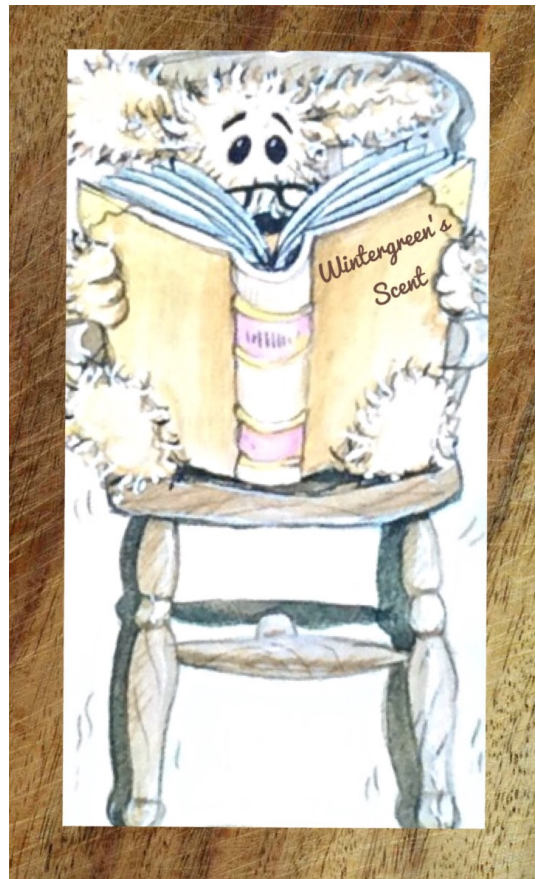


## Writer's Block

According to [dogbreedinfo.com](http://dogbreedinfo.com): "When dogs smell something they are not just registering a smell, they get an entire story. They can tell a lot about another dog or human including if they are male or female, what they ate, where they have been, what they have touched and what mood they are in. This means they are actually reading a story, not just smelling an interesting scent."

So let me tell you a story I recently read in Wintergreen's scent. I've mentioned before that she is a nice mixture of cooking smells, wildflower perfume, tea and those funny wintergreen mints that make me sneeze. But that is not all that I can read from her. I can smell each member of the pack on her clothes after she kisses them goodbye in the morning. I smell her breakfast on her ... Cheerios, which never fails to irritate me because there are no scraps and it doesn't include bacon. I know when she's brushed her teeth and had a shower because she smells too clean. I then have to give her cuddles and licks to get my scent on her so that she smells like she belongs to the pack again. But earlier today there was something else in her scent -- the acrid tang of pheromones that smell of frustration and anxiety. Ah yes, the sweet bouquet of Writer's Block.

Writer's Block descends on this house when the words won't come. Why this is such a big problem is not easy for me to grasp. While I understand some words (I have quite a wide vocabulary), I often view them as a poor way to communicate. Posture, tone of voice, peeing on a bush, sniffing another dog's bottom -- these things tell me infinitely



more than words could ever say. But to humans words are all-important.

"What is she struggling to write?" you ask. Well, it's a little embarrassing to admit this, but she can't think of what to say in this article. Yes, she does help me write Bailey's blog. What? Did you think that I got up at night, like some article-writing fairy, and tapped away at her computer, leaving flawless composition for her to find in the morning? No, I am not the literary equivalent of the cobbler elves. I need help getting all of this down and that's where Wintergreen comes in. And now, despite the fact that I am endlessly entertaining, she is stuck for words.

"It sure is ironic," she mumbles.

While I'm not entirely certain what irony is, I do know that whenever it makes an appearance in Wintergreen's life, she sighs heavily and casts her eyes upward in a pained expression. The ironic nature of this situation is rooted in the fact that Bailey's Blog was an afterthought. She'd already written a draft for Not Exactly Shakespeare (28 articles to be precise, along with 100 poems to accompany it) and she'd made a good start on Memoirs of a Frazzled Mother (another 8 articles in at least rough draft form). But Bailey's Blog was a whim -- something she thought she might toy with for a bit of fun. Now here's the ironic bit: my blog has proven to be the most popular feature on this website.

I'm not really surprised by this because, let's face it, I'm a righteously awesome labrador. But now Wintergreen is under the gun to write more articles. Unfortunately, she looked at me this morning and said, "I got nothing."

So now the torment begins. Within the literary world, there is nothing so pernicious as Writer's Block. It can take a mild-mannered person like Wintergreen and turn her into some sort of insane Mount Etna, spewing molten crazy all over the place. It begins with deep, dramatic sighs of frustration, followed by the increasingly frenetic tapping of her pen on the desk. An idea will occur to her and she will

hurriedly type it up before it evaporates. She'll read over what she's just written, proclaim it to be crap and delete it.

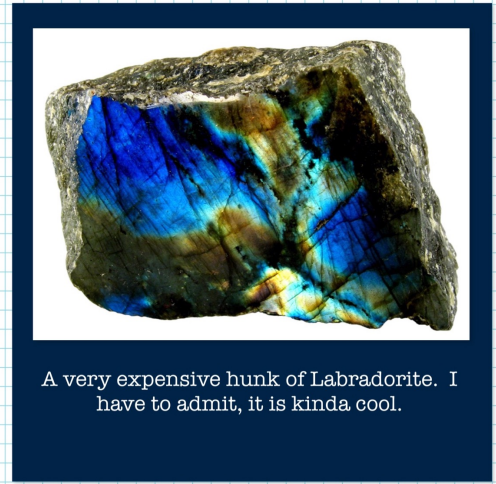
An hour of this will go by and then she'll look to me for inspiration, or more to the point at me. She keeps staring at me hoping that an idea will come and forgetting that dogs hate being stared at. To us it is very confrontational. Now I know that Wintergreen is not angry with me. I know that this is not a confrontation, but my reaction is automatic. I steadfastly avoid eye contact until she looks away. It is very unusual behaviour for Wintergreen because she is wise in the ways of dogs and should know better. But this is what Writer's Block does. It undermines humans so thoroughly that they start acting like imbeciles.

Another hour passes and Wintergreen, now thoroughly demoralised, utters a rude word and decides to mess around on Facebook for a minute. Facebook is like some magical land where a "minute" swiftly becomes an hour of dicking around and getting nothing accomplished. She was so loathe to go back to work that she took one of those online quizzes: What Crystal Are You? Now let's be clear here: Wintergreen is not into crystals. She doesn't meditate and has no interest in geology. But to avoid what she calls "the tyranny of the blank page," she embarked on a quiz to see which pretty rock best suits her personality.

The results, actually, were surprisingly interesting. Apparently, "her kindred rock" is labradorite. "Huh," she said, sitting back in her chair. "I didn't even know that existed."

Upon further investigation, she learned more about labradorite. First discovered by missionaries in 1770 in Labrador, Canada, the stone already had a long history of mystical use among the Inuits. They believed that the gem originated in the fires of the Aurora Borealis before it fell to earth. According to [www.crystalvaults.com](http://www.crystalvaults.com), "Labradorite is treasured for its remarkable play of colour, known as labradorescence. The stone, usually dark gray-green ... is composed of aggregate layers that refract light as iridescent flashes of peacock blue, gold, pale green or coppery red."

Labradorescence! Now that is an awesome word. Ah, listen to me, grasshopper: if you are soft in your ways, wise and sagely, and a lover of bacon, you too can possess the mystic quality of "labradorescence." Speaking of mystical qualities, the stone is thought to provide a conduit between intuition/instinct and intellectual thought.



"This is all very interesting," Wintergreen mumbles, "but it's not helping me write the article."

So now we're back to being annoyed. She's now pacing around the room, talking to herself.

Interesting fact: when Wintergreen gets bored, she cleans and while she cleans, she sings. This, in and of itself, is not so strange. However, **what** she sings, if overheard by normal people, would raise a few eyebrows. And so today I was treated to an "Ode to Bailey" sung to the tune of Meghan Trainor's "All About That Base":

Because you know it's all about the Bailey, bout the Bailey  
(No squirrels)

Yeah, it's pretty clear I ain't no Shih Tzu  
but I can fetch a stick like I'm supposed to do.  
I got that tennis ball that all the dogs chase,  
Buried my bones in all the right places.



I've seen those Lassie films with Timmy down a well  
And I've see Beethoven really give 'em hell  
You see it's just like that with each dog and pup  
Cause every inch of us is perfect from the bottom to the top.

Yeah, my master he told me "Don't raid table scraps from the bin.  
The kitchen's got all kinds of mischief you shouldn't get in.

My shoes are off limits and don't shed your fur on my bed  
Or park your ass on my pillow cause that's where I lay my head."

But you know it's all about the Bailey, bout the Bailey,  
(No squirrels).



You think that's painful? She then went on to re-write Taylor Swift's  
"Shake It Off":

I jump in puddles, mate,  
And play out in the rain.  
You might think that's a pain (mmm-mmm)  
But I won't refrain (mmm-mmm)



I sneak into the house,  
Jump up on the couch  
Now your carpet is all stained (mmm-mmm)  
I'll say it once again...



Oh I am oozing mud and yuck,  
Keep moving, cause it is amusing  
While you chase me with a towel  
Trying just to get me dry.

Cos I jump in muddy lakes, lakes, lakes, lakes, lakes  
Get filthy, drenched and slaked, slaked, slaked, slaked, slaked,  
Then I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake  
Right by you, right by you.

Kiss your clean carpets goodbye, bye, bye, bye, bye  
Sorry, got mud in your eye, eye, eye, eye, eye  
Cos I've just got to shake, shake, shake, shake, shake.  
Shake it off, shake it off.



Shake it off, shake it off (bow-wow)

Shake it off...

Hey, hey, hey!

While you've been getting down to scrub those dirty, dirty carpets,

You should have been cleaning off these ... soiled ... feet.

My master's got a new dog flap; I said "Oh my God!

I'm just gonna shake it near the fabric couch there

and the antique chair.

Come on over puppies we can shake, shake, shake."

I tell you the woman's insane. This is what I have to contend with everyday!

But wait, her scent just altered slightly, the vinegary smell of frustration has lifted and Wintergreen is once again relaxed. I look at her curiously.

"Why?" she asks, reading my mind. She turns her computer around so I can see the screen. It is covered in these words.

"Thank you, baby," she whispers and gives me a belly rub.