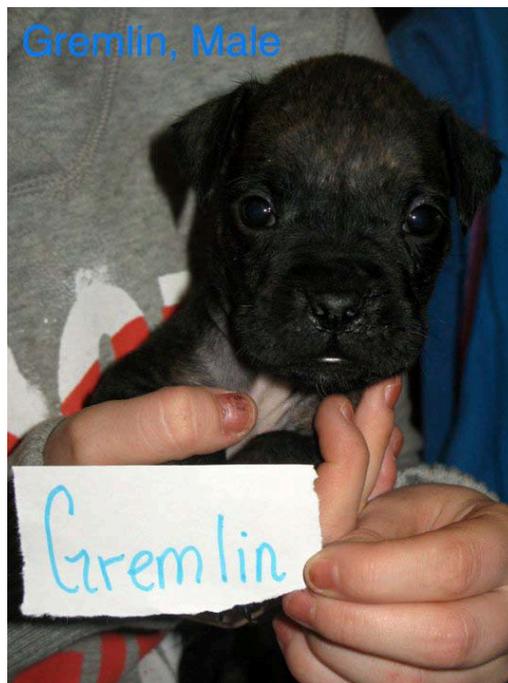




In the spring of 2011, during an incredibly volatile and desolate time in our lives, just after we'd lost the only child that we'd ever conceived (we were lucky enough to be able to adopt 4 amazing kids, but were given a 1 in a trillion chance of conceiving naturally) I was done. I was a broken mess who couldn't get out of bed and couldn't stop crying. I didn't think my world could make sense again and I was struggling, I mean REALLY struggling to pick up the pieces. And then the phone call that would change my life came.

My uncle, who I used to co-breed valley bulldogs with (don't worry we were the ethical kind of breeders – no expenses spared, health testing, the whole nine yards) called me with a unique problem that he needed help with. His dam had just given birth to 11 pups about 5 weeks prior and he was getting a call to go to work on the road. He needed me to take the mom & pups and find good homes for the litter (that was always my favourite part – interviewing people and trying to find the pups the very best homes possible). At first I really didn't want to do it. I just wanted to keep wallowing in my sorrow and stay in bed – but something told me that I had to do it – and so I agreed.

The pups arrived and with them my spirits lifted a little too. I was still under an immensely thunderous black cloud – but I was getting out of bed again – until tragedy struck again. The pups started to get sick, one by one they were all coughing – after a bunch of vet visits and medications it was determined that they had contracted a severe upper respiratory infection, not dissimilar to kennel cough. The pups did great on the meds and one by one were able to go to their new homes... all of them found great homes that I am still in contact with today except for 2... Little Audi, and Gremlin. While both the remaining pups conditions kept worsening despite medications, I hurried them to the vet begging God and whoever would listen to save them because I just couldn't bear another loss – and then I had to. Notwithstanding the vets very best efforts, IV medications and sub-q fluids – little Audi died and Gremlin was fighting hard for his life. Losing Audi felt like losing our baby, Lyrick, all over again. It was as though I had tried so incredibly hard to keep them alive – just as we had tried so hard to conceive a baby – for nothing – to have to face the death of somebody you hardly knew but loved entirely was soul crushing.



Fast forward about a month of intense care where Gremlin slept on my chest with a stethoscope in my ears to listen to his lung sounds in the night, and me not getting a complete nights rest since we had lost Lyrick, things were looking up – Gremlin was on the mend and I was preparing myself to find a good home for him. I had vowed that we were NOT keeping any puppies; we were NOT getting another dog. The thing was though, no home was good enough for him – people would come and look, they'd show interest and I'd find some reason that either he wasn't ready or they weren't right. My kids were begging me to keep him, and my husband kept saying, you know we don't NEED another dog – and every time I'd say I KNOW WE'RE NOT KEEPING HIM! And then one day, after I'd made a video of my oldest son Robin begging to keep Gremlin and me saying NO daddy said no (of course I didn't want to be the bad guy) - my wonderful husband, who has only become a dog person since knowing me, said to me – you know, we should just keep Gremlin, and I just started to BAWL. I didn't even know that I was that emotionally attached to him – but the relief that I'd get to keep him and never have to give him up overwhelmed me.



Things were great for quite a while after that, but Grem started to lose weight and throw up all of the time. After a phone conversation with the vet that we had used for the pups he had suggested “megaesophagus” and my over-active Google-super-powers kicked in and I did everything I could to learn whatever I could find about the condition. The initial prospects looked pretty grim and I can't even begin to tell you how attached I already was to this little man – he was like he was my rainbow baby, in canine form. After a lot of reading, I stumbled upon the Facebook “canine megaesophagus support group”. The people, their dogs and their stories not only gave me hope, but they inspired me to never ever give up on him. We took him in

for his barium x-rays and full work up, and walked out with a bonafide case of megaesophagus and a heart problem. Because of the support group I knew right away that we'd need a bailey chair, and with my husband away at work, I enlisted the help of a guy named Gary from The Home Depot here in Red Deer. He was amazing - he found donated wood and built a chair to our googled specifications. The chair worked ok but Grem kept getting out of it - so when my husband got home, he designed a new type of chair that had a chest support and tray - the very design used today by Bailey Chairs 4 Dogs - which, also started because of this amazing little fur-man I get to call my own.



Something here is to be said about fate... I lost a child, and I hated the universe for dealing me such an unfair hand... but then it handed me a dog... a dog who, like a baby, needed constant care and attention day and night - who like a baby, needed to be fed in a high chair. Who also happened to need someone to fight for him, and I needed something to fight for again - and just like that - like a raging river busting

through a dam – my fight came back. I was fierce and determined during the first few months after his diagnosis, and even though I was told by every veterinary professional, by friends, by my well-meaning family members, to let him go – I couldn't. I wouldn't, he was my baby and for as long as he was willing to fight so would I. Gremlin, who should be a 50 pound dog, got all the way down 19 pounds and at his sickest teetered for quite a while at the 24 pound mark... but we kept fighting, and we found a vet who would fight along side us, and formula by formula, pound by pound, new chair after new chair we got settled on a routine and he started to get healthier.



One more fast-forward to today. I just got back from a camping trip with me, my friend, my cousin, my three youngest kids, my friend's dog & her cat, my parrot, my cat AND of course, my almost 50 pound Gremlin. We got to fulfill one of the items on Gremlin's ever-growing barketlist (a to do list of sorts that a group of friends and I came up with, unique to each individual & their dog that allows you to take your dog on all kinds of adventures before they "kick the bucket" – some may think it's morbid – but I think every single dog should have one, afterall it is a fact that our

dogs, medically compromised or not, are not with us forever – as the saying goes “he may only be here for part of your life, but to him, you are his WHOLE life”.) To date, Gremlin has checked many things off of his barketlist – from eating ice cream, to putting his paws in the ocean – to riding on a train and many many things in between. This time, Gremlin got to check off “go on a boat” off of his list – not just any boat – I took him seadooing and he LOVED it. He kept trying to get back on the seadoo with whoever was taking their turn. His little crooked grin showing and his ears flapping in the wind – it was a total sense of freedom for both of us and it was amazing.



While I feel like I’ve just bared it all for the whole world to see, there is a moral to this story – things are hard sometimes... Really REALLY hard, but there is also always a little fight left somewhere, you just have to dig for it – and somehow, despite how dire things may seem – eventually things have a way of working out. Make a barketlist for your dog – and Always, always try to be a good person – unless you can be like a dog, because there is no better person than a dog.



UCB PROUDLY PRESENTS...

#BARKETLIST CHALLENGE

"He might be here for part of your life but for him, you are his whole life" ~ Author Unknown



Many of us have bucket lists of our own - a list of things we'd like to do before we "kick the proverbial bucket" and we at the UCB thought - what better way to raise awareness for MegaE and MG - AND have fun at the same time than to create a #barketlist for our own dogs?! This way we can showcase how our dogs can and do live happy fulfilling lives despite their disabilities! So here is our challenge to not only our fellow MegaE and MG parents but to the global dog community: Make a #Barketlist for your dog - create some lasting memories and have some fun with it! Understanding that some of our fur friends are limited by their disabilities - we challenge you to focus on what you can, within those limits provide for them! Some examples include - putting your paws in the ocean, eating a steak dinner (even if it has to be pureed) chasing butterflies in an open field, riding in a convertible with the top down... the options are endless! So get to it! Create a #barketlist for your dog and then post pictures, videos, blogs and whatever else you can come up with using the hashtags #barketlist, #megaesophagus & #myastheniagravis - because your dog deserves for you to make his whole life spectacular!

PLEASE SHARE THIS POST & DON'T FORGET TO TAG YOUR PHOTOS ON INSTAGRAM, TWITTER & FACEBOOK LETS MAKE THE #BARKETLIST GO VIRAL, RAISE AWARENESS FOR #MEGAESOPHAGUS AND #MYASTHENIAGRAVIS





