

Opinion: How dogs laugh with you

By Ian Frazier, *Outside*

I was sitting on a front porch in Helena, Mont., with my 14-year-old son on a hot summer afternoon when the smoke of nearby forest fires made the air even hotter. A black Labrador belonging to nobody we knew came walking along in a low, overheated mood. On a neighbor's lawn, a sprinkler was going. The dog saw it, bounded into the spray, and stayed there for a long while. Then he came out, shook himself a lot, and walked up onto the porch. He sat on his haunches looking at us.

This was one happy dog. This dog owned happiness.

Regarding us benevolently, his eyes had the fogginess of total bliss. Just sitting there, wet and dripping, he embodied the sound *ahhhhhhhhhhh*. My son and I agreed that we had never seen a human being as happy as that dog, and suddenly we became happy ourselves.

A dog's sense of smell is said to be ten thousand times better than a human's, and that's also how much better dogs are than humans at being happy. Human happiness is a shabby thing compared with a dog's. For eons, humans benefitted from the canine gift for happiness and favored happy dogs, who thus passed along their happy genes, producing a species that is now besotted, almost deranged, with happiness.

Of course, many other animals take pleasure in being alive – eagles soaring, otters skidding down slides, cows content to the point of smugness. But there's a selfishness to that happiness.

Dog happiness always looks outward. To reach fullest expression, a dog's happiness has to be lived large and strewn

around. The only thing that slows down a dog's happiness is if he can't infect you with it so you can be happy together.

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