without a counter top?

I shouldn't have worried, however, because the next day daddy Bill stayed home and some more humans came to install the counter tops.

Now let me set this straight. The number one job of a mighty Airedale who has a human family is to protect that family from all bad guys whether they (the family) realizes that the guy *is* a bad guy or not.

Well the man who was the boss of the counter-installer people was OK, but his assistant wasn't. Later I remember when daddy Bill described him as looking “like a mugging about to happen,” whatever that means.

Anyway, I did not like him and I didn't want him in our house. I was a little too forceful about telling him that, and so rather than locking me in my crate daddy Bill made me come sit with him in the computer room where was working. This was OK by me: I could protect him from there if I needed to, and I could be with him, which as I have already said, was my favorite thing in the whole world anyway.

But I didn't trust that bad man, so when I got a chance I sneaked out to the den and sat in my dad's chair where I could watch the guy. Dad's recliner chair was on a swivel and I had long since learned how to turn it to face the direction I wanted it to, so I pointed it straight at the kitchen.

About the time that the boss and the bad man decided to stop for lunch, daddy Bill realized that I was not in the room with him, and he came looking for me. And just at that time, the boss and the bad man went outside. That was OK with me, because they were leaving and I wanted the bad man out of my house and away from my human. But just as daddy Bill got almost to me, the bad man turned to come back inside for some reason, and that was my cue to act.

As hard as I could I launched myself straight at him from daddy Bill's chair, with my mouth wide open and my teeth bared, and giving my best war-growl ready to do some really major harm. I would have killed that

bad man if I could have. (I was not mean – it was just necessary to protect my human and our house.) But daddy Bill, who can sometimes move surprisingly fast for a human, managed to get between me and the man, and he caught me under the collar and under my back legs. Now I was a *big* mighty Airedale and I weighed more than 90 pounds at the time, but daddy Bill was (and is) no shrimp himself. He caught me and held on, and he didn't go down – he just leaned against the wall. And I spent the rest of the afternoon while they were there in my crate in the computer room. I guess that daddy Bill realized that I was only trying to protect him and our house, and that I wasn't just being mean.

Well the next day, daddy Bill was again working from home, and the police came. I think he thought that the bad man had put in a complaint about me. But no, that wasn't it at all.

They were looking for that bad man. They never did tell daddy Bill exactly why they were looking for him, but I did hear them say something about multiple warrants from out of state, and even though I didn't know what those were (and still don't), it sounded pretty bad to me.

So when they noticed me, I went over and licked the nice police officer on the hand, and he got down on the floor and played with me a little. He liked dogs AND he liked mighty Airedales, too. Well he and my human got to talking and daddy Bill told him that he had been worried that they were coming about what had happened the day before – and he told them the whole story. That made *both* of the police officers sorta' happy, because they both rubbed me and petted me, and one of them went back out to their car and brought me a puppy biscuit – a big one.

They told daddy Bill that I was an excellent judge of people, and that he should give me a steak for dinner as a reward. But he never did; all I got was hamburger and an extra ice-cream cone from McDonald's instead. But all-in-all, I'm not sorry. I had protected my human from a bad man, and my human had told me what a good boy I was.

No Airedale can ask for higher praise than that.



Getting back to Sarah, we had lots and lots of adventures together. My human had put what you call an “invisible fence” around our yard, and if you try to go out of it, you get a real bad shock on your neck. Now being a *brave* mighty Airedale, I would occasionally go through it for urgent stuff, like when I wanted to investigate a lady chow puppy who smelled especially good – I think she wanted me to come help her make puppies or something.

Well one day Sarah's shocky collar came off, and so we decided to go through the fence on an adventure. We had gone only a little way down the street when Sarah noticed that there was a creek that went under the street through a big pipe.

You see, Sarah had fallen for all that hype about how we mighty Airedales are supposed to love water and love to swim and all that hogwash, so she quickly ran down the bank to get into the creek. Water. Yukk! But it wasn't really a creek, but just a drainage ditch with some water in it, and although I called and called her, she couldn't get back up. So I had to go down to get her. By the time I got there, she had already gotten trapped in this big pipe thing, and I think her regular collar was hung on something, because not only could *she* not get out, *I* couldn't get her out, and by now her foot was caught, too.

So I ran back up to the top of the bank and started barking for daddy Bill to come and rescue Sarah. Luckily he came outside a couple of minutes later, and although he couldn't see us, he could hear me barking. So he came down the street and crawled into the the big pipe and got Sarah out and took us both home. It's a little odd, though, because he never scolded us for going out on an adventure. He just seemed to be glad to have us back inside the house that day.



Another time, Sarah and I played hunter. Another dog – not the nice lady chow who I always hoped would come back to make puppies with me – came into our yard. He was a puppy probably a little more than a year old, and he came over and just hung around in our yard, marking what he thought was his new territory.

Well he wasn't out there when Sarah and I got to go out to investigate, and when got to our back yard we split using the standard mighty Airedale search-grid technique number three. Staying exactly 10 feet apart we silently ran back and forth across our back yard at top speed making a series of parallel passes until we had covered the entire thing, and then we flipped and did the same thing all over but at a right angle to our original search, making a complete grid. Then we did the same thing all over, but this time doing a diagonal search. My human stood there watching us with his mouth open. What did he think we were going to do? Bark like idiots, maybe? Well anyway, when we finished our search we ended up at the invisible fence at the front part of our driveway, and right across the street stood our target, that puppy.

He came over to visit us, but he was afraid to come into the yard with two mighty Airedales there, so he just hung around for a couple of days – I think he was lost, and he didn't even have a nice collar and tag like Sarah and I did – and he finally went away. I hope he went back home, because it would be terrible to be a young puppy like that and to lose your humans and not be able to find them. I really hope he got home and that he's OK now.

END OF PUPPY SCHOOL AND WHY

Shortly after we got Sarah, she got to go to the puppy agility school with me and daddy Bill. I was so proud, because not only was I good at what I was doing there, and not only did I have what I believe to be the best human an Airedale could ever own, I even had a little friend Airedale to watch and admire what I was doing. I even knew that someday I could teach her to do all of my tricks and have fun, there, too.

But that night something not-so-good happened.

I used to love to go over the trestle, and I was good at it. But tonight when they set it up they wanted us big puppies to go over it first, and being the leader, they let me go first.

But it was real wet and soapy on the top from the humans who had washed it off and hadn't dried it at all, and it was very slippery. My foot slipped, and I fell off.

And I got hurt.

I think I sprained my right wrist, but you know we mighty Airedales don't like to complain, so I didn't let it show very much. That night was OK otherwise, but the lady who ran the school said that my times were "way off." I think that means I went too fast or too slow – I'm not sure which.

But we rested and daddy Bill took me to the vet. The doctor couldn't find anything wrong with my right arm, even though she x-rayed it and felt it all over. But for some reason I kept on limping on it for a few days (OK it really hurt, but I wasn't about to tell anybody that. I was a mighty Airedale and we mighty Airedales do not show signs of weakness). But you know, I think they just ought to get rid of those things altogether. This was the second fall I had had from one of those things, and neither one of them was my fault.

And the next week when we went back to the puppy school (with the boy Nicholas to help and to watch out for Sarah), I didn't want to do the trestle. I got over it, but it just wasn't as much fun, and I had to go slowly because my wrist hurt.

And over the next few weeks I found it was less and less fun to go to the puppy school. It was a new quarter, and lots of my old friends had stopped coming to the school. And then one night, my human hurt his leg and fell down on the course – he had bad knees and I think he hurt one of them – and the lady who ran the school yelled at him. And we never went back. It may have been something to do with the fact that his knees had gotten worse and he couldn't run on the course with me, or it may just have been the mean lady. Or it could even have been that all of my friends were gone, and it was less fun for me. I'm still not sure.

But that was OK with me, because who needed that old school anyway. Daddy Bill and I practiced every day in our yard, and even though we didn't have all the same fun equipment, we still had a good time. You see, most of the fun of doing things like that is doing them with and for your human.

You don't even have to be a mighty Airedale to understand that idea.

And so instead of going to puppy school with daddy Bill once a week, I started going to soccer practice twice a week. And I figured that two outings a week were better than one anyway.

One of the most fun things happened at one of those soccer practices, I got to chase a snake away from my human. It was a big snake and I chased it away from him by staying behind him and barking while the snake went the other way. And best of all, at those soccer practices there are balls just all over the place. You can chase them and push them with your nose and pick them up and shake them. But I had to be careful not to break them – a big mighty Airedale can pick those things up and pop them in his mouth. I know. I popped 2 or 3 of Nicholas's soccer balls before I figured this one out.

Overall, I think I liked soccer practice even more than puppy school. Yeah, there weren't many other puppies there – almost never more than one – but there were lots of human kids the same age as Nicholas there, and they all loved to come over and pet me, or to throw out a soccer ball for me to chase. Almost as good as jumping gates. And a *lot* better than that old see-saw.

NICHOLAS GROWS UP, AND SARAH DOESN'T TRUST HIM – BUT I DO

As Sarah grew up – because it has been a while and I may be scrambling up some of my dates here – Nicholas didn't exactly know how to treat her. Usually he would play nicely, but ... well, I have heard humans say, “boys will be boys.” And I think I know what that means.

Sarah was never very trusting of anybody. I mean she *mostly* trusted daddy Bill, and she trusted mommy Cathy even more. But she never really relaxed and totally trusted anybody that I can remember.

And Nicholas was ... well, Nicholas was a growing human boy – just another kind of overgrown puppy.

Most of the time he was really nice to her. But there were some things he couldn't resist doing. For instance one day when she was pretty little, she and Nicholas played a game with a rubber band. He would shoot it out across the floor and she would run, run, run after it. And then he would have to run, run, run after her to get it back. And she held on pretty tightly, let me tell you. Even pretty little girl mighty Airedale puppies have strong jaws, and if an Airedale doesn't *want* to give you something in there, you can wait a very long time to get it.

Well at one point in the game, Nicholas became afraid that Sarah was actually trying to *eat* the rubber band. So he pried her mouth open (not an easy feat) and tried to pull it out. But it got caught on her sharp puppy teeth – and it broke, popping her on the nose.

From that day on, Sarah was always afraid of rubber bands. She just had to see one to start being afraid and shaking. Sometimes she'd run away with her tail down. Now Nicholas knew this, but he was pretty young himself – not to mention immature – and so he used to pull out a rubber band sometimes and just let her see it. He never shot her with it, but she got so scared that he didn't have to.

Also for some reason she was always afraid of being picked up. Now being a mighty Airedale myself, I could really identify with this one. I didn't like to be picked up, either. But Nicholas always loved to pick up Sarah and carry her around. He would carry her outside to go potty, or he would carry her back inside after she went potty. He liked to carry her upstairs to his room and shut her in there (and unfortunately, being a human “kid”, he probably had lots of rubber bands in the junk that was always all over his floor).

Because of these things and a few others like them, Sarah never trusted Nicholas – and I think that's the main reason she never picked him out as her human. But I know that she initially intended to, and then she didn't. And she also really liked mommy Cathy, too, so maybe that's the real reason.

In any case, Sarah never really trusted Nicholas. But do you want to know something? I did. You see, I was a male puppy once, and I know how much fun it was to play, even when I didn't know that I was hurting or scaring the one with whom I was playing. And I remember what it was like to play with someone much smaller than I was, too: that someone was Nicholas when I was a year old and outweighed him quite a bit.

So I trusted Nicholas, and I hope that someday (now that he is older) Sarah will, too.

MR. FRISKY

One day my human family came home from church talking about something interesting. Someone in their Sunday school class had told them that there was an Airedale puppy in a local pet shop, and that it was pretty big. Now daddy Bill already knew about this place – it is a store which buys puppies from some things called “puppy mills,” and while he felt bad for the puppy he said he didn't want anything to do with a place like that.

Well, I didn't really understand why, but I figured that my human probably knew what he was talking about, so I didn't let it worry me.

But do you know what? Daddy Bill never went to that puppy store, but he kept track on that puppy over the telephone, and nobody bought it.

And then the day before they puppy was going to be sold to a lab for experiments, he went to the store and rescued the puppy.

This poor little baby Airedale was going to be big – maybe even bigger than I was – but they had kept him in a little bitty cage for months, and they never gave him enough food or water. And exercise? Don't even ask. As a matter of fact, the first time that this puppy ever saw grass or went outside was after my human brought him home in his car.

The car. The poor car. Daddy didn't know it at first, but this puppy was absolutely terrified of cars, most likely because he had been driven all the way to Atlanta from a place called Arkansas in the back of one along with a bunch of other puppies and who-knows-what else. And probably with no food on the trip and maybe no water. The poor little guy was scared and he proved it by pooping all over the rugs in the back of daddy Bill's car.

But daddy Bill didn't scold the puppy or anything – I think he really understood.

And when he got home with this big little mighty Airedale puppy it was strange. The puppy took one look at me and one look at Sarah, and we knew that despite the horrible treatment he had undergone, he was really going to be all right. Sarah and I decided he could stay with us. Now the first night he was with us, he was bouncing off the walls and he didn't know how to act toward anybody, human *or* Airedale. But the next day, he was a lot better, and by the third day, he was so relaxed and so changed that you wouldn't know he was the same puppy. He had gained about 6 or 7 pounds (he was severely dehydrated when he arrived, you know), and he was now acting like just another member of the family. And he was so grateful to my daddy Bill that I even let him sit in daddy Bill's lap without attacking him. For a little while, anyway.

Nicholas decided that he ought to be named “Mr. Frisky,” and that's what he was called.

But do you know what? My daddy Bill had told everyone on the Airedale list on the computer about Mr. Frisky, and there were more than a dozen people and rescue organizations who all contacted him and told him that they wanted Mr. Frisky. And finally the nice lady who was owned by Ursula the Airedale talked to my daddy – and Ursula and Mr. Frisky were related. Mr. Frisky ended up going to live with Ursula, and I think that part worked out really well (I didn't really like having to share *MY* daddy Bill, you know).

Later we found out that due to the bad nutrition (as best we could figure out, anyway) and the severe confinement, Mr. Frisky would require surgery to replace both of his hips. That does sound painful, but his is a mighty Airedale, and I think he'll make it OK. And even if he still hurts a little, we mighty Airedales don't complain much, especially when we have humans around us who love us. I just know that my human saved Mr. Frisk's life by rescuing him before he could be sent to be in laboratory experiments, and that Mr. Frisky is probably going to be eternally grateful to my daddy Bill, somewhere, someday, somehow.

ANNUAL AIREDALE PARTIES

The year before we got Sarah, there was a big contest for Airedales from all over the country and maybe even all over the world right here in Atlanta. And so my daddy Bill and the lady Cathy decided to have a party for any of them who wanted to come.

That was our first party, and we had one every year until this year (more about that later). My daddy Bill didn't get to go to the Airedale contest (and I didn't either) because the day of the contest, there was this big wreck, and on the way to it, his car suddenly just died or something. So we never made it there, and I had really, really, REALLY wanted to go. I always hoped to go to another one, but the rest of them are way up in Pennsylvania, and somehow we never got to go because something always came up at the last minute.

But I got to have Airedale parties instead, and maybe that was even better.

At our first party, there was a well-known and highly respected Airedale named Photon as the guest of honor. He was very, very old – I think he was 13 and was getting a little creaky. But we had 23 Airedales there at the party, and a fox terrier (who didn't know how little he was), and we all had fun. No fights, no fussing, just fun.

Otis and Milo drove down all the way from Vermont just to come see me. They were really neat and I wanted to play with them, but they were smaller than I was, and they were sorta' shy.

And my secret sweetheart (hey, this is *before* Sarah ... OK?), came the party, too – the lovely Rita. Sigh. She was really a good looker. And it was her birthday, too, so she thought the party was all just for her.

Rita even tried to steal the humans' cake which mommy Cathy had made and had decorated with a big picture of an Airedale on it at that party.

And the next year, Sarah was the guest of honor. We only had 18 Airedales there that year (and a different fox terrier) but we had a wonderful time, and again there were no fights. Lots of Airedales to play with and ... well in many ways it was a lot like Heaven at that party. All the treats and human hamburgers you could eat, lots of Airedales to play with, and plenty of places for naps. What more could an Airedale ask?

Our third Airedale party almost got rained out. And lots of people canceled at the last minute, too. So although we had 18 Airedales who said they were coming, only 11 showed up – and not all at the same time. And Mr. Frisky was supposed to be there, too, but his humans had to work at the last minute and he didn't get to come. I was a little sad about this, because after we rescued him and got him a good home, I always wanted to go visit him and Ursula (his lady Airedale friend who was a lot bigger than I was), but somehow I never got around to it, and then one day his humans moved to a faraway country... I think it's called Mississippi or something. I just know it's too far to walk. So this one wasn't as good.

And the fourth Airedale party was really great. We only had 16 Airedales there (and one fox terrier again, and a golden retriever) but we had fun – but more on that one later.

These parties were what I used to spend my entire winter dreaming about – next to being with and going places with my human, they were always my favorite thing in the entire world. They were even better than an extra vanilla cream sandwich cookie at bedtime.

PUPPIES

Back in the summer of 2001, my human and the lady Cathy started acting funny. I knew that Sarah was going to start smelling real good pretty soon, because she was showing all of the signs. But what I didn't know was what else was going to happen. I mean previously whenever Sarah started smelling good and wanting to make puppies, the humans made her stay in her crate during the days, and when they were at home poor Sarah had to wear this diaper thing. And whenever I started getting really interested, they made me go lie down in my crate or take a cold shower or something.

But this time, they let us stay together the whole time. Now thinking about it, the last time Sarah started getting interested in making puppies, they let us stay together, too. But that time, Sarah was ... well, let's just say she was a long way from cooperative.

And this time, they took her to the vet several times – a new vet, one called a fertility specialist. Now I don't know what that vet does for a living, but one day they took *both* of us there, and it was a WONDERFUL place – a lot like what I think those human massage parlors for men only are like, if you know what I mean (nudge, nudge, wink, wink). And we got to go back there again – mommy Cathy said that the doctor had told her it was for “insurance,” whatever that is. But sadly in a few days, Sarah stopped being quite so friendly and stopped smelling so good. And I decided that she probably wouldn't have puppies this time, either.

But then she started getting bigger and bigger. And eating? She ate everything in sight – which is pretty normal for Sarah – but she did it a lot faster and a lot more often than usual. And daddy Bill gave her all sorts of extra special foods. They smelled great and I got to try some of them, but I never got to try all those pill things she took.

Well anyway, except for the fact that Sarah wanted to sleep more than usual, eat more than usual, and move a lot less than usual (though she continued to bark as much, so I knew it was Sarah), not much changed.

Then one night early in September, mommy Cathy and daddy Bill took Sarah down to the basement: she was shaking all over, and I thought she was going to be sick. Daddy Bill and I stayed upstairs in the human bed that night, but mommy Cathy stayed downstairs in my old room (which had been seriously rearranged with lots of neat stuff for some reason) and never did come up to bed.

And in the middle of the night, Sarah started having babies like crazy. Before she was done, she had 9 beautiful little baby Sarahs and Merlins – I think there were 6 girls and 3 boys. I came down to visit her the next morning (bringing her the bad news that dad had forgotten to feed us), but she just growled at me, and both daddy Bill and mommy Cathy made me leave the room. I didn't get a good look at the babies until that afternoon when Sarah took a nap. They were as big as I had been when I was born, and one of them (they one they later named “Bear”) seemed to have been born very, very hungry, because she couldn't get him to stop eating for anything.

Well in the next few weeks, these babies started growing up, and I had my hands full teaching them. About the time that they started getting their eyes open, Sarah decided that I could be trusted around them, so I sat down there with her a lot. She was in this big thing they call a “kiddy wading pool” with the babies (and that's weird, because we didn't have any kitties down there), and I would lie on the floor and talk to her and the babies. And then when the babies got even bigger, they found out how to escape from the puppy pen and they came out and crawled all over me, too. I didn't hurt them even when they bit down on my ears. I *did* bark at one once, but that was my “hey let's play!” bark, but it scared the puppy, so I learned not to do that again.

And finally they got big enough to go outside! We had so much fun. Nine babies, Sarah, mommy Cathy, daddy Bill, Nicholas and I would all go out and sit in the sun. We had a lot of fun.

But then something bad happened.

One day when the babies had gotten big enough to have their own personalities, and to eat lots of solid food, people started coming to look at them, and somebody took one away with him. I didn't like that at all: the first puppy to be stolen from Sarah and me was my favorite, “Bear,” a baby Merlin if there ever was one. And it didn't stop there. Pretty soon we were down to just two babies (and Sarah and I tried to hide

them so that all those crazy humans wouldn't come and *steal* our last two babies). And then one Friday morning before breakfast the telephone rang.

Daddy Bill called up the stairs to the lady Cathy and told her that a couple was coming from a long way off to see our babies. And then he said that another lady was also coming. We got scared. In only about an hour, these two humans came and knocked on our door. But when I met them, I knew that it would be OK.

They told daddy Bill that their Airedale had died two days before and that they *had* to have a puppy to love, and it had to be a mighty Airedale. And do you know what they did then? They sat down on the floor and played with me and Sarah. They really knew how to give great ear-rubs, too ... next to daddy Bill, that was the best ear-rub I ever had. And when daddy Bill brought up our two last babies, the ones he had been calling "the Grrrr Girls," the lady human cried. She hugged both of the puppies so hard while they were licking her face that I was almost afraid that one of them might bite her or something. But she must not have hurt either one of them because they seemed to like her a lot.

And then I heard the man human ask her in a real quiet whisper, "Which one do you want?" And I heard her answer back, "Both."

Well I gave them my blessing then and there – especially after I heard that these humans had a big farm and a big lake and lots of ducks to chase – but about this time the other lady who was coming to see the puppies showed up.

She wasn't nearly as nice as these first humans were, and she had brought her little girl with her. By now I could tell the difference between big children and little ones, and I would say that this one was in about the first grade. And do you know what this little girl did? She took one look at our babies, and she climbed up on a chair, and she started screaming in terror at "those big puppies" (and she didn't mean us, because we were hiding in the dining room with the door close, taking turns peeping through the keyhole). I knew right then and there that this lady was not right for our babies, and I tried to let daddy Bill know by barking to him, but I don't know whether he understood.

But I didn't need to worry: daddy Bill may be only human, but even a human could figure this one out. He was about to let the lady know that she couldn't have a puppy when they lady grabbed her daughter (who was still screaming and kicking) and said that she'd "have to think about it..."

And the nice people, the ones with the farm, got to take our last two babies with them. I'm sorta' sorry that we never got to take them up on their offer to go visit them ... we were going to go at the end of September this year, but I guess that wouldn't have worked out anyway. Sigh.

But Sarah and I had made beautiful babies, and they all now had good homes. I guess that we did our part and a pretty good job of it, too, even if I do say so myself.

Maybe that's one of the important things about babies, I guess. We even thought we might try again sometime ...

MORE PUPPIES

Well this just wasn't supposed to happen. In a few months, Sarah started to smell real good again, and I even had my hopes up that they would take me back to that lady vet for some more hanky-panky. But something unexpected happened.

Of course all the humans tried to keep us apart, and of course they crated Sarah a lot (or me) and took her out to go potty all by herself, and even made her wear that dumb diaper thing in the house. But they were not as careful as Sarah and I were sneaky. And this time I got a big surprise.

Not only was Sarah a little more “cooperative,” *she* kept actively trying to help her make puppies, pestering me nonstop until we got the chance to do so. And finally one morning, one of the humans let me outside when Sarah was supposed to be out there by herself, and the other human who was supposed to be watching Sarah had to go inside for something, and ... guess what we did. (heh heh heh)

And nobody knew it!

Somehow I got let back into the house by daddy Bill (who was unaware of what we had been up to), and later they got Sarah back in. And the next few months were rather uneventful.

Although Sarah still ate like a pig nobody noticed, because after the first litter of puppies, she never stopped eating everything in sight. And she got bigger around the middle, but not as much as the first time – but it was winter when daddy Bill never gives us haircuts, so Sarah's winter coat is so thick that you couldn't tell how she was growing.

And then in May daddy Bill gave us both our spring haircuts and Sarah didn't look all that big – after all her winter coat made her look enormous and now she just looked plump. But then two days later it was time for Sarah's annual checkup at the doctor's office, and the doctor told mommy Cathy, “Sarah is so pregnant that she could have her puppies any minute.” Boy were all three of the humans around here surprised and confused.

They quickly set up the puppy room as soon as mommy Cathy got home with Sarah. And it's a good thing, too, because that night Sarah started shaking and making earthquakes on the bed again, and they took her back down to the puppy room. And the next morning she had already had one puppy before daddy Bill or Nicholas could wake up. Before it was over she had 5 more beautiful babies.

They were a lot like her other litter of babies, but this time one of the boys was special. He had a white blaze just like most of our puppies have had, but his was on his left hand, and daddy Bill and mommy Cathy started calling him “Mr. White Toes.” And before you know it, unlike the 9 babies in Sarah's first litter, our humans actually named all of the babies in this litter. Originally they were named Pig, “Mr. White Toes”, Ozymandes, Hilda, and Nosey. Now as time wore on, “Mr. White Toes” became known as Obidiah Doo Dah Dale (his registered name, BTW), but we just called him Obi, and “Obi and Ozzy” had lots of fun. Now Pig was a big puppy, a lot like my big brother, Beethoven, had been. And wouldn't you know it, later when the babies were big he was the first one that some mean old humans came in and took away. I didn't like that at all: the first litter had been fun to play with, and Sarah and I had sorta' planned to keep all of these babies because we both like puppies. In one weekend we went from 5 babies to just 3. That made me sad, but for some reason Sarah seemed relieved. Women. You just can't figure them out.

Well after that, it was a little weird. Nobody called daddy Bill or mommy Cathy about the babies, and we overheard them talking about maybe keeping all three of them. After all, we liked them, and the humans liked them, and anyway how much trouble can three little mighty Airedale puppies be? Forget the part about how going into their room was a lot like going into a pen full of little land sharks. Those teeth don't hurt all that much. After you get used to them, anyway.

And suddenly, we had one of our babies back. Her humans had to go out of town for two weeks, and they wanted to put her in a kennel of all places. My daddy Bill said not way: let her come stay with us, and that's just what they did. It was fun to have “Nosey” (now named “Ginger” – boy did they get that one wrong) back. We got to play with them a lot more, and now they were even big enough to play back.

Then one day, my daddy Bill got a phone call or some email. There's this computer thing called an "Airedale List" and lots of humans talk to each other on it. And one of them who lives way off in Montana had had a tragedy happen to her.

She had two Airedales, and they got into something poisonous. And before she could get them back to the clinic to pump the poison out of their tummies, her favorite boy Airedale died. This even made *me* cry.

She wanted to know if we still had a boy Airedale left and would daddy Bill let her get one of them. Well, the answer was yes to both, so daddy Bill talked with her, and they settled on Ozymandes being the one that she wanted (but she had a cousin named Ozzy or something, so she was going to name him "Spencer" – what a silly name... I thought Ozymandes looked a lot more like an "Ozymandes" than a "Spencer."). But there was a problem, how to get him to her. She had used up all of her vacation already and couldn't just drive down to get him. And none of the airlines would allow him to fly because of the heat. So She and my daddy Bill tried for several days to find a way, but it just didn't work out. So finally one day she called him in tears and said that she couldn't get Ozzy/Spencer after all. And the next morning these other humans came and took him home with them, and somebody else came and got Hilda and there we were with just one our puppies left, Mr. White Toes.

Well that was a Tuesday, I think. But on Friday morning the phone rang and it was the people who had taken Ozzy away. They didn't like him.

Now let me explain: these humans had never been around an Airedale before, but they said that they had "done their homework" and "read all about them." And daddy Bill had given them over 2 hours of what he likes to call "Airedale Horror Stories" to try to persuade them not to get an Airedale puppy. But they said that their schedules were flexible, and that the lady human worked at home, and that the puppy would have a big yard to play in, and lots of other stuff. And so finally, reluctantly, daddy Bill let them take Ozzy away.

But now they were complaining that when they put him in his pen in the basement before they left at 7:00 in the morning he was pretty OK, but that when they got home at 7:30 at night, he was frantic. Why, he had even bitten his way out of the pen (chicken wire won't hold a mighty Airedale, not even a 10-week-old puppy) and torn up a golf shirt. And he didn't like sleeping all night in the basement, and he wasn't housebroken yet, and he barked sometimes, and he played rough, and when they got home he wanted to jump up on them, and ... well, it was whine, *whine*, WHINE!

My human (who is a softy, I guess) immediately said "Bring me back the puppy – I've still got your check," and they arranged to bring back Ozzy the very next day, on Saturday morning.

Well I thought Saturday morning would *never* get here, but it did. And about 8:00 in that morning, the phone rang. But it wasn't the humans who had Ozzy. It was another lady who had taken one of our babies from Sarah's *first* litter, a cute little girl named "Tillie."

It seems that Tillie had picked out the lady's husband as her human, and then he died. And the lady didn't like Tillie at all. Tillie had always slept in the bedroom and on the bed with her family. Suddenly she was an outside-only Airedale, and was being treated like a dog. But it gets worse. Sometimes when Tillie barked, the lady hit her. Hard. And finally one day, the lady sat in a chair on her deck although Tillie was already under it. And it made Tillie cry because the leg of the chair was on top of her foot. So the lady tried to yank Tillie out from under the chair, but she was stuck. So when the lady tried to pull her out by the other leg, Tillie bit her (to keep herself from having a broken leg).

And for that reason the lady told my human that she was on the way to bring Tillie back. I won't comment on this lady, because I'm sure she had her own problems. Let's just say that some people don't deserve an Airedale – especially one as sweet as Tillie – and let it go at that.

Then a little while later, the first couple brought Ozzy back! We were in heaven. Ozzy and Obi loved to play and they were now big enough that I could play with them. We all had a great time. And it turned out that these people had not been entirely honest with my dad. The lady worked at home – but only once every other week. And their "flexible schedule" meant that they got home between 7:00 and 9:00 every night, and that poor Ozzy had to stay in a prison in the basement the rest of the day AND at night. And finally they didn't have their yard fenced in yet. We knew it was going to take weeks to get Ozzy over having lived with those crazy humans for even a few days.

And then Tillie got there, and we had our own impromptu Airedale party. Three big Airedales (me, Sarah, and Tille) and two little ones (Ozzy and Obi). Sarah even did her first tuck-butt-run ever.

So by that afternoon, exhausted by happy, 5 Airedales and 3 humans settled down for a well-deserved rest.



There's this thing I have heard an announcer say on television late at night, "But wait! There's more!" And I sorta' know what he is talking about now. On one day we had gotten two of our babies back, and Sarah and I – and all three of the humans as well – were happy about that. But my daddy Bill started to look a little worried. Our yard was way too small for that many Airedales. And then he posted the stories about Ozzy and Tillie on that Airedale list I mentioned earlier.

Well the next day, the lady in Montana – who is a vet and treats sick and injured or wounded grizzle bears all day – called my daddy Bill and asked "Do you still have Ozymandes?" It turns out that her father suddenly decided to drive to Montana to visit her. Even Sarah and I danced a little jig at that thought – for a mighty Airedale getting to play with grizzle bears sounds like fun (as long as you are careful not to hurt them too much).

So they worked out the arrangements, and in a couple of weeks, Ozzy's new "grandparent humans" drove over to pick him up, and then we just had the four of us. And by this time, it turns out that mommy and daddy had decided to keep Obi as well (Mr. Obidiah Doo Dah Dale, if you want to be proper about it). We were all set.

And the next week this other lady came up from Florida to adopt Tillie. She and her husband had a big farm in Alabama where they were going to retire in 2 years, and they had lost their Airedale the year before (some humans are soooooo careless). And they wanted Tillie. Well daddy Bill and the lady sat around playing with Tillie for about an hour and Tillie seemed to like the lady ... and before you knew it, we were again a 3-Airedale household.

I think it was intended to be that way.

OUR FOURTH AIREDALE PARTY

I mentioned our first three Airedale parties above, but our fourth one was probably my favorite. Although we had only 16 Airedales there (plus a fox terrier and a golden retriever) guess who the guest of honor was. No make that were.

Our guests of honor were all five of Sarah's and my puppies!

There were lots and lots of children there, too, and I don't think any of the puppies ever got put down on the ground long enough to cool off.

And we had 3 of our babies there from Sarah's first litter, too! This was the best one of all. And we had our friend Tom Sawyer Airedale there – and he was always fun to be with. Overall, I think this was our best and most successful Airedale party ever.

Unfortunately the next year, when we should have had our fifth annual party, the ones that daddy Bill would usually announce on the Airedale lists with something liked

Merlin and Sarah
Cordially invite you to the
Fifth Atlanta Airedale Party
at

The thing was that this invitation would go out to maybe 1,500 humans or so, but I don't know how many Airedales got to read their own, personal copies.

But this year, my humans were having the downstairs bathroom rebuilt (another remodeling project. Did you ever notice how often humans do those for no particularly good reason?), and they had to postpone the party until Labor day. And then that got canceled, too.

Life goes on – but I always wanted to go to one more Airedale party. The more, the merrier I always said.

OBIDIAH DOO DAH DALE

Well it didn't take us long to settle down into a routine. My human and lady Cathy had decided that Obi just *had* to pick Nicholas as his human. You may remember that when they came down to the farm and got me, they thought that I would pick Nicholas, but it didn't happen. And then when they went and got Sarah, *she* was supposed to pick him, too. And that still didn't happen (because Sarah likes ladies better than children or men), and they were going to try one more time.

Now honestly, daddy Bill is so perfect for an Airedale's human that I can't see why anydale would ever pick out another human over him. But he and lady Cathy were both already taken, so we were all set.

We settled into a routine, and Obi and I or Obi and Sarah played almost constantly. And we settled down to "live happily ever after."

But somehow things didn't go as planned. Obi was going to be a big mighty Airedale when he grew up, and so somebody (stupid idea!) decided to have his ... er, uh ... to have him ... that is to cut something off so that he wouldn't be interested in making puppies ever. Or at least so that he couldn't. Ouch.

And that made him more playful and more puppy-like (forever it looks like), and that made him harder to control. Plus he was really smart – maybe as smart as I am – but so hyper part of the time that it was hard even for me and Sarah to keep up with him, let alone the humans.

But it turned out that not only was Obi smart, he was as nice and gentle, as loving as I was, so he fit into our family very well. Yes, he had a harder time learning not to poop or pee except outside, and he ate or chewed up more things than Sarah had – almost as many as I had, come to think of it. Yes, he really fit in.

The summer ended, and we had a wonderful fall. My tummy and my knee started hurting, but I only let that slow me down a little. And most of the time when Obi wanted to wrestle, I was the one who had to hold him by the neck and put him on the ground – but don't worry. We weren't fighting: we were playing and wagging as hard as we could. And as soon as one match would end, we'd start another game. We had fun. And when I was too tired to wrestle any more (which gradually happened more quickly and more often), Sarah would take over and they would chase – either inside or outside. They had fun.

And when Christmas came, Sandy Claws brought me a new hedgehog, my favorite toy in the whole world like the one Obi had chewed up at Thanksgiving. And Sandy Claws brought Sarah and Obi lots of toys and we all had great fun. That was probably the best week of my life – or the part while we had Obi anyway.

I think it was about that time when I stopped running most of the time and started walking more slowly, and I definitely started feeling some hurty spots in my tummy. But I was as happy as a 6½ year-old mighty Airedale can be, with a wonderful family, a pretty good human of my very own, and Airedale family, and all of the love and attention I could possibly want.

CONVERSATIONS WITH MY HUMAN

You know, I'll bet that most Airedales talk to their humans, but how many of those humans really listen? Well, every day, I would sit and quietly talk with daddy Bill, and – despite the handicap of being human -- he was a good listener. And I was a good listener, too. At first it was mostly just me talking to my human, but with him not answering me – or almost never answering me (and getting it all wrong when he did). It was almost as if he didn't really understand what I was telling him.

But as we were together longer and longer, and as he talked to me more and more, it got to the point that I really enjoyed listening to *him*, too. And after a while I began to understand a lot of what he was saying.

I think it had to do with the way we had bonded initially, and maybe it had something to do with the way we spent so much time together going to and from puppy school (or practicing for it), or at soccer practice, or even late at night when he had to sit up really late and work on the computer for his office and I sat up with him. But whatever the case, it was something that I really enjoyed, and whenever daddy Bill would talk to me, I would listen. After a while he would listen, really listen well to me, too.

He probably never really knew how many times I knew exactly what he was talking about. Any time something really made him sad or hurt or angry, he told me about it, and I would come over and give him a big hug or a good lick on the hand or face – whatever seemed appropriate. Or sometimes I think he just wanted someone to listen to him and not say or do anything ... just really listen. And I was really good at that. And gradually I think I learned a lot of human words. I couldn't say them like daddy Bill did, but I understood them, and I often showed him that I understood.

And then there were times when he was really happy about something and he would tell me. And on those occasions I would do my happy wag dance for him, or do some really happy barks, and we would celebrate together. His triumphs were my triumphs, too, you know. And if he had cause to celebrate, that was a reason for me to celebrate, too.

I'm getting all ahead of myself here, but one time a few weeks ago, a friend of daddy Bill's died, someone that he had know since college. I think daddy Bill said the man's name was Charlie something-or-other. I don't know what happened exactly, but his friend had some kind of blood vessel explode in his head one morning, and he just fell down dead. My human was really sad then, and he came home and told me all about it. I wasn't feeling very good at the time myself, but I put my head on his knee and let him know that I was there for him, and I know he appreciated it. We sat on the floor for a long time and when my human got up, he seemed to feel a lot better.

I know that it is hard to understand what I'm telling you here, so I'll stop for now and explain a little more later.

THE BAD PART

One day in July of 2003, when I was just a little over 7 years old (that's 49 in human years in case you don't know it) my human came home and I was limping on my back left leg.

Now Sarah and Obi and I liked to sleep in the living room near our crates (or sometimes in each others' crates just for naps), and when the humans came home, we'd always jump up, bark like maniacs (it was fun!), and run as fast as we could through the dining room, through the kitchen, and to the back door where the humans would come in. But the rug in the dining room on this day had obviously skidded out from under somebody, and my human thought I had fallen there and hurt my leg.

That was a Thursday, and on Friday night I wasn't any better – in fact I was a little worse – so Saturday morning, we went to the puppy doctor. He examined my leg and decided that I had probably sprained my knee. But while I was there, it was time for my annual shots, and so it took so long that the doctor's assistant had to take me outside to pee.

They came back in and told my human that I had blood in my urine, and they did what humans call a “culture”. They decided that I had a bladder infection, and they gave me some pills to take every day. (I liked taking them, because daddy Bill would play a game with me – he would put them inside a hot-dog and give me the hot-dog to eat, and I would separate the two, swallow the hot-dog, and spit the pill out. Fun! Sometimes I got as many as 3 hot-dogs before I had to swallow the pill...).

Well, I got better and stopped having blood in my pee, but after the medicine ran out, I started peeing blood again, so we went back to the vet.

This time the doctor was a nice lady vet who got down on the floor and petted me a lot. But it was a trick. She knew that my bladder infection was back, and she wanted to stick a tube inside me (I think she called it a “catheter”) and get some of my pee in a most unnatural way. And by the way, this is *not* fun.)

Well she gave me another antibiotic, one a lot stronger, because the tests showed that I had a serious E.coli infection in my bladder – and they can take months to cure and can even kill humans OR Airedales.

About this time, my human and Cathy had made arrangements to go on their first vacation in years and that was while the boy, Nicholas, was on a trip to Minnesota with the Boy Scouts (something about paddling a canoe all over the place. Hmmm. Sounds like fun. No, wait: water. Forget it.), and so I got to stay at the puppy condo's with Sarah and Obi. I always loved the puppy condo's, and the people there knew us and loved all three of us a lot. We had a big room all together, and it was big enough for 6 Airedales, so we weren't crowded. And we even had what they call “recess” 2 or 3 times a day and got to go out and play individually with the humans at the vet's. We had fun.

But the third day we were there (the night before my human came back for me) I started peeing blood again, lots of it. And they called my human and asked if he knew about this.

And the day after he came back, the nice lady vet who had stolen my pee with a tube called my human back and said that I had what she called “some unusual cells” in my pee. She wanted me to see a specialist for this and for my knee which was getting worse.

Well we made an appointment at this big puppy hospital, and we went there pretty soon. And they kept me all day and did lots and lots of tests.

They said I had “end stage bladder cancer” and that I had about 200 days left to live.



But this didn't worry me, because when I was with my human each day seemed to be like an eternity in heaven, so I wasn't upset.

And they examined my knee and said that I had taken a bad fall and torn my ligament that's like the human ACL. I was almost crippled and could only use my left leg a little by now. But the cancer vet said not to have the surgery, because I didn't have long enough to get completely over it. My human argued with that doctor a little, because he really wanted me to be able to move around whenever I wanted to – he knew how much I loved to play outside in the winter.

Well my human was *really* upset, and he and Cathy talked to lots of other humans on the Airedale lists, and they all said *do* have the surgery – I had 6 or 7 months left and I would be up and around very soon (possibly as early as 1 month) – that it would help me to feel better.

So on Monday they made the appointment for the next Wednesday, and that morning I went to the hospital to have my knee fixed so that I could walk again. But before they did the surgery, they did lots more tests and discovered that I didn't have a torn ligament or anything. The X-rays showed inoperable bone cancer, and the only choice was to take my leg off above the knee. They also did a biopsy, and we had to wait days for the results, but the surgeon was sure it was bone cancer.

My human (Good for you, Dad!) said that he didn't believe in chopping parts off just because some of them were sick. After all, they also told him that it would take several months to recover from the surgery and by now he had started to accept the fact that I might not make it. He didn't want me to suffer, be in pain, or be miserable.

So we got more pain medicine (just in case) and set up a new routine. I had my bed from upstairs down in the den and every evening all of the humans would sit with me and play with me or pet me, or give me treats. Sometimes they could get me to eat. For by now, I was refusing to eat most food and would not drink unless tricked or teased into doing so (let me tell you, cottage cheese with tuna and catsup with a little whole milk some sugar thrown in can be really tasty sometimes).

This new routine lasted only a few days. On Friday I seemed so ill that they started talking about taking me “for a final trip to the vet's office.” I didn't know what this “final trip” meant, but I knew that if my dad wanted to do that it would be OK, because as I already said: I trusted him and I knew that he would never do anything to hurt me.

But I also remember that I was so sick and felt so bad that I told my daddy Bill “good bye” and that I “was going to go to sleep and not wake up.”

On Saturday morning, I perked up a lot and felt better, and seemed to be better until after lunch on Sunday. But then my right back leg stopped working. It turns out that in end-stage bladder cancer, when the cancer has already started spreading through your body – particularly in your bones – you can get other, fast-growing tumors in other parts of your body. I had a new growth in the joint of my right hip. Ouch. I couldn't get up by myself any more.



But I was still “perky”, and the lights were bright inside in my eyes. I wagged every time my human came near me, and I even lifted my head and tried to lick him. Why, I even tried to get up (on my front legs), and we worked out a way I could go outside to poop and to pee. As long as they could get me outside and up on all four of my legs, I could manage that much, especially when daddy Bill held onto my tail and helped to stabilize me.

But Sunday night, things started going down hill very fast. Suddenly I had a temperature and was in pain. The E.coli infection had come back with a vengeance and I was very sick. My dad stayed up with me all that night, sleeping on the floor in the den next to me and petting me. He went (at 11:30 PM) to the vet's and got a strong prescription for the infection and the pain, and somehow got me to eat it, although by this point I would not drink or eat anything.

The medicine worked some and I felt a little better Monday afternoon, and Monday night I even slept. But on Tuesday, I was very hot and could not drink. My temperature shot way up despite the antibiotics and I started being in more pain. But then I settled down and got a little better until bedtime. But on Wednesday morning when daddy Bill carried me outside to go potty, he touched my left leg and it really hurt a lot. And then for the first time ever in my entire life, I actually bit him. Hard. I didn't mean to, though. It was a reflex action, and I let him know. And do you know what? He wasn't even mad at me. He said he understood, and he got me a bowl of milk to try (I touched my tongue to it, I think, and I even drank a little of it). Then he iced me down to make me feel better, and I started feeling more like myself.

At this point, my human and I had a long talk.

Now I don't mean the kind of long talks we had when I was little. Any time my human was really sad or upset about something, he would talk *to* me and tell me all about it. I know that doing that made him feel better when he did this. And when he was really happy about something, he would sit and tell me all about that, too, and we would hug and celebrate together – and I think that made him happier, too. After all, when you are a mighty Airedale and you have your very own human, that's just one of your responsibilities. I listened very carefully and paid a lot of attention to every word my human said, even before I understood what he was talking about.



Now anyone reading will most likely have figured out by now just how much my human and I loved each other. And you might have figured out how closely we had bonded. But what you probably haven't figure out (because I haven't *told* you, but have just hinted about it) is that he and I could actually talk with each other. Now I don't mean that he would talk and I would listen again and wag my tail or bark. I mean we could actually communicate. We started doing that when I was about 3 – I don't know how or why – and it made everything else so much more special for both of us. We have actually met a few – a *very* few, exactly two – other canine/human pairs who could do this, so I know that we weren't unique. So anyway when I say we had a long talk, I mean just that. We had already talked a week earlier when I felt better, and I knew that if I told him it was the Time, he would take me to the vet and all the pain would stop.

I told him that I loved him and that I knew he loved me. And I told him that it was the Time. And I told him good bye for the last time, and the lights just went out in my eyes.

So after he stopped crying, my human called the vet – this was Wednesday morning – and they said to come that afternoon. My dad sat on the floor almost the whole day Wednesday, cooling me with cold compresses, feeding me Tums (which I still thought were people candy), loving on me, petting me, and crying a lot. He took me out to go potty 6 or 7 times, but I was unable to poop at all. After the last time we went out, he had to go to the potty room and then the phone rang and he had to answer it. In the few minutes he was out of the room I had severe diarrhea and tried to get back onto my cushion but just managed to rub it into the carpet pretty badly. My dad cleaned me up and tried to save the carpet (it is probably ruined and I would have felt bad about it if I hadn't already felt worse than that because I was dying anyway) but he wasn't mad at me at all. And then he and mommy Cathy carried me out to the car for my last ride.

Let me explain something. I always LOVED riding in the car. This time I still tried to sit up and look out the window, but I was in the back part of the Land Rover and I couldn't see out a window. But I did manage to sit up and Bill and Cathy talked a lot to me.

Then we got to the vet's office, and while Cathy went inside to make sure they were ready for us, my human carried me in as gently as he could.

When we got inside, my human dad put me down on the floor very gently (I always hated those examining tables), and the nice vet came in and looked me over. Then the vet ladies (they weren't strong enough to do it) had my dad carry me into the back room where they put this needle in my arm, and they carried me back on a stretcher to the room where Cathy was waiting for us (but I liked being carried by my dad a lot better even though it hurt a little sometimes).

And then my human and Cathy both told me good bye, and the vet came over and put something into the needle thing that was in my arm, and I just went to sleep.

Well this ought to have been the end, but it wasn't quite. A little while later, I was looking down at what was left of my body, and I realized that it was gasping for breath. My human and Cathy were sitting there crying on the floor with “me” and still touching me, petting my neck and ears.

And you know what? I didn't hurt any more! And BOTH my legs worked again, better than they had in years!

And I guess that then I died, because that's when I crossed the Rainbow Bridge.

FOR SARAH AND OBI

Sarah it looks like you finally get your wish. Since I am gone and cannot come back, you finally get to be the undisputed alpha just as you always wanted. Of course Obi is a lot bigger than you are – but when when you were a tiny baby and I outweighed you by 85 pounds that never stopped you, so I doubt that it will now.

Every day when daddy Bill left to go to that office place, he would tell me, “Merlin, you're in charge. Take care of the house and be a good boy.” And I really tried, every day and in every way I could. Now I have to tell you, Sarah, you are in charge. You be a good girl, and take care of the house and be a good girl. Please do this for me.

You will have to finish teaching Obi all of the stuff that I wanted to teach him, like how to lift his leg to pee, and how to talk with dad, how to howl and sound like a whale out in the ocean, and how to protect our humans' home and all. Please be extra nice to him, because he is still a puppy, and he is a lot like I was at his age. He is big but very, very gentle, and he doesn't like fights or arguments. He mainly wants to play and to make people happy. He is a big, sweet, boisterous mighty Airedale puppy. And I think he is also very smart, so he should be easy to teach if you try.

I know that daddy Bill and mommy Cathy have been trying to get Obi to choose *Nicholas* as his human (and that's only fair), but you can tell him that since I won't be back daddy Bill is also available for adoption, too. I think Obi already knows this, because I saw him going over to sit with daddy Bill several times when I was so sick and Obi thought I was asleep. But tell him that whether he chooses daddy Bill or Nicholas, nobody will be mad at him.

And Sarah, you be a good girl and have some fun. You have been worried about me for too long and have not played as much as you ought to. Make daddy Bill go out and throw the Frisbee for you every day. You both like that. And try to get daddy Bill to show you how to do agility tricks. With your grace and speed, you'd have a wonderful time jumping over the gates, and the weave poles are really fun, too. And we won't even talk about the A-frame scramble – you get to be way high in the aire, and it's fun, too! (But watch out for that see-saw; I never liked it, and you may not either.)

But you know, I think you will like anything you do with mommy Cathy and daddy Bill. mommy Cathy is *your* human just as daddy Bill was *mine*. She might enjoy taking you on long walks in the evening around our neighborhood, and there's even a chance you might get to meet a new boy friend that way, too.

Most of all, please, please, *PLEASE*, remember that even though you thought I was mean or too rough with you sometimes I always loved you – second, only to my human – and I never tried to hurt you. I shared my home, my food, my toys, my bones, and my life with you without reservation and never regretted any of it because I loved you.

And please let Obi know – for I know he cannot read this, not yet, anyway – that I loved him, too. Out of all 15 of our babies, he is the most special one of all, and I will miss him terribly. When you are playing with Obi, try not to hurt him too much or too often – for when you are old he will still be young, and you will want him still to love you as he does now. Being nice to others is sometimes hard for you (and it isn't your fault), but please make a special effort with Obi – he is half you and half me (and 100% himself) and being nice to him is also being nice to both of *us* as well.

And one final thing: our humans did not get to hold their annual Airedale picnic this year. And even though they will not have the one they had planned for this fall because I died and they had to change their plans (sorry), they need to have it again next spring at the right time. I will be there in spirit but not in body.

You can have all of my bones, most of my toys, and my crate, my dish, my cushion upstairs, and my good leash – but give daddy Bill my favorite squeaky hedgehog, Ralph. Please tell Obi to stand still when daddy Bill cuts his hair – it works better and he will enjoy it more that way. Obi can have all of my kongs, my sticks, my big bones, my empty plastic bottles, my special squeaky dumb-bell, my tug thingey and my jumping gate, plus anything else I have forgotten to mention.

Obi, I'll tell you a secret: in my whole life, daddy Bill never hit me or hurt me or anything, and I never bit him or hurt him or even growled at him. You and he and I are all a lot alike. Even if you finally pick Nicholas as your human, if you are really nice to daddy Bill, he will always be nice to you. Think about it and try to take care of him for me. OK?

And Obi, please go easy on Sarah. You are still a baby but you are already much bigger and stronger than she is. Always remember: not only did she give you life and not only does she love you ... she can also kill you on a moment's notice. So since you love her, just be nice to her, and she will be nice to you, too. And if you want to sit with daddy Bill from time to time, that is now allowed (and even encouraged). He will need a mighty Airedale to love on and to love him in the next few months, and Sarah's human, mommy Cathy, will need all of Sarah's love to get by for a while.

Forever in love for both of you,
Your devoted husband, your loving father, and your all-time best friend,
Merlin

AVE ATQUE VALE

So now you know why – all those months ago – my human, daddy Bill, had written that funny thing about me and the Rainbow Bridge. I guess that somehow, perhaps subconsciously in one of our conversations, I must have let it slip that I was going to go to sleep and never wake up. And being only human, my dad didn't consciously realize it and couldn't figure out when it was going to happen either.

But the important part is that I picked out the human that God or doG or whoever had sent for me, and that he and I loved and trusted each other totally for over 7 long years. Most humans never get to have that kind of good luck, and not even all mighty Airedales get to, either. So I guess that – even though I had planned on living a lot longer – I shouldn't complain too much. After all, a run of 7 years' good luck is something to treasure. It doesn't come to everyone, and when it has ended it may never come again.

I'm a little sad that my human is so upset right now though – you see I've noticed that he has never handled change very well. I would go back and sit with him and tell him that it's OK, just as I did many times when we were together. But I'm no longer sure I could or that it would work, even if it were allowed. Humans are so insensitive to everything around them that he might not even know I was there. And anyway, I guess he needs his time to grieve, too. So I'll give him a little while to cheer up and if he doesn't, then I'll see what I can do – after all on this side of the Rainbow Bridge, we mighty Airedales have a lot of influence with the Number One Guy, and maybe I can work something out for him. We'll just have to wait and see.

But he'd better think long and hard about something:

Daddy Bill, if you're reading this please remember what I tell you here.

Someday you, too, will cross the Rainbow Bridge, and when you do I'll be waiting there to greet you with my best welcome-home howl, my best Happy Wag Dance, and all the licks, nosepokes, and body rubs I can give you – I'll even do my very best tuck-butt-run in celebration for you when you get here.

When all is said and done, I always loved you and you always loved me – neither of us was ever mean to the other, and I will miss you until we are together again. Thank you for being my human for 7 wonderful years. Whatever else we went through and whatever else we shared, we always loved and appreciated of each other, and we still do.

Maybe all those years ago, that's the real reason I picked you out in the first place.

– Merlin, a.k.a. daWunda Dale, a.k.a. Sam's Dandy Dale Merlin, and Bill's best friend forever,
Sunday, August 24th 2003