

August 12th

A journal? Airedales don't write journals. Well, of course they don't. I dictated it. Voice to text software has come a long way. Now it can translate any language, taking us into uncharted areas, like my mind. See, all things are possible. So read on, I have lots to say. Hmm, where to start? Well, the beginning might be a good place.

Being the intelligent person you are, I'm sure you're aware that we belong to the species *canis familiaris* (dog to you), though I'm not just any dog, not this guy. I'm six weeks old and too smart for my own good, which is how I'm sassy enough to talk to you like this. I belong to a distinguished family, members of the Airedale Terrier tribe, and I'm mindful of the standards I need to uphold. You see, terriers are hunters and Airedales are royalty, kings of the terriers, superior beings in many ways as you will see. We're handsome, brave, keen-eyed, long-legged, fiercely loyal, well you get the picture. The list of our character traits is endless and let's not forget, we're indisputably British, true aristocrats.

Right, let's start with some history. Bet you didn't know the Romans were first to classify us into groups – house dogs, war dogs etc. They also began the werewolf legend. They treated their animals with callous indifference and left them to roam the streets. Homeless dogs get hungry and fight for food. There's no one to teach them manners, and it's scary alone so they ran in packs, scavenging and terrifying any unfortunate people who crossed their path, hence the legend. Did you know that?

Stick with me, I've got lots of fascinating information - for instance, how long we pooches have been here. Well, it turns out we evolved from an animal like a weasel about forty million years ago. That's a bit hard to stomach but, oh well, who doesn't have something in their background they'd rather not reveal? Have you looked in your family tree lately? After a while that old weasel somehow evolved into a direct forbear of the genus *Canis*, which, as you no doubt know, includes the wolf and the jackal, as well as the dog.

About twelve thousand years ago, give or take a few years, some wolves, the more cunning ones, realized there was free food at human dens. The pickings were so easy they stuck around, deciding a little company in exchange for a meal or two was a good deal. Why should they go out to find it when all they had to do was sit near the fire? Early agriculture might not have started without the help of the wolf, which means *canis familiaris* (ahem, yours truly) was responsible for the evolution of human civilization. Zinged you with that one, didn't I? How's that for a real turnabout on the evolutionary scale? Of course, we're nothing like wolves today, though some of us do resemble them. Even if we wanted to try, which we would be crazy to do, we couldn't make it in the wild. After centuries of pampering, who would forego a cozy bed to scabble about in the cold and rain?

Bet you didn't think a little dude like me would be so smart, huh? I know, I'm precocious, but we young'uns learned all this stuff from our moms. My mom dredged up loads of ancient memories to tell us, passed down to her from generation to generation, and you better believe she made sure we paid attention. Aside from the lessons, I'm gifted with a quick and brilliant mind, which is another Airedale trait, along with stylish, noble, and athletic. I don't want to forget anything. Those are all reasons why we're kings of the terriers and why our moms make sure we're well prepared for our station in life.

Well, back to my name. It's not legally Alf. My birth certificate says it's Yorkshire Lad. Can you imagine people calling "Here Yorkshire Lad, come Yorkshire Lad?" Yeah, right. Why I have a name that is never used, is beyond me, but my pedigree is chock full of champions from dad to grandparents to great grandparents and on down the line, and all of them had fanciful names. Tradition required me to have a formal, fancy name, and as Airedales originated from some place called Yorkshire in England, it's no doubt the reason this one stuck. I later found out my new leader, Anna, was born in Yorkshire and her grandfather's best pal was one of the earliest Airedales. That gave us an immediate bond and me an aristocratic pack. Fitting, don't you think? I'm honored such an important ancestor is connected to my family.

So, no Yorkshire Lad; Alf suits me much better. Someone named me after an old, and I mean old, TV character from way back, an alien, whatever an alien is, because I look and act just like him. I don't know about that but I like Alf okay, though it wouldn't look too good on paper amongst all those other double-barreled handles of my snooty forbears. I must be a throwback to somewhere as I can't imagine spending my life prancing round a ring and being bathed and brushed and cossetted all the time, just to get a CH (champion to you) in front of my name. Yuck. There must be much more fun to be had, like playing in the mud and chasing squirrels. Besides, I already know I'm a champion, there's no need to prove it.

Okay, enough history, here's where my story begins. There are eleven of us, six brothers, four sisters and me. We live with mom and various uncles and aunts. Dad, well he comes to visit once in a while, always a much anticipated occasion. We're all in awe of him and while he's a bit aloof, we know he's proud of us. We follow him all over the place, getting underfoot and trying to carry ourselves like him with regal pride. Mom watches over all of us and teaches us stuff. It keeps her busy, I can tell you.

I'm the last born and as a result, the smallest of the bunch. I refuse to consider the word 'runt' since in my case, small is temporary. Arriving last was just the luck of the draw. Mom's milk is available on a first come, first serve basis and there are more of us than there are places to get it from, so my place last in line was established at the outset. Outweighed by everyone else, getting enough fuel to catch up is difficult to say the least, but starting out at the bottom doesn't mean I have to stay there. I'll fight for my place later when I'm stronger.

In the meantime, when the dinner bowl rattles we all race to get to it first. My bigger siblings don't cut me any slack for my size. I run as hard as I can, but my legs are shorter and I'm always last to arrive. I'm lucky if anything is left by the time I've fought my way through the crowd. I try all kinds of tricks to anticipate the dinner bowl before it rattles. I keep my eyes peeled and I'm always first to savor the mouth-watering aroma as it comes wafting into my nose. It smells so good I can taste it. You know how the aroma of roast lamb makes you salivate, right? Well, that's exactly it, lamb and apples and sweet potato all mixed up with gravy. We don't smell just dinner, we smell each individual ingredient, making for a sensory overload you guys couldn't match. It's fun to anticipate some new and different morsel instead of just the same old thing. Yum, and we can't be fooled. You might drink a milkshake and think it tastes like chocolate but, in fact, it's made up of vegetables. You could never fool an Airedale that way.

Once in a while, through sheer cunning I do get there first, but not by enough to make any difference. The rest of the gang always thunders right behind trampling me without a second thought. I squirm and worm and wiggle my way to the food against these heavyweights. I would

get hurt if they weren't all pudgy and soft from eating my food, unlike myself, the lean and mean edition. They shove and jostle me at every opportunity, but I endure it to get as much food as possible so I'll grow big like them. I push back, of course, but they don't even feel it. Sometimes I even get squeezed underneath or between two big bodies. Mealtimes are not pleasant and I learned early that life is tough.

Mom doesn't help either. She's not around when we eat and she has no patience with snitches, so I've learned to ignore the trampled toes and the bruises. Every day I hope things will be better but sometimes it's too much and it gets me down. That's when I just lie at the back of the pack, my head on my paws and watch, wondering why I'm not like them. The humans always know when this happens and offer help. They give me some food on my own which gives me a chance to eat in peace without one of the others poaching my portion. On those occasions I savor each bite, tasting each item instead of sucking it up in one huge gulp. I'll be big as them soon, maybe bigger if I work at it. It's no fun being picked on just because you're smaller. It's a very unAiredale-like trait, even in my sisters who, though I refuse to admit it, can also sit on me. Bullying is not in the book of Airedale etiquette; anyway, enough of that.

It's a good place, home. We live in the people house at night in our own room and we each have a soft bed. They're arranged in a spiral so we can sleep close together like we did when we were younger, all on top of each other intertwined like a nest of snakes. A thick dark carpet on the floor protects us from falls and the walls, painted blue as a summer sky, make it feel like daylight. We have a big pile of toys too; tug ropes and balls, squeakers and plush cuddly ones. I like the giraffe best, but whenever I get hold of a toy someone else always tries to grab it from me and it ends up in pieces, stuffing flying everywhere. That's how I learned to dismember my toys. The stuffing makes good eating.

In good weather we stay outside where there's more room to play. The grass is quite long in places, good for hide and seek. Huge old oak trees, planted so close they almost touch, keep us shaded from the sun. Bushes with sharp, dagger-like thorns screen out a more tempting landscape and dissuade us from venturing further. Outside we play in a huge cage where our people can keep an eye on us, but sometimes we're allowed in the large garden. Our humans know it's safe there because a big wall surrounds the boundary so there's no fear of getting lost. Then it can take ages to find us, ten little pudgy guys and one skinny one, all rambling out in different directions, searching for mischief, and finding plenty of places to investigate. I still haven't seen all of it and I know there's much more. Once, our human pack leader took me to the vet, and I discovered a different world exists outside our back yard. The first trip petrified me, so I didn't see much except the inside of the vet's house, but I'm older now and know what to expect.

Playing outside gives us more room to sort out the order of the pack and a lot of sorting goes on. Wolf packs have a top male and female pair, a second in command pair and so on down the line to the lowliest of the low and everyone has a job. Dog packs and dog-human packs are similar, but we dogs can change our status by winning little battles in stages. It's not an all or nothing thing, thank goodness. We each try to dominate the other through various ways, pouncing on each other, standing up on shoulders, play-biting in a mock attack, boxing and body slams, to name a few, and while I'm not winning any of the bouts yet, I get in tons of practice and I'm learning the weak spots. It won't be long now before I move up the ladder.

Diane (she's our human pack leader,) sometimes takes me to the place where she spends her days, workplace, she calls it. When this is going to happen she comes in wearing her work clothes and gets down on her knees pushing her face close to inspect us, her small, square eyeglasses sliding down her long skinny nose. Everything about Diane is skinny. Very tall and thin she looks like a walking skeleton with clothes on and she always wears long narrow skirts and fitted cotton tops which accentuate her thinness. Short, mousy brown hair frizzed out to the shape of a helmet completes the appearance of a dandelion. You'd think someone like that was short on strength but you'd be wrong. Diane has large knobby hands and can pick up Mom, or heft huge bags of feed as if they were puppies, and she wears clumpy boots on her big feet. Shortsighted as she is, putting her face close to ours is a necessity when deciding whose turn it is to accompany her. At our age, we seem identical and most people can only tell us apart by the different colored collars we wear. Not having met many people I didn't know Diane looks odd, nor do I care. Dogs don't care about appearances. She is kind and loves us and those big hands and long knobby fingers are deceptively gentle. She points those fingers at us, moving from one to the other until she decides who will go.

On my first visit, pumped with pride at being chosen, and secure in the knowledge that Diane would protect me from anything bad, I didn't hesitate in my eagerness for new experiences. Curiosity bursting from every pore, I wriggled for Diane to put me down as soon as she walked in the door. Right away I spied a handsome little fella across the room. About my size, he had black hair and brown paws, a hint of a puppy tummy and the edges of his ears were blonde, as was the tip of his tail. The hair on top of his head was a bright russet red. *That's funny, just like me.* I ran over at full tilt, eager to make friends, skidding to a halt on my butt a hair's breadth before my nose smashed into the wall. *What magic is this? Why can't I touch or smell this guy?* I stared at him again and cocked my head in puzzlement. He cocked his head. I sat down and scratched my ear. He sat down and scratched his ear. It took a while but the bone did drop. The handsome stranger wasn't a puppy, he was me, and I couldn't help but gaze at myself again. *Hmm.* I always thought I was a handsome devil, now I knew for sure. I had never seen myself before and was captivated, pleased to find myself much better looking than any of my siblings. Perhaps that's why they were so mean to me. They were jealous. Mesmerized by myself I continued gazing, hypnotized, until Diane chortled and I turned round to find several people laughing. *How dare they entertain themselves at my expense, and find me funny? Was everybody mean?* Embarrassed, I pretended not to be hurt and stalked away in as dignified a manner as I could manage, head high and tail erect.

What a time that was at the workplace. People kept coming in the front door, I mean a lot of people, all day, and they rushed right over to coo and fuss over me. People are huge to a small puppy and some are much bigger than others and can be very intimidating so I behaved with wary politeness, ready to scoot at the first sign of a problem. All this attention quite exhausted me, and then there were the little people. They could be mean, mostly the boys.

Two of them were trouble from the start. While the big people were busy talking to Diane, these two edged away from the grownups, nudging each other and pointing, sniggering behind their hands as they bullied a younger child until he cried. That's when the fat one spied me alone in my corner and trotted over pointing and laughing. His face was covered in ugly, oozing zits and his spiky hair made him look like a hedgehog.

With practiced slyness he placed himself between me and the rest of the room, his pudgy body big enough to block mine from view while he tormented me. The two of them pulled my tail and poked me with their fingers when no one was looking. The smaller boy's pale skin turned pink with delight and his cold squinty eyes lit with malicious joy whenever he made me squeal. Then he would suck on a wisp of his long, almost white hair, fine as a cat's. When he thrust his face close to mine his pale eyes bulged behind his glasses like a bullfrog's.

Caught, helpless between the two of them, I ached to bite that big pale nose jutting out so close to my mouth. Instinct stopped me. I knew what would happen if I hurt them. Except for the thick black frames of his eyeglasses, the second boy looked like a frog in a wig. He was worse than the other one. He looked at me as though scrutinizing a bug, trying to decide which wing to tear off just for fun. I tried hard not to yelp and give them a reason to poke me again. No such luck. They kept it up and it hurt. It hurt a lot. I'm an Airedale and we don't recognize pain but I'm also only a little guy and my bones are still soft. They pulled my hair *oww* and while one boy yanked on my tail the other poked me in the ribs or jabbed a finger at my face, his own face scrunched up with glee. *Ouch, my tail, they're pulling it off, oh, it burns and my side feels all tender and bruised. It makes me jump when they touch it. Don't do it again, nooooo.* This was too much and I lost my cool. If this kept up they would pull my tail off or inflict irreparable damage. If I can just get my mouth on a fat finger... In my pain I forgot I didn't have much in the way of teeth yet. One of them was getting ready to pull my tail again and I tried to turn and catch a finger but just at that moment another jab in my face curled my toes and made me flinch. Both boys took care to stay just out of reach.

No one took any notice of my predicament so it was up to me to defend myself. Out came my big boy growl and bared teeth, such as they were. I tried my best, twisting and turning, snapping and growling. I even tried barking but nothing worked. I had just learnt a life lesson. Not every human was nice. Defending myself was risky because I might be labeled vicious instead of lovable, and that could alter my future, but still the noise inside the workplace was at such a high pitch no one noticed and the little hooligans laughed harder. To my chagrin my big boy growl came out as a squeak. I tried so hard to be an Airedale but was no match for these two monsters. The more I protested, the more fun they had. That left me with no choice but to bite my tongue and lie still until they grew tired and left me alone. Despair oozed over me. If this went on a serious injury was inevitable.

I came to dread these visits to the workplace and ran and hid from Diane when she came to choose one of us. She had no clue why I worked so hard to be left behind. She got frustrated and grumpy trying to catch me and I knew I had been struck off the adorable puppy list. Then one day a small girl noticed the boys tormenting me. She was a tiny little thing, looked as light as a feather. Thick hair, black as an Airedale saddle, fell to her waist and huge button eyes shone from the brown skin of her little round face. Dressed in pink shorts and a frilly white top she didn't look too threatening, but apparently she didn't know she was tiny because she flew at those two thugs like an avenging angel, hair whipping out behind in her haste to protect me. The tongue-lashing she gave them was a joy to hear. Everyone in the workplace took notice. Quivering with outrage she stood, toe to toe with the big boy. Hands on her hips she leaned toward him trying for face to face but ending with face to chest. This didn't diminish her attack in any way. She stretched up on her toes to reach him better and yelled up at him.

“Stop it. Leave that puppy alone you morons. Stop it at once. How dare you hurt a poor defenseless baby.

*Baby! Who's she calling a baby?*

Where's your mother?" She grabbed at them, trying to push them away. Of course the boys being much bigger, this had no effect, so my little angel hurtled toward me, shoving in between me and the boys like my brothers heading for the dinner bowl. I bet she could take them all on without breathing hard. Hands on tiny hips she glowered at the two bullies, indignation evident in every taut, quivering muscle. She glared at everyone in the store, eyes sweeping back and forth with the intensity of searchlights, waiting for someone to collect their little darlings. No mothers stepped forward. The gang of two stared at the girl in astonishment, then at each other, shrugged and moved away to find another source of amusement. My pint-sized heroine tossed her head in contempt before turning her attention to me, sprinting over to see if I was all right.

She clucked her tongue and felt me all over with gentle concern, probing for tender spots or bumps. "Poor puppy, did those blithering half-wits hurt you?" She crooned as she stroked me.

I had a little trouble with 'blithering half-wits' but I got the idea and licked her all over and then some, grateful to be free of the little tyrants. She giggled so much everyone else started to laugh. She turned to her mom, dragging her by the skirt over to my corner, yanking on it to punctuate her plea. "Mom, he's so cute isn't he? Can we take him home, please, please, please?"

Mom's bemused gaze switched back and forth between her daughter, Diane and me. Twitching her skirt free of the vice-like grip which threatened to pull it down, she squatted next to my little angel, her face easy to read as it changed first to a concerned frown and then morphed into a wide smile as I sat licking air in her direction. "He's adorable sweetheart, but young puppies need constant care and attention and he will grow into a very big dog in no time. We're away from home a lot and a little guy like him would be miserable by himself."

Storm clouds gathered over sweetheart's little brown face and she opened her mouth to protest when Diane, with the smoothness of long experience, intervened.

"I'm sure you'd take wonderful care of him dear, but Alf is far too young to leave home now. If a puppy is taken from his mother too early it can affect his whole life and you wouldn't want that, would you?"

Sweetheart's mouth closed and a frown of fierce concentration covered her little forehead as she digested this information. Long moments passed as we all tensed before the frown disappeared and her face screwed up in an effort to prevent tears. She tore her gaze away from me and shook her head. "No," she whispered, gaze fixed on the floor, "I wouldn't."

A long conversation followed about the expense and terms of care of an Airedale puppy, which is kind of boring, so I won't tell you here. Suffice it to say my avenging angel and her mother left after that, the little one staring back at me until the door closed behind her. I'll always remember that little girl. Diane still took me to her workplace but my angel never came again. On those future visits Diane kept a vigilant eye on all the children who wandered near me, so things improved.

In between being poked and petted, my curiosity got the better of me and I ventured out to explore and sniff for messages, trying to figure out what went on there. This workplace interested me. Chairs and shelves and assorted strange looking instruments lined the walls while rows of small high tables stood in the middle. The air held the scent of many dogs and strange odors, harsh, chemical ones which wrinkled my nose and pleasing scents, clean and fresh. The tables had long poles attached with a loop on the end. A mass of hair covered the floor, dog hair, good for snuffling, I wondered about that until one day Diane let me watch as she lifted a poodle onto one of the tables and started giving him a haircut. *Did that mean I'd have to have a haircut? Hmm. I would ask mom.* Why anyone would want to work shut up in a room all day is beyond me. The human world seems odd to me but I know I need to figure it out. As I said, we've lived with human companions since the earliest wolves bargained for food. People need us. It's a very important career and I love puzzles.

At home during the day I play with my brothers and sisters when they let me, and chase leaves and stuff, a much better way to spend time, but over the last few days Diane has been stuffing me in a small box and making it clear she wanted me to stay there. This game of hers didn't match my idea of a game but people are weird so I put up with it. The box has soft sides and mesh windows and has just about enough room for me to lie in it. There's no way to play but Diane looks pleased so I do what she wants, for a while.

About the time Diane started this, some of my brothers and sisters went away and haven't come back. I'm not too upset about this, it means fewer bruises and more food, but something is happening. Deciding to find out what, and astute as I am, it wasn't long before I noticed mom was not her usual self. Her gorgeous red hair lay lank and dull and the coarse black saddle hair on her back had lost its usual shine. She lay watching us, an expression of such sadness in her golden eyes that I grew concerned, so I left the play area and ambled over to sit next to her under the shade of a big tree.

"What's up mom, are you okay?"

Mom watched the rest of the family play as she answered. "You're all growing so fast, before long you'll be as big as me."

"Cool" I said. "I can't wait."

Mom sighed. "Alf, there are eleven of you and with all the rest of us here we're too crowded. Soon you'll all be gone."

"Leave?" I asked aghast. "What do you mean, leave?"

"It's all part of growing up Alf. Just like humans, when we grow up we go out into the world and find another home and another life."

"Why?"

"There isn't enough room here for our entire family. Daisy will have puppies soon and there will be nowhere to put them."

"New puppies are why we have to leave?"

“Everyone has to live their own life Alf. Some of your brothers and sisters have already left for their new homes. I’m sad because they went far away and we will never see them again, but it’s the way it has to be. Diane makes sure you all go to loving families who have good homes and enclosed yards, so you shouldn’t be afraid. You should look forward to a new adventure. Your dad and I expect you to carry the Airedale standard with you and make your new family proud.”

I stopped talking, horrified at this news – to be taken away from my family to a strange place, so soon. I’d barely had my eyes open long enough to explore this place. This was going to be a bad thing, I knew, despite Mom’s assurances. So I said, “But I’ll be lonely without you and what if there aren’t any other pups to play with and how come you guys get to stay here? I don’t want to go.”

Mom explained. “In this matter, we’re the same as a human family. We love you all and don’t want any of you to go and that’s why I’m sad but your dad and I and your uncles and aunts got here the same way.”

My jaw unlocked itself. I had loads of questions and started peppering them at her, but she wouldn’t answer any more and sent me off to play. I trudged away worried and despondent. My life had just been taken from me, turned from happy and joyous to scary and miserable. As I walked away, contemplating this awful news, my head went down in thought and my tail crept between my legs, what there was of it. It’s kind of hard to put half a tail between your legs. I have no memory of the experience but the vet cut half of it off when I was a few days old, so I never missed it. Mom said the Romans were responsible for this barbaric practice; those pesky Romans again, nasty people. They believed cutting off a dog’s tail prevented rabies, can’t imagine why, but one of my brothers told me it was because Airedales hunt small animals down in their burrows and sometimes they got stuck in them, so a shortened tail was a useful handle to haul us out of a sticky situation. Someone else told me there’s even a story about a tax on dogs’ tails. The rich people would leave their dogs’ tails alone because they could afford the tax. The poor people couldn’t and would chop off the tail to avoid payment. Those poor pooches were called curtailed dogs, which got shortened to cur. You learn something every day don’t you? As for those tax collectors, talk about a pound of flesh. What is tax anyway? In any event, one good thing occurred. I got more food and put on more weight each day. Soon I’d be too big for Diane’s box which I now viewed as the evil instrument of my departure. My unhappy musings evaporated when a tiny yellow thing fluttered by and kept flying round my head, a butterfly Diane called it. Entranced I chased after it for ages but it always flew higher than I could reach. I soon forgot about leaving and ran off to continue the hunt.

End of sample