



Branding Iron

► by *Eric Grant*, general manager

Lessons from Linus

My wife and son talked me into rescuing a dog named Linus from the Happy Hunting Grounds a couple of years ago.

Each day a blessing

Having spent several months at the shelter, he was a mess.

Riddled with heartworms, he could barely climb a flight of stairs or walk around the block. His haircoat was coarse and bleached from excessive sun during his time at the pound, and his elbows were scabbed from sleeping on a concrete slab.

I suspect the previous owners gave him up because of his size.

Linus is big — about 150 pounds. He's so big, I commented once that "he looks like a dude in a dog suit."

He's also exceptionally lazy, except during thunderstorms, which cause anxiety-laden attacks during which he has a nasty habit of gnawing through doors (three, so far, and counting).

When the weather's nice, he takes daylong naps, basking in the sunlight that streams through our windows. He also likes walks, and every evening we stroll around the block, Linus sniffing the trees and watering the bases of the neighbors' mailboxes.

The only trick we've been able to teach him is how to roll over for belly rubs, something he loves more than life itself.

Someone in a previous life had taught him how to shake. He offers up a lazy paw in exchange for rawhide treats, which we buy in bulk from the grocery store.

He rewards our good behavior by posing as our home's loyal guard dog. Each evening before bedtime, he shows his mettle by wandering onto the backyard patio, raising his hackles in the moonlight and barking at the poodle down the street.

You can never be too safe, you know?

He's also convinced something — anything — is attacking the house every



night at precisely 2 a.m. Because it wasn't my decision to get the dog in the first place, I murmur to my wife as I pull the warm covers closer, "Linus ain't my dog."

So she shuffles down the cold stairs with her hairy companion, and waits by the sliding glass door while he completes his inspection of the premises.

To date, I'm happy to report all has been clear.

The other day I watched Linus nap. I couldn't help but notice what a beautiful dog he's become. It's amazing what happens when you care for something: His coat is coal black and shiny. The scabs have healed and disappeared. His body has regained its strength; he can even do a joy-filled hop — more like an exuberant hunching of his shoulder blades — when he spots one of us grabbing the leash and heading for the door.

Gravity will never be his friend.

In the end, Linus teaches us that life is a funny, uncertain thing. If dogs could ponder the great imponderables — and for Linus, that would be very slowly — I suspect they would see each day as a blessing.

Unlike the rest of us — who more often than not take most of this for granted — he knows deep down just how short of a leash we're all really on.

We forget we live in a free and relatively peaceful time. Unlike many parts of the world, our kids can go to school, get an education and dream about tomorrow.

We forget we are free from want. We don't wonder when or if a next meal is coming; instead, we ponder the great questions like, "KC strip or ribeye?"

We forget we live in a world of great conveniences, so much so that our biggest complaint is often a slow Internet connection or spotty coverage for our mobile phones.

Linus makes me remember.

I cannot begin to tell you how blessed I've been the last 10 years to serve the members of the American Angus Association, but I made the decision to step down this month to pursue other opportunities.

It's been a great run for me because there is nothing else like Angus in American agriculture. Everything about Angus runs counter to the narrative many have tried to impose on our industry during the last four decades.

Indeed, Angus is a roadmap to growth and expansion. Angus is a path to prosperity for rural America.

Most of all, I've been lucky to serve with a great team of people, people who want to move forward, not backward; who want to see the Angus business grow, not control it into contraction. I'm very proud of the work they do, and how each day their devotion and loyalty advances the interests of our members and our industry.

Best wishes to all of you — and thank you for everything.

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