

Simon and Alistair

In September of 2002 two puppies were born at Patapin Registered Miniature Pinschers breeders located just outside of Sarnia, Ontario. They were of the “red” variety of min-pin: the puppy who would be named Alistair was born on September 23, 2002, while the puppy who would be named Simon was born three days later on September 26, 2002.



On December 1 2002, Harold, driven by his friend Loryl, went to Patapin to possibly adopt one of these min-pins. They were the two remaining “red” min-pin pups, and Harold considered the idea of getting both. He phoned his friend Gerry back in Toronto, and they discussed the pros and cons of the idea. Gerry pointed out that getting two, they would be company for each other.

So Harold got both: Simon and Alistair – so named because, well, Simon just looked like a Simon, and Alistair, after a song by Radiohead.

The New Puppies at Howland Ave

Harold lived on Howland Ave at the time, with a student roommate, in a rented house in Toronto's Annex neighbourhood.

Cute as buttons



Soon, however, Harold bought a house on Marlow Ave and moved there. It was a three-bedroom house, and after settling in, Harold asked his friend Gerry to move in with him, to help him look after the puppies.

Gerry was content in his downtown one-bedroom apartment, but he couldn't resist the lure of living with Simon and Alistair, so he moved in.

The pups, needless to say, were happy to see more of their favorite uncle, and have another human to wind around their paws.

Winter garb. Still small enough to fit into some cut-up hockey socks that made good winter coats. (Note: the date on the photos is incorrect.)



Puppies lounging.



The pups around Toronto

Harold and Gerry took Simon and Alistair to a dog-friendly area in the ravine parks behind Sunnybrook Hospital quite a few times. The entrance to this area was a road that wound down behind the Hospital between wooded banks. When they got to there, Gerry would say, “Are we there, guys?” and the pups (especially Simon) would both start to bark hysterically. They knew *exactly* where they were!

Made it! Simon doesn't like water – but the brave little guy managed to get across the Terrible Stream – which was at least two inches deep in spots!



The pups on Vacation

Harold and Gerry took the pups on vacation a number of times to Prince Edward County (and once up to eastern Ontario, visiting friends Claude and Gilles in Gatineau outside Ottawa). They stayed in B&B's that took pets, and several times in a cabin. Needless to say, the pups loved this.

Once Alistair was in the vets for several days just before the vacation, and upon arriving at the beach in Cobourg, suddenly ran to Harold, and leapt up at him, as if to say: "Thanks, dad! I'm so happy!"

Simon-on-the-beach. Simon at the beach at Wellington in Prince Edward County, encountering the waves. They kept coming and made a noise – and he didn't like that. He was very suspicious of the waves and shows it in his stance here. He barked at them a lot that first summer.



Wait a minute! Alistair on the deck outside our room at the B&B in Wellington. The deck gave a great view of the back yard and the lake – in particular the local squirrels. But there was one problem: no stairs!



While Simon was only lazily interested in squirrels, Alistair was a dedicated squirrel chaser. He never actually *caught* one, and didn't seem that interested in doing so, he just kept right behind them. The closest time Ali came to catching a squirrel was when an especially stupid one got behind a tree next to a fence and didn't feel the need to run up out of reach. On this occasion, Simon joined in and, from the sound it made, Ali must have gotten at least one good snap at the squirrel. But Harold and Gerry called the pups off, and the squirrel escaped okay.

On one occasion, Ali actually encountered a rabbit in the local TTC park, chasing it under a fence before it escaped. He was "high" for some time afterwards – he had never encountered something that fast before: "What was *that*?"

At this B&B balcony in Wellington, Ali could see the squirrels in the back yard, but couldn't chase them. Maddening!

Alistair-at-vigil. Alistair, in the graveyard at Picton in Prince Edward County, has treed a squirrel. Too many squirrels and Ali lost it – he would go “squirrelly”: the excitement drug inside his brain took over and he became kind of crazy.



Lightened the load. Simon has just made a deposit. Relieved and care-free, he runs back to Gerry, while Harold, bag in hand, has to clean up!



Let's go Dad! Everybody's ready for another day of fun and adventure!



Peek-a-boo! Pups under the table at a restaurant in Picton that allowed dogs.



Lunch at the beach. Wellington. Surely there's some for us, Dad!



A bucolic scene. Two puppies on a country ride – actually on the caretaker’s road between the park and cemetery at Picton.



Raring to go! Harold coming back from paying the owners of the cabins where the four of them stayed. It was heaven for Alistair – for just outside the door of our cabin was grassy grounds that he could explore.



Simon the lap dog. Simon at the B&B in Winchester in eastern Ontario, melting into Harold's lap and very aware of his cuteness!



Simon on the beach. Simon resting while Harold reads the paper on a picnic table. A beautiful day but a still more beautiful pup! (Both profiles.)



Glint of Wonder. The pups in the water of the Moira River, north of Belleville, just below the falls, created by a dam where the geese all stood in a row. It was the geese that interested the pups. The leashes gave them courage to go as far as they did into the water. (The following year, without them on, they were far more cautious.)



The pups at Marlow Avenue

A rare moment of on-daddy time. Harold was the center of Alistair's world, but Ali wasn't a lap dog. He liked best to lie against Harold, amongst the blankets. Then he would have an expression of the purest bliss.



Ali was definitely a “blanket burrower” and as the years passed, the house gradually became more and more full of blankets, as more blankets were bought or given as gifts to the household – blankets, piles of them, lay on every chair and the couch, so that the humans had to shift them to sit down. And there were blankets in the dog bed upstairs in Gerry's office and the dog bed downstairs in the living room.

Simon imitated Ali at times, burrowing, nosing into a pile of blankets and turning to pull the blankets over him, eventually disappearing. But Ali was the master, a dedicated blanket burrower.

The summer of 2014. Simon and Ali rest on the *chaises longue*. Simon, blind since earlier that spring, due to his diabetes, had lost none of his gumption.



No one knew it was to be the last summer together, but that summer was certainly a blessing, filled with long, sunny, lazy days, never too hot, lounging on the patio, while Gerry, under the sun umbrella, worked on his first novel.

Christmas 2014. Harold, exhausted, has fallen asleep, Ali resting beside him, and Simon – as always – just a little too alert, a blur for the camera.



Simon had come down with diabetes in December 2013, and Ali had been suffering from pancreatitis for years, with attacks of it now and then. Harold and Gerry knew they didn't have too long with their pups, but did everything to care for them, including some difficult treatments – first the twice-daily insulin shots that Simon would let only Gerry do – so he had to be woken up mornings to give it. Although hating getting up early, he never complained – for Simon nothing was too much.

Then, more spectacularly, near the end, Ali had to be hydrated, with a wide-bore needle – but Harold and Gerry did what had to be done, and developed a technique that minimized the trauma for all three participants. Ali was brave for the most part, and Harold cossetted him afterwards.

Things worsened in December 2014, however, for both pups.

Grandma visits. Gerry's mom over for Christmas 2014, Ali in his beloved blankets.



Ali had several bouts of extreme pain in which he cried for hours. Harold and Gerry took him into the vet hospital on Boxing Day 2014, and while in the waiting room discussed what to do if nothing could be done for him. The distraction of the car ride to the hospital, and the wait in the waiting room, however, led Ali to stop crying. Since there was a long wait to see the vet, Harold and Gerry decided to take him home.

During that trip home, Ali silent in Harold's lap, everyone relieved, Gerry commented how this was what life was all about: the little crises and family taking care of its own, facing the more terrible aspects of life, ensuring the best for all members of the family. Ali and Simon made Harold and Gerry, two bachelor friends, a family. Gerry recounted how he had heard once on a television show that the purpose of life was to care for someone. He said that Ali and Simon had given him that gift.

The pups officially don't like winter. A winter, years before, in a brief sojourn into the back yard, the pups wait impatiently on the porch to be let inside again. Only walks made winter weather tolerable for them.



The onset of really cold weather in December 2014 had made things more desperate. With their health problems, walks were now out of the question, and Simon and Ali were even allowed to do their business in the basement when it was very cold in the back yard.

Gerry marvelled at what love could make one do. Ordinarily cranky about being woken up years before – by a clawing at his closed bedroom door when Harold went to work – opening the door he would see a pup poised, ready to flee if faced with an angry “Go away!” but still hopeful of receiving an invitation to hop into Gerry’s bed.

Now, when Simon had to pee every couple of hours, he only had to stand up in bed to wake Gerry, who would get up, bemused at how content he felt to carry the little blind pup to the basement to do his business.

In early January 2015, Simon unexpectedly took a turn for the worse – and simply stopped eating. Harold took him to the vet again, on January 14th, and brought him back, rehydrated. Gerry was very grateful to have his little friend back – whom he had not expected to see again. Simon slept in his bed that night, but the next morning Simon was very weak, and when Harold took him into the vet that last time they told him that there was nothing more they could do. Harold had done everything possible.

Harold and Gerry had had the talk about Simon the previous evening, so Harold made the difficult decision that morning at the vet. Then he went to work. Alistair, at home with Gerry, sometime later that morning, came out from his dog bed behind Christmas tree, sat down in the middle of the room – and howled several times. He knew.

Simon finally left this world on January 15th, 2015. After that, Alistair, already very sick, just seemed to give up, and followed Simon on the 23rd of January, 2015. They left the world eight days apart, five days more than they had come into it, friends all their lives – 12 years together.

Friends always.

