

Last Conversation with Coal Dawg No. 8: Goodbye Buddy

On December 22nd, 2004 I had my last conversation with Coal Dawg. This old Airborne Ranger said goodbye to my buddy through a veil of tears. I whispered, “I love you precious boy,” and many other familiar words close by his old ears. I told him what a good boy he was, how precious, and how he was a ‘sweet boy’. Frankly, I didn’t hear the words the rest of the family shared as we all knelt by him rubbing him tenderly.

I didn’t see the Vet crying, when she put him to sleep at age 14 years, 10 months and 8 days in our house. Remarkable for such a big black laborador-golden retriever mix. Indeed, he was an extraordinary friend, confidante, and giver of unconditional love to each of the five Bowdens in my family. For us, he was the best dog ever.

Coal was strong, gentle and loving to the very end. Braveheart dog. We went for our usual long walk on Monday before I went to California on business. He started vomiting. Then, the next day he had diarrhea and couldn’t walk. In the following days we had the tests taken to tell us his days were measured with only a few more days possible. The long-growing cancer and arthritis made him suffer. He wouldn’t eat anything. My wife, his ‘Momma’, made him his favorites. He walked only to go to far corners of the yard at night to lie in odd places that were never his spot. I had a hard time finding him in the dark. I asked him to not die alone in the rain. He came in with my help. We carried his 85 lbs gladly as sadly we watched to see if he would rally one more time. I’d written about his ‘last’ summer in ‘03, but he proved me wrong - thankfully.

Alas, our tears in each private good bye were testimony of what must be. We share grief, openly, but not hysterically, as passionate Southerners are wont to do. We live life as it is in tears of pain and joy, laughter, kisses and hugs – and lots of unabashed “I love you”. In the times when the rough edges among family relationships mined any conversation, any, into potential confrontations, we could always talk about Coal together. He loved the attention and we shared a common love when our real love for one another was a rose with thorns that prick.

Coal was a reformed, actually an awakened, liberal. Like almost all Southerners, he used to be a Democrat. But, even as a dog, he was too intelligent to let his emotions rule his mind. He understood that life is all about relationships and duties.

Many times when I gave him *lovin’* I thanked the Lord out loud for creating this creature, this great watch dog, protector, and friend to my family. Well, great watch dog unless one called him by name and rubbed his tummy. It’s a funny story about the ‘Great Toilet Papering Event’.

My relationship, and my wife’s, with God through knowing Jesus – really knowing – is the basis of all other relationships. Our relationship with spouse, children, parents, kin, friends, co-workers, neighbors, church family, and even enemies is shaped by this unconditional love. Coal got it.

Coalie understood that families are the heart and soul of everything important in life. Coal didn't know what government is. Which brings us to the division perhaps greater than the separation of 'Red' and 'Blue' voters and states. Americans either love dogs or not. We pro-dogs worry about the hearts of others. A Blue dog-lover has but to see the path of compassion, love, and my favorite word from the Bible – lovingkindness – is the Conservative way forward.

Moreover, the source of love, truth, justice, dignity, and all things sacred and holy is the God of the Christians and Jews. None other. The Sovereign God of the Universe is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving. That's why an Evangelical CHRISTian minister, a Bible believer, preached this question, "If God is all-loving, then how can he make heaven a perfect place for humans and not have animals there for us to enjoy?" How could heaven be perfect without dogs? We'll see someday.

How appropriate for him, agape dog, to die at CHRISTmas. Regardless, forty years from now three families, at least, will have very big dogs, maybe more, because of the life our Coalie lived. Good dog.

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