

Vehicular Therapy by Frank Bruni

THE RAIN IS COMING DOWN with the kind of ferocity that set Noah in motion. The thunder is twice as loud. And I'm driving. Not because I'm going anywhere. Because I have a companion whose quirks, most of them delightful, include sheer terror during summer storms. Our Honda is her haven.

There's no discussing meteorology with a dog, no assuring her that she's safe at home in her bed and the world isn't ending. Regan knows an apocalypse when she hears one — and she has great ears.

Whenever the skies open and lightning strikes, she paces furiously. Whines at me, incessantly. Nudges me, over and over. It's painful to behold. It's impossible to ignore. Forget writing. Forget reading. She won't allow it.

Her panic can last anywhere from 20 minutes to four hours, depending on the storm and on whether I've given her the sedatives that the vet prescribed. But those doggy downers work only some of the time, and I don't want to administer too many too often. I've tried squeezing her into one of those thunder shirts, to no avail. I've tried loud, clangorous music to drown out the cacophony of the weather. Doesn't work.

Then, about two and a half weeks ago, when we were getting serious thunder and significant rain in my area of North Carolina on a daily or near-daily basis, I had a thought. The car! It's cavelike, so Regan might feel protected. The vi-

bration of its movement, coupled with the hum of its engine, might somehow distract or console her. I suppose I had some buried memory of friends telling me that they'd pacified howling infants with such vehicular therapy, though I wasn't conscious at the time of the parallel.

I put Regan in the back seat. I drove into the downpour. Within a minute, she was mirac-

ulously still. Magically silent.

So I've repeated the trick, including last Monday evening, which I described at the start of this confession. I forgot to mention that during

that Regan-shushing drive and a few before it, I listened to the audio version of the recent best seller "This Dog Will Change Your Life," by Elias Weiss Friedman. Seemed fitting.

I'm not sure if my automotive accommodation of Regan makes me a chump or a champ, but I lack other ideas, and I can't see exiling her to some distant room in the house and thus exacerbating her grief just so I'm spared it. I've found a way, albeit somewhat kooky and cumbersome, to relieve a beloved's distress. Shouldn't I use it?

I deny Regan and am stern with her in other circumstances. She doesn't need that when the heavens rage.



How Old Is My Dog in Human Years?

The old rule of thumb of 7 years of a human life equals 1 dog year has been refined, especially for younger dogs.

By Dr. Debra M. Eldredge, DVM, in the Whole Dog Journal

Many of us wonder how old our dog is in human years, sometimes using it as a gauge to decide how our dog must feel compared to our own aging bodies. The old standby is that one year of a dog's life equals seven years in a human's life. It's easy to do mathematically, and it does give you a ballpark idea, but it's no longer considered accurate, especially for younger dogs.

According to a 2020 study from the University of California at San Diego, the seven-year equation needed to be refined. Very simply put, the researchers used DNA changes to determine that a 1-year-old dog would be equivalent to about a 15-year-old person. This fits with puberty coming about that age for many dogs.

At the age of 2, the study showed dogs are comparable to around a 24- or 25-year-old human, a change of about nine human years.

After that, the USCD plan shifts to about five human years for each dog year.

However, there remains a discrepancy with toy breeds, who often hit 17 or 18 years of life, and giant breeds who are often elderly at 7 years or so. So, while this new method of calculating dog years into human years is based on scientific research, it doesn't (yet!) compensate for the breed or size differentials in lifespans.

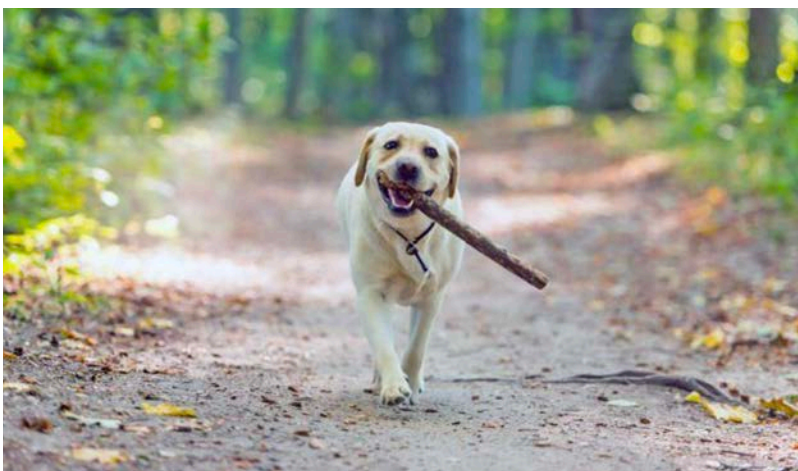
The Supporting Research

The USCD study included 104 Labrador Retrievers spanning a 16-year age range.

The researchers scanned the dogs' DNA patterns for comparison and used the rate of the methylation changes in the dogs to match it to the human epigenetic clock (biological aging). They then proposed a new formula of comparing dog years to

human years for dogs over the age of 1. Much of the research on aging (in any species) looks at how DNA ages, particularly methylation, as this study did. The genes controlling this change in DNA appeared to be similar for both the Labrador Retrievers in the study and humans.

The study is fascinating, and you can access it as a beautifully illustrated report with charts of



Caption: A study with Labrador Retrievers changed the way we compare dog years to human years. Credit: Stefan Cristian Cioata | Getty Images



Dog Age (cont.)

the study. The study conclusions were accepted by the American Veterinary Medical Association and most veterinary professionals support the findings.

The Dog Aging Formula

The study's math is a complicated formula, requiring you to be able to calculate your dog's age in natural logarithm (not how many years he's been alive), multiplied by 16, plus 31. Using this formula, a 6-year-old dog would be equivalent to a human who is 59.7 years old, instead of the old method that would compare the dog to a 42-year-old human.

While most of us aren't going to do the math, other examples of how this works out include a 7-week-old puppy being similar to a 9-month-old baby (with both of them teething at that age), and the average Labrador (who lives to about 12 years of age) correlating to a 70-year-old human (the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say the average lifespan for humans is 76).

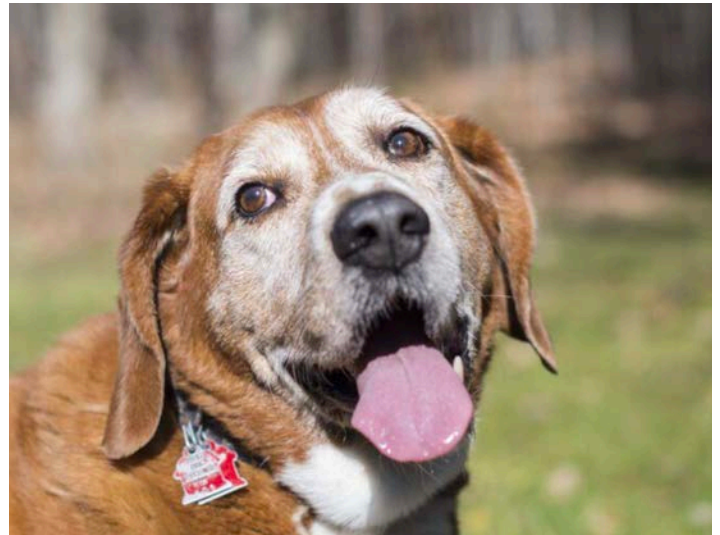
Health Matters to Dog Aging

An undisputed fact in lifespan calculations is that for all dogs – and humans, too, for that matter – keeping your dog fit, trim, and active, while practicing appropriate preventive health care and feeding good nutrition, is the best way to give your dog a long, full life. Of course, genetics do matter, so it helps to get a dog whose pedigree includes dogs who lived long lives, if you can obtain that information.

When Is a Dog Considered a Senior?

By Cindy Howle, M.Ed. NBCT

"There is not a 'one size fits all' schedule for senior status, as different-sized dogs age at dif-



ferent rates," says Dr. Robin Downing, Hospital Director for the Downing Center for Animal Pain Management in Colorado. We know from biological markers that metabolic and structural changes occur as dogs age, determining their senior status, she says. And size matters.

Tiny dogs typically have a longer life expectancy, while giant and large breeds are on the other end of the spectrum biologically, aging faster. The chart on the next page shows a rough range for when dogs typically reach senior status.

"One important consideration is a dog's biologic age may or may not match their chronological age," says Downing, noting that the rate of aging depends on many factors including genetics and lifestyle. This, she says, gives pet owners a powerful opportunity to help their dogs achieve and maintain a lower biological age than chronological through preventive care.

A recent study using data from the Dog Aging Project found other factors affecting activity

(Continued next page)



Dog Age (cont.)

over time including the owner’s age, dog and owner characteristics, dog size, and the environment where they live.

Caring for a Senior Dog

When you are caring for an aging dog, there are some things you can do to improve or even extend her life. Helping a senior dog stay healthy can include:

- Keeping your dog a healthy weight is the first line of defense. Your vet can help determine an optimal weight and body composition for your dog.
- Making sure your dog sees a vet at least every six months. Early detection of any potential problems means early intervention, supporting a longer and better life.
- Getting regular exercise. Exercise remains key for maintaining aging muscles and joints. “Move it or lose it.”
- Providing mental enrichment. Seek out safe opportunities for mental and emotional engagement, such as learning new skills or tricks.
- Don’t forget to socialize! Experiences like cafes and group walks are healthy activities for dogs who like that kind of thing. Honor your dog’s preferences regarding social time.

- Providing regular dental care at home and professional periodontal therapy as needed. Periodontal disease is extremely common in

older dogs and can lead to a number of other health problems.

Common Senior Dog Health Problems

Old age is not a disease, yet some health issues are more common in older dogs. Among them are:

- Osteoarthritis (OA)
- Chronic kidney disease
- Congestive heart failure
- Cancer: Have your vet investigate every lump.
- Hearing and vision loss
- Age-related cognitive dysfunction

When it comes to older dogs, less get-up-and-go stamina does not necessarily mean the dog is uncomfortable or in pain. However, a marked decrease in activity and mobility almost always indicates pain. Check out all mobility issues with your vet.

When a Dog is Considered a Senior

Dog Size	Dog Weight	Age Considered a Senior
Small Breeds	Under 20 Pounds	10 to 11 Years
Medium Breeds	20 to 60 Pounds	8 to 9 Years
Large Breeds	60+ Pounds	6 to 7 Years



Tesla Dog Mode Tragedy

Recently a devoted dog person who is known to some of our members lost her beloved border collie in one of the worst ways imaginable: She had bought a Tesla for the precise reason that the car had a “Dog Mode” that could keep a car cool with dogs inside while the owner was absent. The Dog Mode failed, and her dog died of the resulting heat.

Terrible, tragic things sometimes happen with our animal family members, which induce agonies of guilt and pain.

Someone, a friend of the person mentioned above, posted an essay about this kind of love and loss which is beautiful and worth sharing with all of you.

Sometimes the “small” news, news of losses or tragedies on the personal scale, takes my breath away.

All of us in the dog world know the pain of losing a dog. It’s the cost of admission—none of us get to have a special bond with a dog without also knowing that almost always we’ll outlive them, grieve them, ache and mourn them, and then do it all over again.

We protect our dogs in crystal palaces of vet visits, fancy foods, special treats, ergonomic equipment, and lessons. We read their body language, take care not to push them too hard, try our best to learn who they are and what they like and dislike.

It’s easy to forget that they are animals, and that animals usually die violent or unpleasant deaths, just like we do, when humans aren’t there to curate with kindness that last day of special snacks and an IV into slumber.

The more we do with our dogs, the more cracks there are in the crystal palace. If we

keep them safe at home, only going to weekly lessons and leash walks, they’re certainly as safe as can be. They’re also bored, under-en-

riched, and not leading a full, dog life of joy and power.

If we take them out, run them, push them, challenge them, our bond gets so much deeper, their lives so much more meaningful and joyful. Their dogginess is so much more respected, understood, and enjoyed.

But the cracks in the palace allow in danger. A broken leg or neck. An impalement, or lethal injury or

bite. Sometimes an overheated car or other equipment malfunction that is only someone’s “fault” because we allowed them out of the palace to fully live as dogs. Because shit happens even to the most conscientious of handlers and humans. A tree could have fallen on them. Lightning might have struck. Sometimes there is nothing to be done except in hindsight.

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A Fun Lizzie Memory



Linda Richards & Lizzie emulate the scene on the wall in the IMC Heart Institute.

Tesla Tragedy (cont. from previous page)

If only I hadn't been under THAT tree ...

I bet those dogs gladly accept that risk, having lived and loved every dog moment they had running free, using their power, connecting with their human, and being acknowledged as the magnificent animals they are.

Today a friend lost a dog, in a terrible way that

will take her a long time to recover from. But I know that her dogs live lives of love and power and joy and full-out dogginess and respect. And no matter how long or short those lives are, I know she's given them her all in the best way possible.

And if they could, they'd tell her to be kind to herself, because she deserves kindness in all that grief.



Paintings with Dogs



ABOVE: Brazilian street painting, on display at the Museum of Street Art and Graffiti in Amsterdam

BELOW: Image of dog uncovered recently in the ruins of Pompeii



The Lighter Side

