

Our Best Friend

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You may have heard of the dog being described as 'man's best friend.' Why is this? Do you know?

Dogs play a very important part in the history of humans. They have probably followed people about for at least 15,000 years. Scientists now think that all dogs, whether they're terriers, sheepdogs, poodles or Great Danes, are descended from one common ancestor. This ancestor was probably a type of wolf and may have come from somewhere in East Asia. Little by little, wolves and people began to get along together, and eventually, wolves became a little like a pet. Over the years, wolves evolved into dogs. Now there are dogs in every part of the world. So far there are 150 different breeds of dog that are recognized by the American Kennel Club.

Because dogs have shared food, shelter and companionship with humans for so long, they have developed an ability to understand people and to enjoy being with them. Dogs are also extremely loyal to humans, which is one of the main reasons we now call them 'man's best friend.'

Dogs are often used as working dogs. They have jobs to do!

In Siberia and Alaska, where the climate is extremely cold, Husky dogs work pulling heavy sleds. They have been bred to do this for many centuries. Huskies originally came from Siberia, but humans took them to Alaska in the early part of the twentieth century because they are able to survive temperatures as low as -60 degrees. Huskies are very strong dogs and because they're good at working in teams, they're ideally suited to pulling the heavy sleds across the ice and snow.

All around the world, dogs such as German Shepherds, Labradors, and spaniels work as police dogs alongside police officers. They are trained to track and catch criminals and to help control large crowds of people. The powerful sense of smell that all dogs have means that it's easy to train police dogs to sniff out drugs, weapons and explosives, too. You often see these dogs working at airports and ports. They also help in rescues after a disaster has happened. Their sense of smell is so much better than ours that they can even find survivors after an earthquake!





You may have heard about or seen a guide dog. These are very special dogs that are trained to help blind people and deaf people to live their lives more easily and more safely. The dogs start their training when they're very young puppies. They go to live with a regular family. All these people have volunteered to become 'puppy raisers'. This means that they are responsible for the guide dog's early training. They take the puppies to as many places as possible so that they get used to different environments. They also teach them basic obedience. After several months, the puppies go to professional trainers and learn all the skills they need to look after people whose sight or hearing isn't so good.

Dogs are highly intelligent animals, but one of the reasons they're so easy to train is that they trust humans and have a strong bond with them.



This is the true story of a little dog whose loyalty to his owner has become famous around the world.

In the early 1800s, a man named John Gray arrived in Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland. He had a wife, Jess, and a son, also named John. John Gray was a gardener by trade but at the time there was no work for gardeners. The weather in Scotland had been so bad that the ground was difficult to dig or cultivate. As he had no other work, John Gray decided to join the police force.

In those days, all police officers had to have a watchdog. John Gray chose a Skye Terrier as his watchdog. He called him Bobby.



Being a police officer was a tough, sometimes dangerous, job. John Gray worked as a night watchman in the police force. Every night he had to go out and check that no one was breaking the law. John and Bobby soon became a familiar sight on the streets of Edinburgh. Wherever John Gray went, Bobby went too.

Many officers left the police force after only a few years because the work was so hard. John Gray managed to work as an officer for five years, which was a long time. Unfortunately he became very sick with a disease called tuberculosis. The police surgeon, Dr Littlejohn, treated him with medicine but sadly on 15 February 1858, John Gray died.

John Gray's body was buried in the graveyard of Greyfriars Church in Edinburgh. After the funeral, Bobby was taken back to the family home to be taken care of.

The graveyard gates were locked every night and police watchmen patrolled the graveyard through the night. But Bobby managed to escape from his home and return to the graveyard, sneaking in through the gates behind one of the police officers. No one saw him. Bobby returned to his owner's grave and sat down beside it.

Day after day, Bobby sat at John Gray's grave, leaving only to find food. The gardener in charge of the graveyard at Greyfriars church tried several times to send him home. Bobby refused to leave. Eventually the gardener gave up trying to send Bobby home. He made a little shelter for the dog between two graves. That's where Bobby lived from that day on.

Bobby became famous throughout Edinburgh. Crowds would gather at the entrance of the graveyard at one o'clock every day to watch him leave for his meal. Bobby would get up and follow John Gray's friend

William Dow to the same coffee house he used to go to with John Gray. There he would be given a meal. After his meal, Bobby returned to the graveyard and once more took up his position beside his master's grave.

In 1867, a new law was passed in Edinburgh. It stated that all dogs must have a license. If they didn't, they would be destroyed. Bobby didn't have a license! One of the most important men in Edinburgh, Sir William Chambers, decided to pay for Bobby's license himself. Bobby was presented with a new collar which carried the words 'Greyfriars Bobby from the Lord Provost 1867 licensed'.

Bobby remained faithful to his owner. He lived in the graveyard, keeping watch over John Gray's grave for an incredible fourteen years until he died in 1872.

After Bobby's death, a fountain was built, with a statue of Bobby placed on top. On it you can read these words:

'Greyfriars Bobby died 14 January 1872 – aged 16 years. Let his loyalty and devotion be a lesson to us all.'