

For the love of ?man?s best friend?

by Mark Pavilons

Charles Schulz once said that happiness is a warm puppy?

Ain't it the truth? Okay, kittens are cute too, but come on, puppies!

February 20 was not only Family Day in Ontario, but it was also National Pet Day.

Okay, we really don't need a day singled out to love our pets ??hey often bring us joy every minute of every day.

A recent survey found eight out of the 10 provinces preferred dogs. The cat-loving places were Newfoundland and Labrador and Saskatchewan.

I'm happy to be part of the canine group.

I've been lucky enough to have had dogs ever since I was a teen and we currently have two yellow Labs.

Dog owners know full well these critters love us way more than we love ourselves. And only love can make them wag their tails.

There are times, more often lately, that I just look at them, deep into their eyes. I?wonder what they're thinking and what's going on in there. Then I just laugh, convinced their heads are filled with thoughts of food, pats, those long stretches and who's at the dor.

Posting photos of pets on social media is now the norm and you can find dozens of them every day. Yes, I?admit it, I?am lured by the antics of those furry friends.

Part of the Canadian survey asked if people post pictures of their pets online. More than half (64.9%) share photos of their pets, while 35% don't.

Survey organizers also looked at which animal gets posted the most on social media and it's a tie folks ??0/50 for dogs and cats. But if you ask me the dog ones are more exciting, more action-packed, while the cat ones are just a tad weird.

Millennials share the most pet pictures on social media (52.9%).

I?have had conversations with my dogs and let me tell you, they appreciate my genius! They get me.

When they look at you, they're not judging you or making fun of you. They don't think your last joke was stupid, even if they didn't get the punchline.

Dogs live for the day, the hour, the moment. They can go from deep sleep to jumping on the furniture in a flash. They can accelerate to a full run in a split second. Heck, they even run in their sleep! Even after all these years of watching my dogs sleep,?I still find this so weird and so interesting.

There's no question having a dog in your life makes it richer, fuller and even healthier.

Studies have found dog owners, when compared to non-owners, had a 24 percent reduced risk of ?all-cause mortality,? a 65 percent reduced risk of death after a heart attack, and a 31 reduced risk of mortality ?due to cardiovascular-related issues.?

Improvements in mental health, including lower rates of depression, decreased loneliness, and increased self-esteem, are also noticed in canine lovers.

Dog lovers know this, without mountains of research data. When we're down, they sense it, and often come to our side. They will offer a paw or tongue anytime you need one!

Of course, our busy lives sometimes hinder our full appreciation of this animal, who simply loves getting out and exploring. I'm not sure if they're just curious, or they need to know what's going on in front of every house or near every tree or lamp post.

They love chasing things, even though they should realize they can never catch them. I'm not sure what my dogs are saying when they bark at a squirrel or bird.

They tend to love everything and everyone ? any other breed of dog, other strange animals, even their nemesis, cats.

I've always preferred the medium-sized breeds ? something you can wrestle with, tease, and really grab onto. Of course, the drawback of medium and large breeds is the pain they inflict when they jump on your stomach or decide to recline on your head!

But you take it in stride because you're a dog owner.

I grew up just outside of Bolton on our 4-acre parcel. There, our dogs had plenty of room to explore. There were times we wouldn't see our Sammy for days.

We've been in Town for years now, and while we don't have a huge property, the back yard is decent, and we take them out on walks as often as we can. We always took them to lakes and cottages when we had the chance.

That's where they come to life and you can see just how much they love this world of ours.

They're free and boy do they make use of it. Our youngest trouble-maker loved chasing water fowl. I'm sure she wouldn't even know what would happen if she ever caught up with one.

Our dogs are in their senior years and our oldest, Marley, has trouble with stairs. And yet she never turns down a walk.

I can't think of a life without dogs. I don't want to.

Sure, the pitter patter of little feet is that much louder. And they are extra mouths to feed. I read that it costs roughly \$20,000 to care for a dog through its lifetime. But that's a deal when compared to kids!

There are times when we're sick as a dog and would prefer to let sleeping dogs lie. When we're dog tired we often grab a dog-eared book and cheer for the underdog. When we work like a dog in a dog-eat-dog world, we just can't wait to get home and see those puppy dog eyes.

Alas, when you love a dog, you have countless good days. And one very bad day.

But we dog-lovers wouldn't trade it for anything on the planet.