

## Dogs and Grapes Forever

Six year old Chuck was having a perfect day, a day for all children. He was sitting Indian style in the warm toasty sunshine. A wonderful cool breeze, in defiance of the yellow ball in the sky, tickled and tingled the arms of the boy, making delighted goose bumps pop up like new spring bulbs.

A big German Shepherd named Skipper, black as night, lay on the soft grass next to the young boy. Boy and dog were like peanut butter and jelly, joined by the stroke of his arm to the soft velvety fur. Skipper smelled the safety and natural love of animals coming from the boy, Chuck had his eyes dreamily closed, each in their own slice of heaven.

This was many years ago, when yards did not need fences between them, and when any neighbor would walk you home if you skinned your knee or got lost.

Earlier in the day, Chuck had been swimming outside, and had strolled into the icy cool of his air conditioned home. Trunks that didn't give a hoot left a trail of drippage on the kitchen linoleum. A bowl chock full of chilled seedless green grapes magically appeared, and sat eagerly on the table, waiting to be devoured. One of his favorite treats, and Mom had them ready.

The cracks that would split the family were not visible yet, at least not to his youthful eyes.

Today at 51, I still love dogs and grapes. But now I worry that the neighbors gorgeous mammoth Newfoundland, a gentle sweetheart named Ginger, will get her wet paws on my work clothes. Grapes still rock, but need to be red for the healthier nutrients.

I still have my moments of serenity. But just when I am sure the station is set to the channel that appreciates the blessings of angelic soul mates and glorious sons, some unseen gnome keeps stealing the remote and switching to the fear channel, which only shows horror stories about what can always tragically be lost.

Wisdom forces me to laugh at myself (and at the putrid southern wind from the gassy grapes), and to rewind the tape in my mind, to just be.