

# dreaming of DOGS

They occupy our waking hours, but what does it mean when they show up as we sleep?

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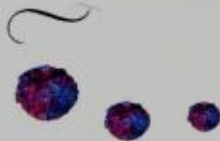
**M**y Border Collie, Lilly, appears in my dreams nearly every night. Sometimes she breezes through like a movie extra.

Sometimes she faces terrible danger. Most mornings, an extreme close-up of her intense, smiling face fills my mind's eye right before I wake.

It turns out that I'm not alone. It's quite common for canine buddies to make nighttime appearances in the dreams of their human loved ones.

When Ron Scott, of Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, dreams about Vikki, the top-winning toy Poodle in history and the top-winning dog, all breeds, in 2007, it's most often about her running, jumping like Superman, or having fun in the ring. Once in a while, he recalls dreaming about her not feeling well before a big show, but mostly they're all happy.

One dream he had during Vikki's final year before retiring makes him laugh. "We were in a very tough competition last year for number-one dog, all breeds," he recalls. "The Akita was right behind us [in the standings], and I remember a dream about an Akita chasing Vikki."



## We Are What We Dream

Typically, we have between three and nine dreams a night, most of which we don't remember. Still, dog dream plots often fall into several themes:

- Dog playing or having fun
- Dog confronting danger or being lost with owner trying desperately to help
- Owner facing danger, with dog bravely taking on threat
- Owner caring for young, old, or sick dogs

Your relationship with dogs impacts the meaning of their appearances in dreams. Black dogs, like the Grim in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, for example, won't register as the classic interpretation of danger for someone who adores big black Labrador Retrievers.

Kelly Sullivan Walden, author of *I Had the Strangest Dream ... The Dreamer's Dictionary for the 21st Century* (Warner Books, 2006), says, "A dog, in general, doesn't mean the same thing for everybody. So, I ask people to describe the dog with three adjectives. Those who don't have a warm-fuzzy relationship with a dog might describe this dog that shows up in a dream very differently than someone who

does have a deep, intimate relationship with the dog.”

Even different dogs from the same family can represent different things to one person, depending upon the dogs’ personalities, role in the family pack, and your relationship with them. Walden explains, however, that all dream characters, including our dogs, are extensions of the dreamer, aspects of ourselves. That means if you dream your dog is a hero, then you’re the hero. If your dog is stuck somewhere, then you’re somehow stuck. If your dog is naughty, it means there’s a part of your own personality you consider *bad*.

Walden says knowing when in your sleep cycle the dream occurs helps you discern what category the dream falls into and what it is really about. For example, she says, “The dreams we remember right before waking up tend to be venting dreams, so this is sometimes when people report having very scary dreams. This is when your unconscious mind is trying to release patterns that are stuck or unworkable. So, if you have a terrifying dream that has your dog in it, your subconscious mind isn’t predicting that something is going to happen. It’s instead helping you to release that energy.”

## Symbols of Hope, Fear

Walden divides dreams into eight categories.

Processing dreams usually occur during the first two hours of sleep and involve unresolved issues from your daily life. When Becky Harstad, of Morrison, Tennessee, raised a litter of 11 Dachshund puppies in 2007, she says, “I supplemented them with goat’s milk in a bottle, along with them nursing on their dam for several weeks. So, even when I was asleep, I was dreaming of the puppies.”

Venting dreams (nightmares) usually come during the final two or three hours of sleep and cause you to wake upset. That’s why they’re easy to remember, like the dreams Vicki Josephs, of Adelaide, South Australia, has about her crew of rescued dogs. “I either dream that someone is trying to take one or all of my girls away from me, or we are all drowning, and I can’t save them all,” she says. “I usually wake up crying and a hug-fest ensues, with blinking dogs wondering why Mummy has woken them up.”

Integration dreams can take place anytime, but usually come in the last two hours

of sleep. They often feature someone behaving in an extreme way, which represents some aspect of yourself you believe to be negative. An example might be a dream where your normally mild-mannered dog turns vicious.

Breakdown or breakthrough dreams happen anytime, but we often remember only the ones that come right before we wake. These dreams always include some kind of natural disaster or buildings collapsing and signal a major change in your mindset or your life. I once dreamt, for example, that Lilly swam through a creek swollen from a flash flood to dig out the clogged inlet to our pond. Once she completed her dangerous task, she swam back across the raging water, came into the house, and stood smiling at my side.

“What a wonderful dream,” Walden tells me. “Every time you see Lilly, doesn’t she open up your heart, calm you down, and unblock your creativity? She’s your plumber, whose job it is to keep your pipes clear. In the midst of turbulent emotions, she is not afraid to weather the storm to support you. She’s symbolic of your courage, resilience, and loyal support.”

Recurring dreams happen anytime in the night, but they often develop a pattern. Think of these dreams as if your dog is a secret agent trying to deliver a mission or message, if you choose to accept it. Until you do, the dream will repeat.

Precognitive dreams usually take place in the middle of your sleep cycle and are an extension of something that’s happening in your life. Truly precognitive

dreams range from happy to mildly

unpleasant. Nightmarish

dreams involving your dog

are more likely venting

dreams, not predictions

of danger or illness

Prophetic dreams

happen anytime,

but we often

remember only

the ones that

come right before

we wake up.

They feature

some wise, loving

being who delivers

a gift or teaches an

important life lesson.

So, if you dream that your

dog is leading you on an amaz-

ing journey, that’s a prophetic

dream. Dreams about dogs who’ve died

often fall into this category.

Wish-fulfillment dreams also happen anytime.

Good things happen, and you wake up really



If dogs cannot get to you in everyday living,  
it will usually be in dreams.

happy. Kevin O'Grady is a county sheriff in Chicago, who trains and competes with his Labrador Retrievers in tracking. He sometimes dreams about his chocolate Lab Abby, who took part in the 2007 AKC National Tracking Invitational, completing a tough assignment. "I dream of us finding the lost person we're looking for," he says. "Abby is phenomenal. She's an excellent tracker."

Sometimes dreams are just funny. Avid dog handlers in competitive dog events report nutty dreams involving their sport. Betsy Harrison, of Golden, Colorado, once dreamed that her Australian Shepherd Pitsch, who is ranked 13th in his breed in agility in 2008, is jumping seats on a school bus instead of clearing regular agility jumps on a normal course. Lisa Routhier, of Ottawa, Canada, who does agility, flyball, skijoring, and tracking with her dogs, Lucy and Walter, had this dream before her first agility trial: "The jumps were regular height, but only one-foot wide, so I didn't know how my dog would manage to jump them. Another big concern was that one of the obstacles was a metal staircase that I worried would be slippery and dangerous."

### Talking to Us?

Because I most often dream about Lilly right before I wake up, I'm beginning to think she enters my dreams on purpose—like, "Wake up! It's time to play."

I know dogs are super smart, but can they become dream weavers?

Actually, yes, says Carol Gurney, founder of the Gurney Institute of Animal Communication, in Agora, California, which opened in January 2008. "If animals cannot get to you in everyday living, it will usually be in dreams," she says. "It's simply when we are more receptive. Wouldn't it be nice if we could be just as available during the day as we are in our dreams?"

Gurney explains that dogs sometimes deliver messages about their own needs—*let's play more, my foot hurts, that new food is yucky*. They also share more profound messages about our health and well-being. "Most animals want us feeling good on all levels," she says. "When we don't, they try their darnedest to get our attention so that we will pay attention to ourselves."

It's also common, Gurney says, for dogs who have died to make nighttime visits. "People will tell me that they felt all day long like they wanted to make that connection after their animal passed on, and it just didn't happen until they slept," she says. "Then, the animal comes in a dream, trying to let the person know that he's OK. He's in spirit form and safe."

Perhaps it's not surprising that those of us who eat, sleep,

and breathe dogs also dream about them. You know that old joke about dogs looking like their owners? In our dreams, according to dream expert Walden, our dogs are us.

*Roxanne Hawn lives in the mountains near Denver and competes in agility with her Border Collie, Lilly.*

### Night Terrors

Sigmund Freud famously interpreted his patient's dreams, often assigning meanings not suitable for a family publication.

One well-documented case involved a patient Freud called the "Wolf Man," so named because of the following dream:

"I dreamt that it was night and that I was lying in bed. ... Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were quite white, and looked more like foxes or sheep-dogs, for they had big tails like foxes and they had their ears pricked like dogs when they pay attention to something. In great terror, evidently of being eaten up by the wolves, I screamed and woke up ..."

Here's a sampling of scary dreams about dogs:

"I always dream that my boys [Dalmatians] are in danger. Usually they are walking down the street, threading obliviously through unbelievable traffic. I am screaming and cannot reach them."—*Leslie Rush, of Jeffersonville, Pennsylvania*

"I dreamt I was walking on a train-trestle bridge, and my dog Gryffon, a Sheltie, was behind me. I reached the end of the bridge and turned back towards Gryffon and saw him fall between the tracks, down to the river below. I could see him struggling to the shore, and I was racing to find a way down the steep slope. Then, I woke up ..."—*Helen Stewart, of Ottawa, Ontario*

"I have dreams about Derby, my Flat-Coated Retriever, and I being stuck somewhere, in a basement or small cramped area, with someone searching for us to hurt us. Derby always tries to be brave. He pulls away from me and runs upstairs and outside. Then, I hear gunshots and wake up every time—crying of course."—*Christine Porter, of New Cumberland, Pennsylvania*