Chapter 1

Defining Seniorhood: To Each His Own

In This Chapter

- Defining dog seniorhood
- How aging affects dogs
- Keeping your senior dog happy and healthy
- Knowing when to let go of your senior dog

As a product of the Baby Boom, I've become acutely aware of the fact that I am aging. I'm not a senior citizen yet, but I will be all too soon. In the meantime, though, I'm getting a lot of reminders that time stops for no one. The AARP solicitations that regularly reach my mailbox are proof enough that I'm no longer part of a youthful demographic.

Even though time hasn't stopped for me, I still try to make it appear that it's at least slowed down. I spend way too much money highlighting my hair in order to cover the gray. I take excessive pleasure in still being able to wear size-2 jeans (they have to be stretch jeans, though). I've long since replaced the astringent designed to defeat my youthful zits with a moisturizer that's supposed to combat the not-so-fine lines on my mid-life face. And I take defiant pride in my ability to identify at least a few of the rock bands my teenage daughter listens to while I chauffeur her to one place or another.

Despite my desire to tell Father Time to go take a hike for another few years, he isn't listening to me. Sooner rather than later, I'll probably break down and get that AARP card. And I'll certainly pay more attention to political debates about the future of Social Security and Medicare because I'll be eligible for those benefits. Whether I want to or not, I'll eventually pass all those milestones that mark a person's passage from mid-life into senior citizenhood.

I'm all too aware that seniorhood will soon be upon me, but Allie, my youthful Golden Retriever, won't have a clue as to when she'll become a senior dog. Dogs don't get AARP cards, Social Security checks, Medicare payments, senior citizen discounts, or other societal signals of impending dotage. Only my knowledge and intuition will tell me when Allie's getting old.

I'm not alone in wondering when my pooch officially becomes a senior. The fact is, canine seniorhood doesn't occur at any specific age. Most vets, nutritionists, and other experts agree that, on average, a dog becomes a senior when he turns 7 years old, but that designation is only an average. Your own unique dog may actually reach seniorhood before or after his seventh birthday — depending on a number of factors.

In this chapter, I give you the real deal on canine aging. Instead of assigning seniorhood to your dog at some predetermined age, you discover how to determine whether your pooch actually is an elder states-dog or still just a mid-life canine. I also give you some basic information on what aging entails for your dog — and for you, as his loving human companion — emphasizing how you can make your dog's senior years the best they can possibly be.

Defining Senior Dog Status

The time when a dog crosses the threshold from mid-life to seniorhood is highly individual. Your 9-year-old dog could be a senior, but the 9-year-old pooch who lives down the street may not be. The 5-year-old dog who used to gallop around your local dog park may now be a canine elder, while another 5-year-old pooch may be as active as a 5-year-old human child.

A good way to estimate when your dog will become a senior is to find out what his life expectancy is. The longer a dog is expected to live, the later the onset of seniorhood will occur. In the following sections, I discuss factors that affect a dog's life expectancy.

A matter of breeding

Breed plays an important role in determining how long a dog is likely to live. Some breeds simply live longer than others. For example, the average Toy Poodle is likely to pass his 14th birthday before mortality catches up with him; by contrast, a Bernese Mountain Dog isn't likely to live much past the age of 7. Scientists aren't exactly sure why breeding affects longevity, but they have a few ideas.

Research indicates that *inbreeding* (breeding close relatives to each other) may be a factor that affects a breed's longevity. Some dog breeders advocate inbreeding as a way to boost the odds that a particular trait or characteristic is passed on to future generations. For example, when a breeder wants to ensure that puppies have ears that fold over rather than ears that point upward, he may breed two half-siblings who both have the ears he desires.

The trouble with inbreeding is that it may not only increase the likelihood that the puppies will have a positive characteristic, but it may also increase the odds that they'll have an undesirable characteristic. For instance, if the two half-siblings with pretty ears also both have a gene that makes them vulnerable to a certain kind of cancer, their puppies are almost guaranteed to have that same gene.

Related to the inbreeding factor is the practice among some breeders of using the same male dog to father puppies from many different females. If the breeder uses the same male dog over and over again, other males aren't used and their genetic characteristics disappear. Meanwhile, the male dog who's getting all the action may be passing negative characteristics along with the positive to his progeny. If those negative characteristics affect life expectancy, eventually the breed's overall life expectancy decreases.

That's why many caring, reputable breeders have become geneticists-on-the-fly in their efforts to produce the best possible purebred dogs. They're careful to match their dogs with other dogs who are most likely to produce the heartiest, strongest dogs with the longest possible life expectancies for that breed. These breeders are looking for more than points and titles on their dogs; they're looking to better the breed.

Still, breeds vary widely in their life expectancies. Table 1-1 lists the 20 breeds that had the highest total number of American Kennel Club (AKC) registrations in 2002 and their average life spans.

Table 1-1 Breeds and Longevity

Breed	*Average Life Span (Years)*
Labrador Retrievers	11
Golden Retrievers	12
German Shepherds	11
Beagles	13

(continued)

Table 1-1 ***(continued)***

Breed	*Average Life Span (Years)*
Dachshunds	12
Yorkshire Terriers	14
Boxers	10
Chihuahuas	15
Shih Tzu	13
Miniature Schnauzers	13
Pomeranians	14
Rottweilers	9
Pugs	13
Cocker Spaniels	12
Shetland Sheepdogs	13
Boston Terriers	12
Bulldogs	9
Miniature Pinschers	14
Maltese	13

If you want to know the average life expectancy of a breed that's not listed in Table 1-1, or if you want to know a lot more about any breed, check out *Choosing a Dog For Dummies* by Chris Walkowicz (Wiley). Walkowicz lists every one of the 160-plus breeds recognized by the AKC and their estimated life expectancies in that book.

Determining the life expectancy of a mixed-breed dog is a little trickier than determining the life expectancy of a purebred dog. On the one hand, a mixed-breed dog's life expectancy is affected by the life expectancies of each breed he's made up of — assuming you can figure out what those breeds are. On the other hand, a dog's unique mix means a unique gene pool, and the more unique the gene pool, the less chance the undesirable trait has of affecting the dog. And if you're looking for a precise figure for your particular dog's breed mix, research isn't a whole lot of help. If you're willing to take an average, though, a mixed-breed dog's life expectancy is about 13 years.

Size does matter

A good look at Table 1-1 reveals not only that breeding affects canine longevity but that size does, too. More specifically, smaller pooches typically live longer than larger dogs.

One theory why little guys live longer than big dogs is that small dogs' bodies don't need to work as hard as those of canine behemoths. Another theory is that large dogs are probably more prone to being overweight — and research shows that packing on too many pounds is likely to shorten a dog's life expectancy significantly. In Chapter 2, I suggest ways to pare some pounds off a portly pooch.

Individual factors

Understanding that size and breed affect a dog's average life expectancy is important, but other factors come into play, too. Many of those factors relate to the dog's overall health and the care that her people give her. Here are examples of some other factors that affect your dog's life expectancy:

- **Girth:** Research shows that a svelte dog is likely to live considerably longer than a portly pooch. Cutting calories and eating nutritious foods can help Fido slim down her physique, and exercise can get that physique into tip-top shape. In Chapter 2, I tell you how to put your pudgy pooch on a healthy reduced-fat diet, and in Chapter 3, I list exercises that keep your senior fit but do not push her beyond her endurance.
- **Nutrition:** "You are what you eat" applies to dogs as much as it does to people. If your dog's daily fare contains the nutrients she needs, delivered through high-quality food, she stands a better chance of living a long life than a dog whose diet consists of her people's dining leftovers. To find out what senior dogs need for optimum nutrition, flip to Chapter 2.
- **Dental health:** A dog whose canines get good care stands a better chance of living a long life than a dog whose choppers are in poor condition. To find out how to keep your dog's teeth healthy (and to keep her from having hoochy breath), check out Chapter 5.
- **Owner diligence:** An owner who makes sure her dog gets all the necessary checkups, consults a vet at the first sign of trouble, and gives her four-legged friend the best possible overall care is likely to have her dog with her longer than a laissez-faire owner. In Chapter 5, I outline ways that owners can keep their senior dogs in good health for as long as possible.

Is your dog a senior?

Are you still stumped as to whether your canine companion is an elder states-dog, a doggy dowager, or a middle-aged canine? The answers to these questions can help you determine whether your own very special dog is beyond her prime:

- **Has she slowed down?** Just like older people, older dogs don't move as fast as they did when they were younger. When your four-legged friend hits seniorhood, she's likely to take more time going up and down the stairs, getting up from a nap, and lying down.
- **Has she gotten grayer?** Gray hair, especially around the face and muzzle, can be a sign of seniorhood and so is a thinner, drier coat, compared to the one she sported in her youth.
- **Does she have accidents?** Some aging dogs, especially older spayed females, begin developing bathroom issues. If your one-time potty prodigy starts making puddles on the floor, she may have an old-age bladder or may be developing a condition called canine *cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS),* which is common among senior dogs. In Chapters 6, 8, and 10, I address why a senior may have potty problems and how to solve them.
- **Does she get tired more quickly?** If your canine companion used to retrieve a Frisbee 20-some times without getting winded but now wants to quit after just 10 retrieves, she's probably approaching seniorhood, if she's not already there.
- **Is she getting lumpy?** Many older dogs develop soft, spongy lumps on their bodies, particularly on their trunks. These lumps usually aren't life threatening; I explain why in Chapters 9 and 10.
- **Does she seem to ignore you when you call her?** If so, she's probably not being rebellious; she may have lost some of her hearing, which is a common sign of aging. Go to Chapter 7 to find out why your senior dog may be going deaf and what you can do to help her.
- **Does she get lost in her own backyard?** If your four-legged friend can't seem to find her way back to the house after spending time in your backyard, she may be losing her vision or developing CDS. Flip to Chapters 7, 9, and 10 to find out why such dogs need to see their vets.
- **Does she get upset more easily than she used to?** Thunderstorms and other loud noises that never bothered her before may now cause her to whine, tremble, or otherwise show apprehension. Such behavioral changes occur quite often in senior pooches. For more info, see Chapter 4.

If you answered yes to most of these questions, your beloved pooch may well be entering the golden years of doggy seniorhood.

Although each question in this quiz describes a sign of seniorhood, it also depicts symptoms of illness. Don't automatically attribute any of these changes to old age. Play it safe and have your vet examine your dog.

Understanding the Effects of Aging on Your Senior Dog

The outward signs of canine aging are often readily apparent to the reasonably observant dog owner. But plenty is going on inside your senior as well.

The senior canine body

A lifetime of use eventually deteriorates a dog's body by the time he reaches seniorhood, but this deterioration isn't necessarily drastic. Just like with older people, older dogs' bodies simply don't function as efficiently as they did when they were younger. And your dog's loss of efficiency shows up in multiple ways:

- **Eyes:** Your dog's eyes change in several ways as he ages. He may experience nearsightedness and a diminished ability to see in either darkness or bright light. The lens of his eye may also become cloudy, although such cloudiness doesn't impede vision. However, several age-related conditions such as glaucoma, cataracts, and dry eye do affect a dog's ability to see (go to Chapter 10 to find out about common canine eye ailments and how they're treated, and see Chapter 7 to find out how you can help your dog deal with his loss of eyesight).
- **Ears:** As your dog acquires senior status, his hearing loses some of its edge. Some hearing loss is normal, but if your dog's ears also stink and sport a goopy discharge, he probably has an ear infection (in Chapter 7, I tell you how to deal with ear infections and how you can help your dog cope with his loss of hearing).
- **Mobility:** As dogs get older, their bones become more fragile, their cartilage becomes worn, and their muscles lose mass, all of which can make movement difficult or painful. The nerves, brain, and spinal column control a dog's movements, so deterioration of any or all of these tissues can mean diminished mobility. In Chapter 10, I discuss common conditions that

affect senior mobility, and in Chapter 8, I describe the many adjustments you can make to offset your pooch's limited locomotion. To find out how exercise can help keep your dog limber longer, see Chapter 3.

- **Metabolism:** An older dog's digestive system doesn't process food as efficiently as it used to, and the result can be extra inches on your senior's waistline. I discuss two common senior metabolic diseases, diabetes and Cushing's Disease, in Chapter 10. In Chapter 2, I describe how a dog's body utilizes various food sources, explain why sleek seniors do better than chubby ones, and tell you how you can slim down your aging canine companion.
- **Incontinence:** If your senior's ability to hold his water has diminished, you may wonder if he needs some remedial housetraining. An older dog's bathroom lapses often have nothing to do with housetraining but instead may result from internal processes that have gone awry. For ideas on how to cope with a new influx of pooch potty accidents, turn to Chapter 6.

The senior canine mind

Just like with an older person, an older dog's ability to learn and retain information is likely to diminish as he progresses through seniorhood. This deterioration can result in all kinds of behavioral changes. For instance, a previously confident dog may become anxious, and a housetraining prodigy may start having accidents. One common reason for such changes is canine *cognitive dysfunction syndrome (CDS),* a canine version of human Alzheimer's Disease.

As an owner, you may need strategies so you can help your dog. Continued training and socialization can help keep your senior's mind sharper longer. Chapter 10 details the treatment and prognosis for CDS.

The senior canine spirit

Being youthful is about much more than looks — it's also about attitude. The people who negotiate seniorhood best are the ones who remain interested in the world around them, appreciate their loved ones, interact with other individuals, want to have new experiences, and retain a zest for learning. Human beings act on their own to make sure their golden years are truly golden; however, dogs need help to make the most of seniorhood.

As an owner, you're responsible for keeping your dog engaged in the world around him. From teaching him new tricks to continuing

social studies, you have plenty of ways to feed your senior dog's spirit and help him remain mentally active. For suggestions on how to deal with situations that may be tricky for senior dogs, such as meeting new people, meeting new dogs, coping with crankiness, and dealing with phobias, go to Chapter 4.

Maintaining Your Dog's Quality of Life

Once your dog enters seniorhood, expect her to become somewhat high-maintenance, as compared to her relatively untroubled youth and young adulthood. She needs some extra time, care, and consideration — but not necessarily a lot more. In any case, making an extra effort pays off big time because living with your dog during her seniorhood will produce some of the sweetest moments you'll ever experience.

Creating a senior-friendly environment

Have you ever noticed how all those ads for "active adult communities" mention that the houses are often on one floor, or, at the very least, that the master bedroom is on the main floor? Builders and architects have a good reason for creating such houses: They know that older people often have trouble climbing stairs as they age. These communities are marketed to active adults, but the houses are built to accommodate those adults when they're no longer able to be so active.

Senior dogs need to be accommodated, too. You don't have to move to a one-floor house, but you should look for ways to adjust your décor to meet the needs of your four-legged friend. For example, put a small set of steps near your bed, sofa, or any other elevated place that your senior now finds difficult to reach. You can also place doggy beds or cushions in several rooms of the house so your four-legged friend always has a soft spot to snuggle. I discuss such decorating adjustments in Chapters 7 and 8.

Of course, any dog's environment extends beyond the physical configuration of your home. The world in which your dog interacts may present new challenges for her. Some of those challenges take the form of real change, such as the addition of a new baby or pet to the family — and just like with older people, older pooches often have more trouble adjusting to change than younger ones do. Other

challenges result from your dog's altered reactions to unchanged events: For example, she may suddenly become very afraid of thunderstorms. I explain in Chapter 4 how giving your dog a continuing education in social studies (and no, I'm not talking history here) can help her address challenges with poise and aplomb. She can even discover the satisfaction that results when an old dog learns new tricks.

Adjusting diet and exercise

Earlier in this chapter, I mention that even though I'm middle-aged, I can still fit into size-2 jeans. Well, I'm here to tell you that I haven't maintained my still-petite size without some effort. To avoid, or at least forestall, middle-age spread, I made changes to what I eat and when I get myself moving. Put simply, I eat less and exercise more.

Your senior or pre-senior dog probably requires similar adjustments to her diet and exercise. Like pre-senior people, mature pooches' metabolisms slow down a bit as they age, with predictable results: Their width is likely to expand. The resulting plumpness isn't pleasing; in fact, it can shorten your senior's life.

Conversely, keeping your dog trim can extend her life. A study conducted by Nestle Purina indicates that cutting a dog's daily food ration by 25 percent could extend the dog's life by more than 20 percent. In other words, giving your 10-year-old dog ¾ of a cup of food rather than a full cup at each meal could add at least two years to her life span.

If your objective is to prolong your time with your senior (and I assume it is, or you wouldn't be reading this book), adjust your dog's diet and exercise regimen. Both adjustments are easier said than done, though. Cutting back your dog's food intake involves not only adjusting quantity but also quality. Depending on the health issues she has, your senior may need to have a somewhat different diet than when she was younger (Chapter 2 describes dietary options for your unique older dog).

And just like people, seniors' exercise regimens need adjusting. My brother in his 50s can no longer run the marathons that he completed in his youth, so he's supplemented running with weight training to keep healthy. Similarly, you probably should restrain your senior from leaping up to catch a Frisbee; instead, show her the pleasures of swimming or brisk walking. In Chapter 3, I describe a number of senior-friendly exercises for your dog and tell you how to alleviate pain if she overexerts herself despite your efforts to moderate her workouts.

Keeping your senior dog healthy

No matter how self-sufficient and knowledgeable you are, you can't maintain your senior dog's health all by yourself. You need a partner who has the know-how needed to help you monitor your senior's health and, whenever possible, to catch any minor health problems before they become major.

That partner, of course, is your vet. In Chapter 5, I tell you how to work with your vet to optimize your senior's health and stay on top of any health issues or chronic conditions that your dog has. I also explain why regular checkups are as important for your dog as they are for you, and why once he reaches seniorhood, your dog needs those checkups more often than before.

Of course, you can do a lot at home to maintain your senior's health and good looks. To find out how to brush your dog's coat and teeth, give him a pedicure, and perform other grooming and health-maintenance tasks, go to — yes, you guessed it — Chapter 5.

Exploring treatment options

Sooner or later, your senior probably will develop some sort of illness or health issue. Even if she's never been sick a day in her life, the law of averages — not to mention a lifetime of wear and tear on her body — will almost certainly take its toll as she becomes an elder states-dog. Being an elder has a unique set of health issues because many diseases and conditions tend to strike senior dogs more often than younger ones.

Chapter 10 lists common senior-specific maladies and outlines the symptoms, diagnoses, treatments, prognoses, and prevention options (when possible) for each. You'll probably notice, though, that I didn't include one very common condition in that list: cancer. That's because I devote all of Chapter 11 to explaining why canine cancer is on the rise, describing some of the many forms cancer can take, and explaining what the treatments and prognoses are for each type. You'll also find out how clinical trials can offer hope to the canine cancer patient and her family if all other treatments aren't working.

Often, the key to successfully treating canine cancer and other senior doggy illnesses is to catch them early. However, because your vet sees your senior only a few times a year, he can't always detect the signs of trouble early. So that makes you the first line of defense for your dog's health. You're in the best possible position to know when something's amiss — if you know what to look for.

Senior Super Dogs: A senior dog hall of fame

When you see all those canine athletic prodigies on Animal Planet or heroic dogs performing remarkable feats, don't think that they're all young Turks or that youth is a prerequisite for canine notoriety and achievement. Plenty of pooches have captured the world's fancy during their seniorhoods. Here are just a few:

Pal: The original Lassie, Pal was a rescued Collie whom Hollywood animal trainer Rudd Weatherwax rehabilitated and trained to star in the Lassie movies of the 1930s and 1940s. When the movie gravy train ended, though, Pal didn't stop working. Television picked up the Lassie phenomenon in the early 1950s — and Pal starred in the pilot episode at the ripe old age of 14.

Moose: This Jack Russell Terrier portrayed Eddie, the cantankerous canine on TV's *Frasier,* well into seniorhood. Moose's other roles included the older Skip in the movie version of Willie Morris's book *My Dog Skip* (Eddie's son, Enzo, portrayed Skip in his prime). Moose is also credited with an autobiography, *My Life as a Dog* (HarperEntertainment, 2000), which was published when he was 9 years old.

Spot: Known more formally as Spot Fetcher Bush, this Springer Spaniel was a favorite companion of President George W. Bush. She's also the only dog to live in the White House during two administrations (she was born to the first President Bush's Springer, Milly, during his administration). Spot died in February 2004 when she was 14.

Bluey: An Australian cattle dog who reportedly worked Australian sheep flocks for more than 20 years, Bluey is believed to hold the all-time record for canine longevity. He died in 1939 at the age of 29 years, 5 months.

Missy: This mixed-breed dog was so beloved by her human dad, John Sperling, that he invested millions of dollars to determine whether she could be cloned. As word spread of his effort, dubbed the *Missyplicity Project*, other pet owners wanted to see whether their animals could be cloned as well. Those demands helped generate a company, Genetic Savings and Clone, which continues to research ways to clone beloved pets. Missy died in 2002 at the age of 15 before she could be cloned successfully. However, her DNA resides in the company's gene bank for possible cloning in the future.

Owney: In 1888, this mixed-breed dog was found abandoned outside a post office in Albany, New York. The postal workers took him in, warmed him up, and adopted him as an unofficial mascot. For the next nine years, Owney traveled wherever postal workers traveled. He died in 1897. Today his stuffed body is on display at the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C.

Patsy Ann: Without fail, this deaf Bull Terrier greeted any ship that came into the port of Juneau, Alaska, during the 1930s. Between ship-greeting duties and visits to the wharf, she visited local businesses to receive the greetings of proprietors and score as many treats as possible. In 1934, the mayor named Patsy Ann the "Official

Greeter of Juneau." She died in 1942 at the age of 12. Fifty years later, the city commissioned a statue of Patsy Ann, which now greets Juneau visitors just as the real Patsy Ann did 60 years ago.

Strongheart: Before Lassie, Rin-Tin-Tin, Benji, and Air Bud, there was Strongheart — the first true canine movie star. Born in 1917, this imposing German Shepherd made his first movie, *The Silent Call,* in 1921 and continued to work well into his seniorhood. He died in 1929. The classic treatise on the human-animal bond, J. Allen Boone's *Kinship with all Life,* devotes many pages to describing writer and film producer Boone's friendship with Strongheart when the dog lived with Boone temporarily.

Rin-Tin-Tin: Although Strongheart was the first dog to star in the movies, Rin-Tin-Tin probably is the most famous. Rin-Tin-Tin was found as a puppy in 1918 as one of the few survivors of the destruction of a German dog kennel during World War I. His soldier-owner, who'd brought him to the United States from Germany, persistently tried to land him film roles and finally succeeded when Warner Brothers cast him in *Man From Hell's River.* The hit film gave the nearly bankrupt studio a much-needed financial boost. Rin-Tin-Tin's film career continued until his death in 1932 at the age of 13. A fifth-generation descendant starred in a television show, *The Adventures of Rin-Tin-Tin,* which ran for several seasons in the 1950s.

Man Ray: This Weimaraner was the first model for the world-famous photographs of his breed taken by photographer William Wegman. Man Ray died of cancer in 1992 when he was 11 years old. A few months after his death, the *Village Voice,* an alternative newspaper published in New York City, named Man Ray its "Man of the Year."

I list the symptoms that signal a possible health problem for your senior in Chapter 9. And to forestall any panic on your part, I group the symptoms into three categories: those symptoms that require an immediate trip to the vet, those that can wait until morning before calling your vet, and those that may not need a vet's attention at all.

Having this knowledge not only reduces stress for your dog, but it also saves you beaucoup bucks. Once your dog hits seniorhood, you'll probably need to spend more money on her care than when she was younger, so every little bit of savings helps. However, savvy dog owners know all kinds of tricks for getting the most out of their veterinary care dollars — and not necessarily by purchasing health insurance for their senior pets (in many instances, the dogs' ages preclude such purchases). To find tips on how to maximize your veterinary care dollars, see Chapter 12.

Letting go at the right time

The hardest part of loving and living with a dog is that, almost always, he dies before you do. The second-hardest part may be deciding when your beloved dog's death should occur.

There's no simple answer when you're trying to decide whether the time is right to give your senior dog a final gift of peace and freedom from pain. Your answer mainly depends on an assessment of your dog's condition but also on your condition — emotional, financial, and otherwise.

Still, you can do a lot to prepare for the time when your dog must leave you. In Chapter 13, I describe some of the decisions you need to make as your dog enters the evening of his life. Chief among those dilemmas is deciding when to end aggressive treatment for your senior in favor of simply keeping him comfortable. In Chapter 13, I also offer you some points to ponder while you make that decision.

While you keep your senior comfortable, you and your family can prepare for what's ahead. Part of that preparation involves dealing with the logistics of euthanizing a pet: when to book an appointment, when and how to pay the vet, and what to do with your dog's body afterward. In Chapter 13, I outline your options.

Letting go can be somewhat easier, and certainly less stressful, when you have some idea of how to determine the right time for euthanasia. Deciding when to euthanize your senior is as individual as you are. When you do decide to send your dog on that final journey, though, both you and he can approach the departure with less fear if you know what's going to happen. Chapter 14 describes what usually occurs when a dog is euthanized.

Giving your dog a compassionate final gift may be the right thing — but those who are left behind feel really lousy. Losing your dog may trigger a flood of grief as intense as any you've experienced previously. In Chapter 15, I offer ideas to help you and your family — humans and non-humans alike — work through your grief and come to terms with your loss.

Appreciating doggy seniorhood

My attention to dealing with the end of your senior's life may lead you to think that your dog's seniorhood is a time of sadness. Usually, though, that's not the case. A senior dog offers his people special joys that really don't occur at any other time in your lives together. In Chapter 16, I outline ten reasons to appreciate your senior (for example, he's already housetrained and has good manners), and Chapter 17 reminds you how to keep your older dog happy and healthy for as long as possible. Throughout this book, I emphasize what senior dogs can teach us in our portraits of "Senior Super Dogs" — starting with the ones I list in the "Senior Super Dogs: A senior dog hall of fame" sidebar in this chapter.