

Are You My Grandchild?

by Sandy Rideout





As the youngest of four, born on a farm during the Depression, Bea Rideout learned early on that it didn't pay to be too excitable. Her unflappable nature stood her in good stead during a long nursing career, a longer marriage, and as a mom of two and a beloved professional nanny. A confirmed cat lover, she reluctantly converted to dogs late in life and under duress. In fact, no one is quite sure that she actually *did* convert. You can never tell what Bea is thinking; she's clever that way.

To keep up with Bea and her family, visit www.sandyrideout.com



Once upon a time, there was a wonderful lady who seemed destined to be a grandmother. Bea Rideout was kind, patient, wise, funny, generous, resilient and extremely sensible. She was even a Registered Nurse, capable of handling all manner of crises, medical and otherwise.

This lady had everything it takes to be a perfect grandma.

Everything except grandchildren!

What had gone wrong? The aspiring grandma had produced two reasonably normal children, who grew up to have degrees, careers, homes, friends, and relationships. Both understood the facts of life, because Bea had drawn infographics, with ovaries and fallopian tubes, and sperm swimming like tadpoles. When pressed on the mechanics, she had said only, “First the parents have to be in love.” Ultimately they figured out the rest, but... nothing happened.

Her offspring had everything it takes to be parents. Everything except kids!



The aspiring grandma was baffled. As adults, her offspring had no particular interest in human babies. All they cared about was animals. Had she allowed too many pets in their formative years? Had refusing them a dog been a mistake? Ever a sensible woman, Bea took the disappointment in stride. She never complained. Never made sly digs. Never pretended to hear ticking clocks. Never said, "One day when you have kids..."

She took her questions elsewhere.



Are you my grandchild?

No, I am not your grandchild.
I am a goldfish. Don't get
attached because I will soon
be flushed away.





Are you my grandchild?

No, I am not your grandchild.
I am a gerbil, and the mother
of 36 myself.

Are you my grandchild?

No, I am not your grandchild. I am a squirrel. The one your daughter named “Bea,” after you. The one you banished after I chewed through your window screen.





Are you my grandchildren?

No, we are all ghosts of cats past - Frisky, Porky, Butch, Hugo, Jet, Mango, Gizmo, Trouble, Mika, Molly and many more.

Are you my grandchild?

No, I am not your grandchild. I am Rufus, the neediest cat in the world. And now you are the mother of my sister, Stella. I am not smart enough to figure out our relationship status.



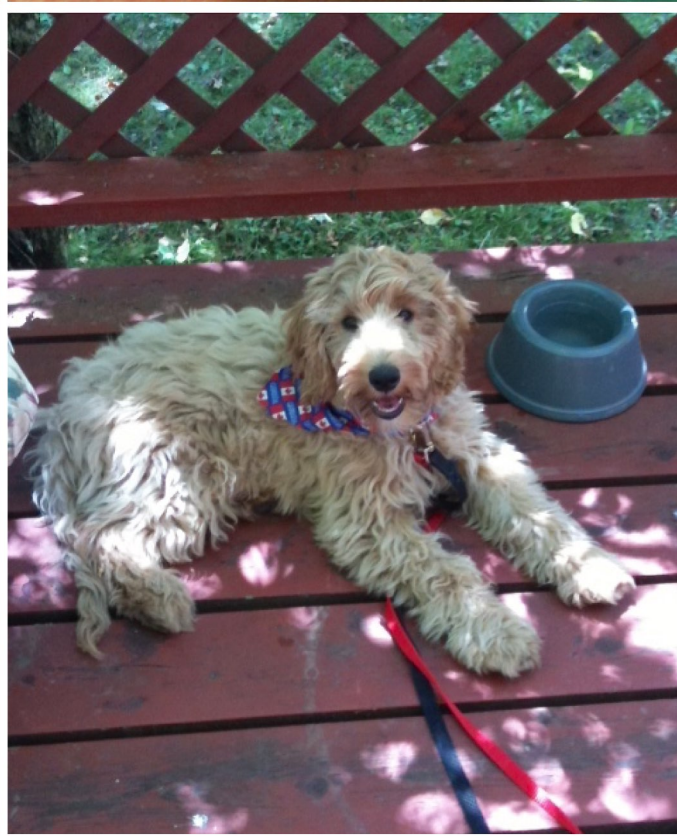


Are you my grandchild?

Yes! I am your grandson! I sat on your lap all the way home from the kennel and I will never, ever forget how safe I felt.

Will you be my grandma?





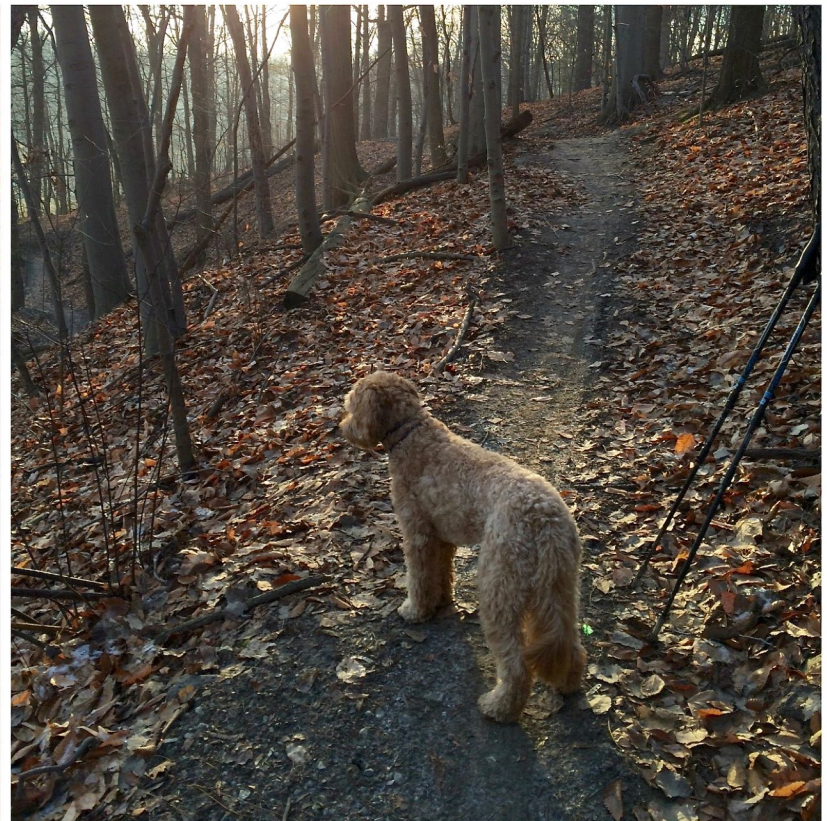
And so the aspiring grandma aspired no more. She resigned herself to her role as grandma to a Goldendoodle named Riggins, and a Rhodesian Ridgeback named Scout.

Riggins loved his Grandma Bea like no one else. Every time he saw her was like the first time all over. And while he was not a dog to waste energy wagging, his tail always wagged for Grandma. He gazed at her like she was the prettiest lady on the planet. Then he grabbed stuffed toys and circled her, making growly noises that meant “You are mine and you are FABULOUS!”



That didn't mean it was easy being grandma to Riggins that first year. He was a very bad boy. He nipped and he nipped until they started calling him "the four legged chainsaw." Grandma Bea made excuses for him, because that is what grandmas do. "He's sick and it's hot and he's young and this will pass," she said. Every day, she called to ask if he had eaten, or if he had nipped anyone. She was actually quite worried about the nipping. Years before, she'd been bitten by a stray dog and had a bad case of Post Traumatic Dog Disorder. While she loved Riggins, she did not want him to become a savage beast. So she reluctantly went along with the decision to take him to training boot camp.

On the lonely ride home, she said, "It will be fine. He'll remember us in a month, I'm sure of it."



Happily, she was right. Riggs remembered them and he came home a better dog. Not perfect, but so much better. However, his luck had not improved. When he was neutered a month later, things went terribly wrong and his scrotum exploded. Grandma called every day, often twice a day, and invited the cats to stay with her until he recovered. When Riggs went to visit in his diaper and cone, he was so thrilled to see the cats that Grandma Bea laughed at his antics. And then she wrote a cheque for all his vet bills. Because he was her granddog, and she loved him almost as much as he loved her.

The sensible woman had fallen for a rogue!



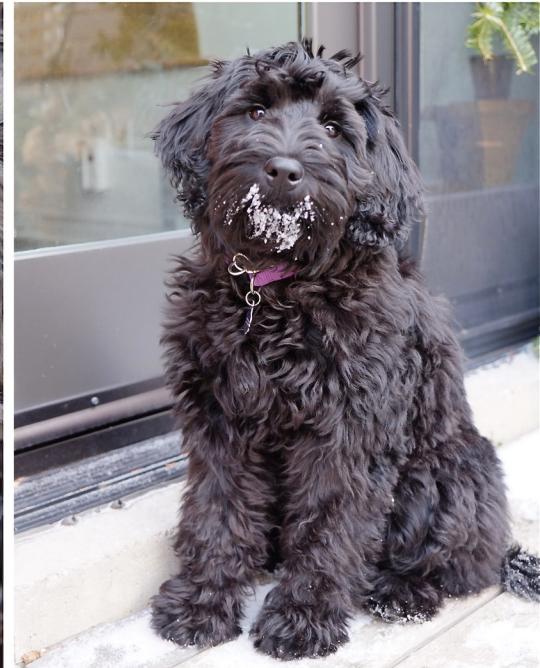
After that, things got better. Riggs went for walks to his favourite park near Grandma Bea's house - the one with all the rabbits and the coyotes. He watched the squirrels from her big windows. He went to her cottage and chased geese off the beach (Grandma Bea applauded at that, and insisted he do it again and again).

He was a good dog now, and Grandma Bea realized she'd gotten off kind of lucky. Human grandkids have wild parties and get tattoos and stop wanting to visit. Granddogs are always cute and never get tired of you. Vet bills are cheap compared to college funds.

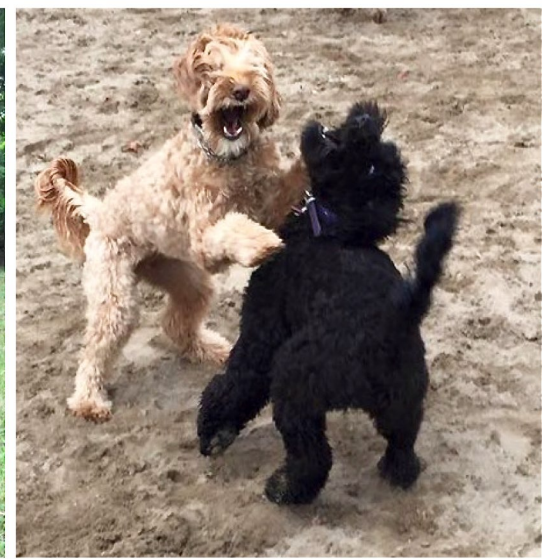
Two granddogs, she decided, were JUST RIGHT.



But then there were three. For reasons Grandma Bea could not fathom, Riggins' Mom wanted a new puppy. After the trouble they'd been through it seemed foolhardy. Even one dog was a big expense for a writer with a mortgage, Bea knew. Two dogs would break the bank - possibly hers. Plus, she knew that two dogs were not necessarily better than one. Sometimes two dogs demolished couches together; she had seen it happen. And what about poor Riggs? He would feel displaced. He hated puppies. He would be an ass, and she did not want that for him. When a new puppy became inevitable, however, Grandma Bea was there to support as always - even if she couldn't quite muster a smile!

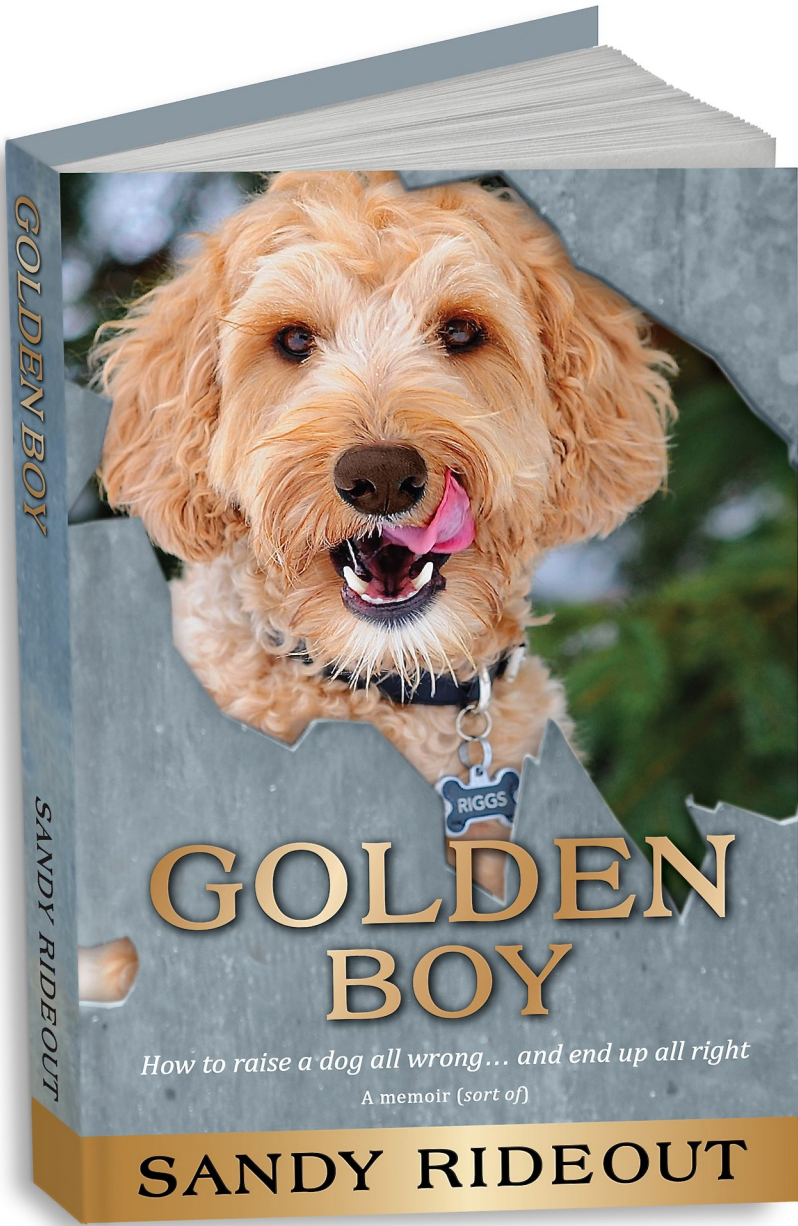


The new puppy was named “Mabel” after Grandma’s own Mom. That made Grandma and her two brothers laugh (the McInnis clan could always take a joke). Mabel soon became part of the family, and Grandma worried about her, too. Would Riggs kill the puppy, like he threatened? Would Mabel learn to control her excitable bladder? Would she ever stop eating stones and poop? It didn’t look promising. But when someone suggested finding another home for the puppy, Grandma Bea was firm: “We do not give our pets away.”



Grandma Bea wasn't convinced a book about Riggs was a great idea. He had turned out fine in the end, so why not let sleeping dogs lie? And was it really necessary to be so darned honest? In her day, people didn't just spill their private business in print. But she had raised a writer, and knew there was always a risk she'd end up on the page.

Luckily, she came off looking like gold, and developed a small cult following of her own.



GOLDEN BOY

SANDY RIDEOUT

GOLDEN BOY

How to raise a dog all wrong... and end up all right

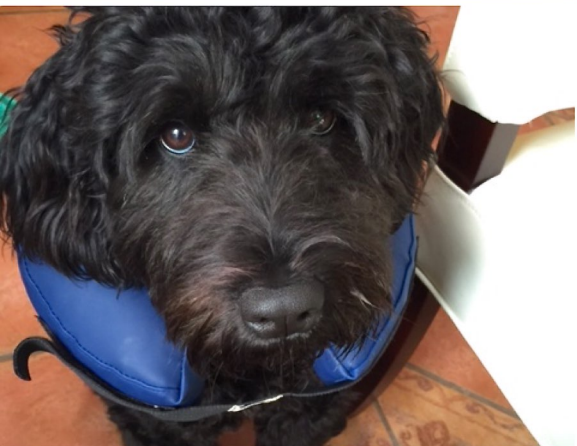
A memoir (sort of)

SANDY RIDEOUT

Mabel left for boot camp, just as Riggs had before her. She was gone a long time - so long that Grandma Bea started to miss her: "What's taking so long? She wasn't that bad. Riggs was way worse." This was quite true.

Grandma was worried Mabel would not be home in time to get spayed before Mother Nature took her course. Sure enough, Mabel was in heat when she came back. Now Grandma needed to worry about her granddaughter getting knocked up by the neighbourhood Boxer. That didn't happen, but when Mabel finally had her surgery she got an infection, just as Riggs had before her.

Grandma offered to babysit Mabel during her long recovery. Every day, Mabel climbed into the recliner with Grandma to wait it out. Riggs had never been allowed in the recliner. Mabel had become Grandma's darling.



Grandma Bea had a secret she hadn't shared. She was sneaking off for medical tests. Meanwhile, she took care of sick Mabel every day and never let on. "She was no trouble at all," she said, every night. Her Grandma ratings were off the charts.

Yet bad news followed soon after: Grandma Bea's cancer was back and she would need to have chemotherapy again. She went into it with her usual sensible optimism: "At least I know what to expect." For six months, Riggs and Mabel visited Grandma several times a week, always happy and excited to arrive. They tried their best to cheer her up, and mostly succeeded, although the recliner was closed for business.



In the spring, chemotherapy ended and the news was good: the cancer had been beaten back once more. Over the summer, Bea could regain her strength at the cottage while watching Riggs and Mabel wreck the lawn, dig up the beach, and chase the geese. There would be shouting as Riggs tried to kill living things or roll in dead ones, while Mabel ate ALL the poop. There would be the lingering stink of wet dog. There would be decent photographs of the best moments because of the new camera Grandma had bought to capture her grandkids for prosperity. And Mabel would be allowed back into Grandma's lap to watch the world go by.

"Make every day special," said a wise friend.

Luckily, every day *is* special for Bea's granddogs, and maybe even more so for those who love them.



Are you my grandchildren?

Yes! And you are the best grandma in the whole world.

We love you, Grandma! Thank you for being you.







Sandy Rideout, a Toronto writer, did not inherit the “sensible” gene from her mother, Bea Rideout. However, the two share many commendable qualities, including a love of animals, a strong sense of loyalty and empathy, and the propensity for laughing fits at awkward moments.

You can read more about Bea and Sandy (and Riggs) in “Golden Boy: How to raise a dog all wrong and end up all right.”

Learn more at www.sandyrideout.com

