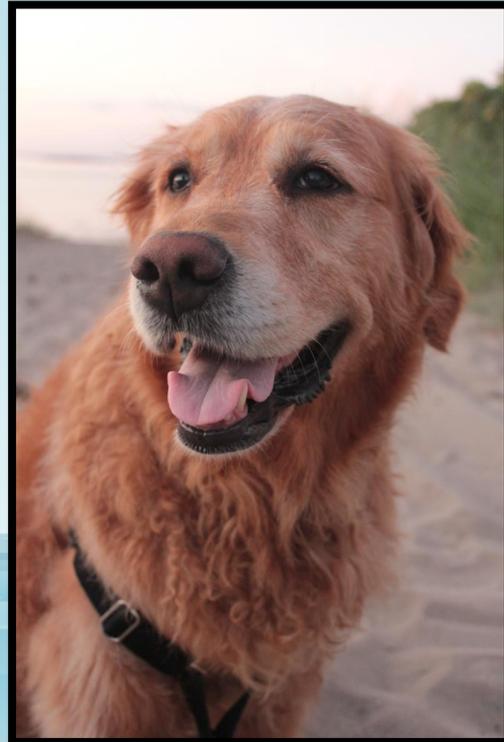


Adventures with Orla

a day at the beach

By Kate McGrath





Orla was enjoying her vacation time this year, spending it with her brother Laddie and humans. Each year, they spent time at a beach house in a small coastal town in Maine. Their favorite vacation spot!

She and her brother Laddie enjoyed every minute of their time, which included relaxing on the beach, digging in the sand for buried treasure, swimming in the ocean, and watching the seagulls swoop and dive into the ocean for food.

Each day was filled with new adventure and exploration. Orla was so curious and amazed by the beautiful ocean blues and sounds of the waves lapping at the sand, the smell of sunscreen that had a hint of coconut and pineapple, and the comforting warmth of the sun – that made Orla's golden fur shimmer. These things made Orla feel so warm and grateful.

Orla wondered about all the sights, the sounds, and the smells of the beach and how beautiful they are. She was so grateful to feel rested and relaxed – and to have these precious moments of time with her family. There was a freedom that Orla felt at the beach too – a sense like none other, and one she hadn't experienced before!

Orla watched as her brother Laddie (a *90 pound, over-exuberant three-year-old Golden Retriever*) daintily dip one of his front paws into the ocean water, followed by his other front paw, and finally his back two paws. *He is so hesitant*, thought Orla, as she watched Laddie just stand there – paw deep in the water.

“Come on, Laddie!” Orla called out as she ran past him into the ocean. Orla loved to swim with the fish, pretending she was one of them as she swam so freely and fast! “Come on, Laddie!” Orla called out again. “You can do it!” she exclaimed.



“No, I’m good,” Laddie said in reply. “I’ll just watch. The saltwater makes me itch,” he said, as his legs shook with fear. *Truth is, is that Laddie has never learned how to swim.*

Why is the water swallowing my feet? Laddie thought, as the water slowly rose above his ankles.

“Oh Laddie, it’s easy – just one paw in front of the other. You just have to have faith and trust that you will be safe.”

“Like this, see?” said Orla, as she paddled past Laddie.

“I see,” said Laddie, as he lifted one paw out of the water, drawing it up, out, and behind his other front paw.

“Laddie! You are going the **WRONG** way,” cried Orla.

“No, I’m just going a different way,” Laddie said in response.

Orla twitched her nose as Laddie backed up and out of the water.

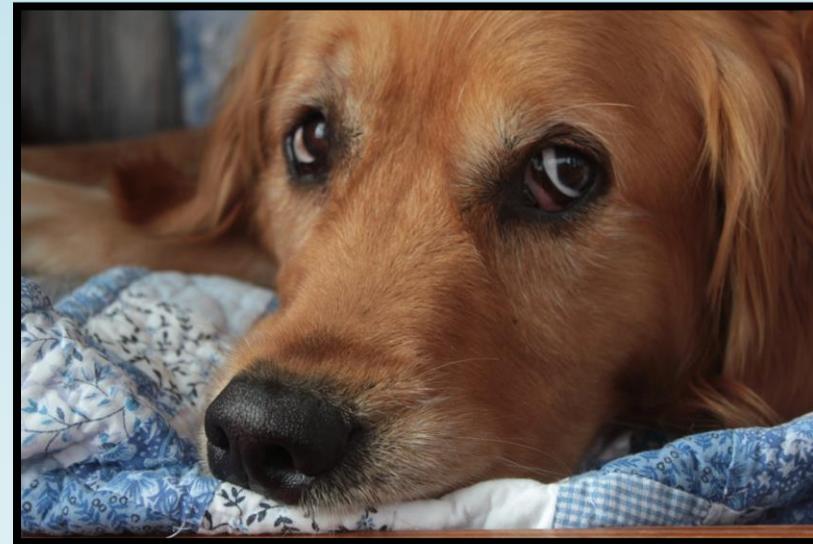
Orla whispered to herself, *what a silly dog!*

By the end of the day, Orla and Laddie were both pooped out. Orla couldn't imagine how Laddie could be so tired, since he didn't do much except soak up the sun. This night, Orla closed her eyes and breathed in a whiff of the salty ocean air. She let out a loud sigh and felt her body relax. As Orla was falling asleep, she could hear crickets chirping outside, and seemingly not long after, she began to hear the sweet melodies of birds greeting the morning light.

Orla woke up at the first appearance of light in the sky. She could hear Laddie crunching something in the kitchen.

“Laddie, is that you?”

CRUNCH, CHOMP, CRUNCH



Orla stretched all four of her legs out and let out a loud yawn, rolling herself up to check on Laddie. And as she peered into the kitchen, she could see Laddie's back end sticking out of a dog food bag, his head fully submerged in the kibble. *CRUNCH, CHOMP, CHOMP.*

“LADDIE!” exclaimed Orla.

“What? I’m hungry” he said in reply.

“Well, okay, but leave some for me,” said Orla. *Silly dog,* she thought as she walked back into the family room. Orla jumped up onto the couch that faced the big sliding glass door. From where she was, she could see the beach and ocean. Orla curled up into a ball and let her body relax again as she watched the sun, rising over the ocean.

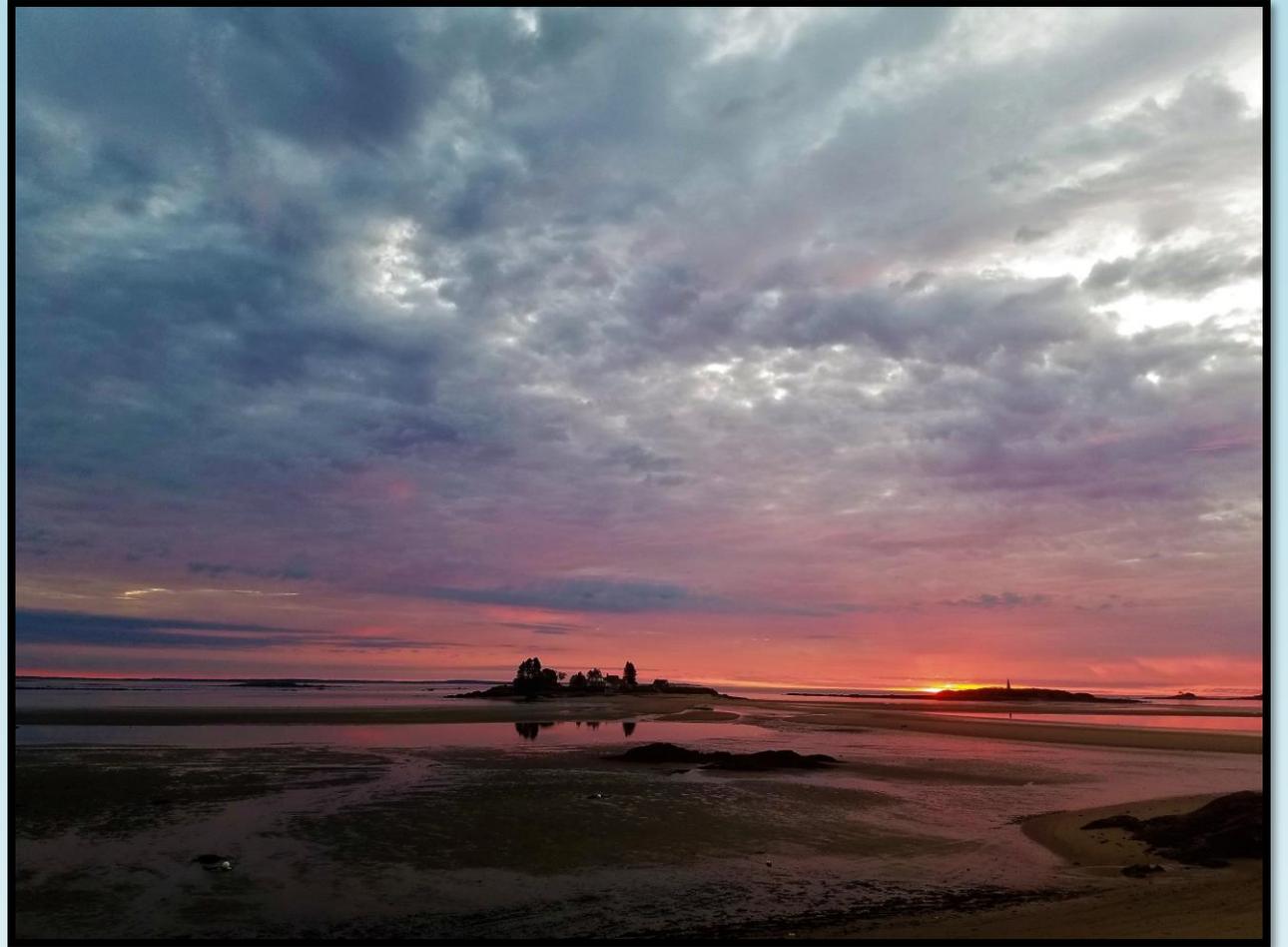
“How beautiful!” Orla said, her heart feeling full and safe. “Isn’t it funny how the sun rises?” she asked Laddie, as he finished chomping another mouthful of kibble.

“What?” asked Laddie.

“The sun rises so gently. It doesn’t just pop up and into the sky, but it rises softly, quietly, and gently.”

“Huh?” mumbled Laddie as he tilted his head, his doleful eyes quizzically looking at Orla.

“It’s just so beautiful!” said Orla.





As the morning light filled the sky, Orla's energy and excitement grew. *A new day* she thought, wondering what awaited her in the moments and hours ahead. Full of curiosity and wonder, Orla could hardly wait for her humans to wake up. Until then, Orla just watched as the morning sun grew brighter and brighter in the sky.

From Orla's view, she could also see the fisherman coming back from their early morning catch. The tide had gone out and would be high again in the afternoon. Orla couldn't wait any longer. She desperately wanted to walk out to the beach and to the two islands that were a short distance from where Orla and her family stayed. Now was the perfect time to walk out to them – when the tide was low.

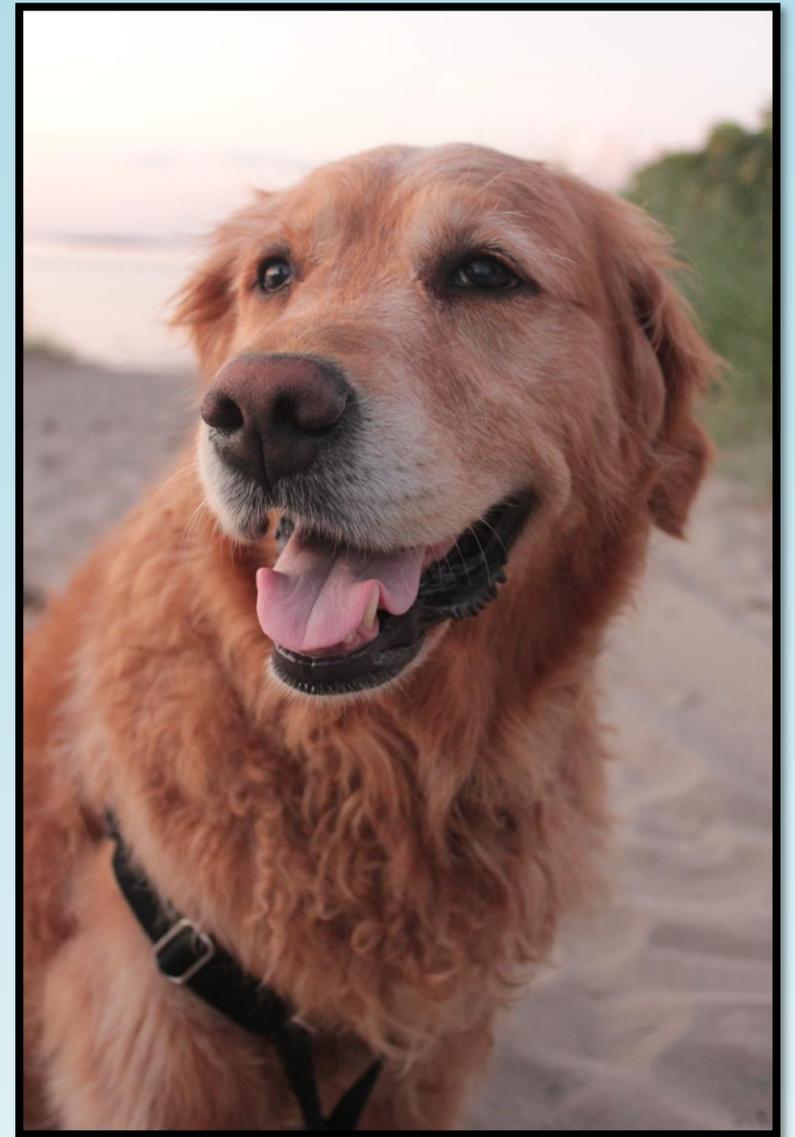
Besides swimming, one of Orla's favorite activities at the beach is walking out to the two islands not far from where she and her humans stay. One island is called Basket Island, and the other is called Monument Island.

Orla's favorite island to walk around is Basket Island. Each time she walks out to Basket Island, she feels a deep sense of peace. Plus, she loved searching for seashells and sand dollars in the shallow water and tide pools that form at low tide.



The time Orla had at the beach opened her mind to wonder about what she saw and experienced. Maybe it was because when she was at the beach, she was so relaxed and free, that the only thing her mind could do was to be open and curious. Being at the beach helped Orla to see things differently and to notice how beautiful things are.

Orla felt a wonder and an awe whenever she looked out at the ocean or up at the sky, and she knew those moments were gifts from God. In her heart, Orla thanked God for the time she was having at the beach. And with that, she ran down the stairs to her humans – who were all still sleeping – and let out a loud “BARK!!!” to let them know it was time to get up, to smell the morning air, and see the wonders and beauty that God was giving to them on this day.





With each new day in Maine, Orla remembered to thank God for the gifts of each day. She asked God to help her keep the peace she experienced in her heart and to remember, like the sunrises and sunsets, the gentle and loving way that God is present each day.

Orla learned so much from being at the beach. The greatest gift she had received was knowing how much care and love God has for creation, and how each day offered new gifts and ways to experience the creative work of God.

The End!



About Orla

Orla is a nine-year-old Golden Retriever. She and Kate have been a registered Animal Assisted Pet Therapy team for the past eight years, visiting patients in hospitals, nursing homes and hospices. Orla and Kate love visiting patients at hospitals. Orla has also brought much joy and distraction to college students studying for mid-terms and final exams at local colleges. Her sweet and gentle personality are noticeable, although she has a playful side to her as well. She has a history of eating things she is not supposed to and has a stubborn streak that sometimes gets the better of her. Orla has been a gift to her humans and has brought joy and humor to their lives for nine wonderful years. Her claim to fame is giving hugs, so if you see Orla around our parish, ask her for a hug!

