

COMMENTARY

Dad at home for furry 'kid,' too

At roughly 8:15 a.m., I hustle my daughters out the door to school. While my time with Daughter No. 1 and No. 2 is precious, my mornings provided me with time I could devote to my "other kid."

Sure, he's a little more hairy than most 9-year-olds and his dining habits are a little less refined than I would like. But when it comes to loyalty and unconditional love, nobody beats the four-legged Foster kid, Molson.

Dog No. 2, really. Molson is the second pooch in the Foster family. His big sister, Tobi, left us last year, after a happy dog life filled with runs through the park, swims, trips up north and reminding Molson that he wasn't the top dog in the family.

A Gordon Setter, Molson sports a shaggy black coat, with brown highlights on his feet, tail, muzzle and, most important, over his eyes. While dogs don't talk, they definitely communicate. It's with these little brown spots that this sensitive creature has "said" so much to me over the years.

Back before I had any real responsibilities — the kind that leave their naked dolls all over the house — I trained this unlikely obedience dog for competition. I say "unlikely" because Gordons aren't known for their

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intellectual brilliance or focus. One judge actually asked if I was seriously competing with a Gordon.

In the end, Molson showed everyone, crushing two consecutive sets of opponents to earn his CD (Companion Dog) title. With his ears perked up and his eyebrows fluttering every-which-way, he'd tell me how much he loved doing things with his "Daddy" and how glad he was to make me happy. It truly bonded us together.

When I was traveling for work, Molson would actually mope around, moaning, asking my wife, "Where's Daddy? When will he be home?"

Being allowed to sleep in my spot on the bed would have been a fine consolation for most pooches. But not for my Molson. And I'd miss him, too. I'd call the kids, chat with the wife and always ask about my buddy, Molson.

So with me as the at-home

dad, I figured this would be a golden time for us — a chance to make up for the time I was away.

And it was, just not right away. The first morning I was home, I closed the door behind the girls, turned to Molson and said, "Well, buddy, now what?"

Confused, and not really a morning person, Molson looked up at me, eyes half-shut with his eyebrows motionless and grunted as if to say, "Shhhh. Nap time. You go away now." It turns out Molson's morning routine consisted of eating breakfast, a quick trip outside to pee and a nap in the sunlight.

An hour or so later, my rested and warmed pal came to me and moaned. This was another way of "talking" to me. These series of groans and moans were as intricately beautiful as a whale or dolphin song.

"Grrrrrrr-errrrrr-oooooh" meant, "I need to go outside." "Grrrrrrrr-errrrrr-oooooh-orrrrh!" meant, "I need to go outside right now!" Other more lengthy combinations were often used to say, "I love you, Daddy" or "C'mon, Daddy, let's play!" or "Daddy, quit fiddling with my paws before I bite you on the butt!"

Sometimes when he was feeling under the weather, his whole face would tell me, "I think I'm

going be sick." And as reliably as he would greet me at the door or bring me that spit-ridden tennis ball for the thousandth time, I'd be there for him. I'd pet his head, tell him he'd be OK and hold his ears up so he wouldn't get puke on them. That's the relationship we had — always there for each other.

Sadly, I finish this column having just said goodbye to my pal, Molson. I miss him more than I can say, but I take comfort in the knowledge that we had a ton of fun together over the years.

I'm especially grateful that I was home with him for the last seven months — going to the park, watching Daughter No. 1's softball games, stalking rabbits in the backyard, just being buddies.

Friends assure me that he (along with big sister Tobi) is in a better place, waiting for me to join him someday. I don't know if that's true, but I sincerely hope it is. It makes me want to be a better person, so I have a better chance of ending up in that place where such a special spirit like my Molson must surely have gone.

I miss you, Molson. Errrrr-eeeerrrrrr-ohhhggg-eeee-orrrrr-ruff, my friend!

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