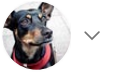




Search Medium

Write



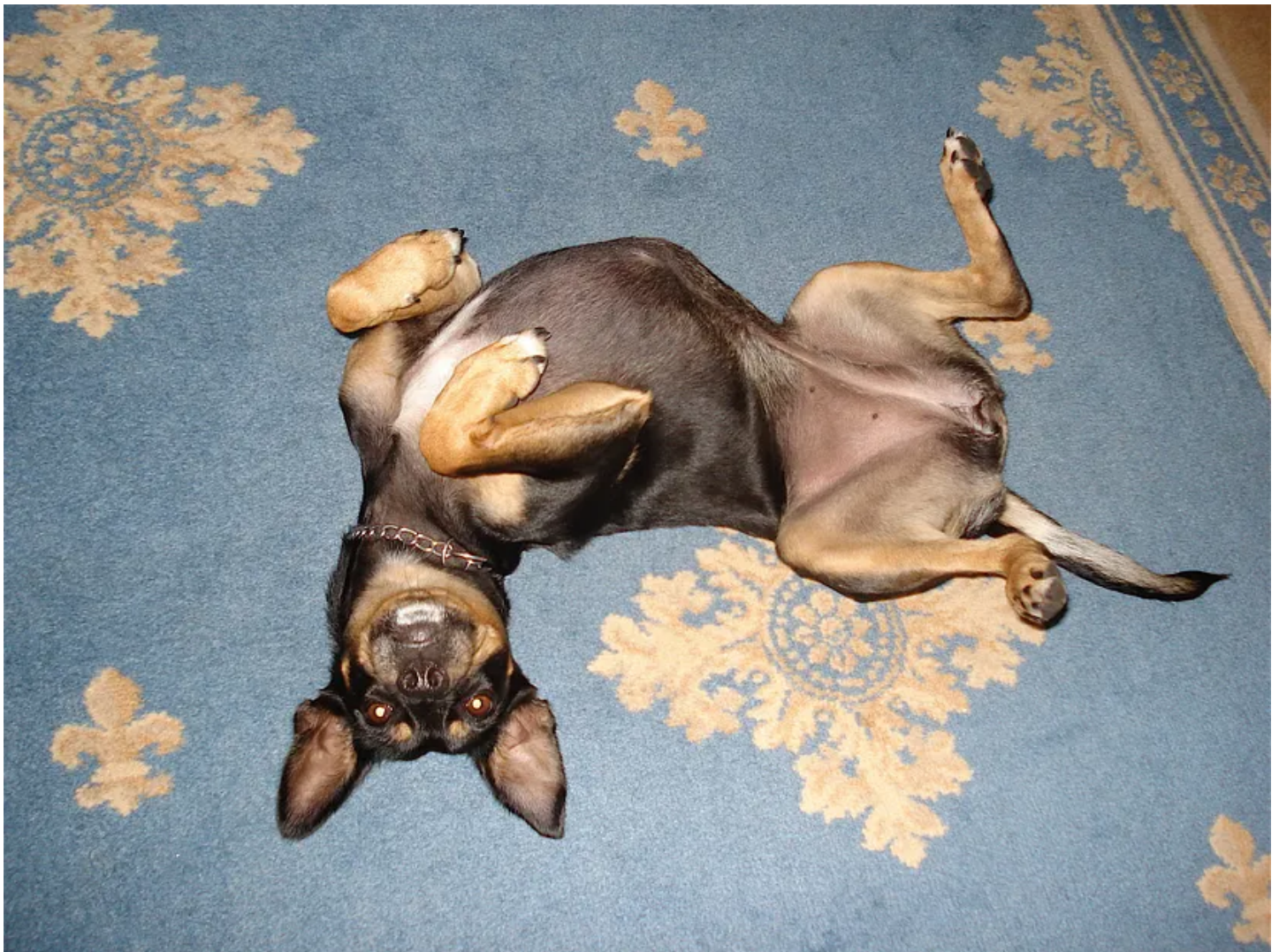
Member-only story

# Whose dog's life is it anyway? \*



CFlisi

5 min read · Just now



My dog Giada has never seen a Broadway or West End play, but her twilight years are unfolding like an award-winning drama from 1978, *Whose life is it anyway?* The play, which became a 1981 movie starring Richard Dreyfuss, examines the right of a quadriplegic to end his own life in spite of existing laws against euthanasia. Technically, my dog's life is entirely in my hands, so there is no legal dilemma. However, I find the ethical burden hard to bear since she can't TELL me her preferences (unlike the articulate protagonist of the play).

Decisions like this are happening all the time, especially for humans in the Age of Covid, but Giada's life can't be conveniently categorized like hospitals when they triage patients based on a clear combination of a patient's age, severity of condition, estimated duration of treatment, and impact of possible comorbidities (two or more medical conditions already existing in the patient). Depending on the weight of these factors, a specialized intervention might save someone's life . . . or hasten his or her demise.

My dog is almost 18 and has been taking cortisone on and off over the last year to deal with a series of medical complications. The joints in her rear legs are osteoarthritic, so she can't jump onto sofas and beds as she used to. Her rear legs are splayed and she holds her front limbs in an awkward, unnatural position. Sometimes her legs buckle under her and she can't walk at all, or she slides off her elevated sleeping mattress and can't get up. She looks up at me as if to say, "What happened? Why aren't my legs working? What is the matter with me?" Cortisone gets her on her feet.

Within the last six months she had three cerebral seizures, analogous to mini-strokes in humans. The impact appeared to be like an epileptic fit. She shook her head with widened eyes, panting in fear and confusion, and ran around in uncoordinated circles. These episodes were frightening for me to witness and must have been terrifying for her to experience. Cortisone addressed the inflammation causing them.

Giada also has a stomach inflammation that might (or might not) be a tumor and that has worsened over the past two years. She has an inflamed pancreas that might (or might not) be tumoral in nature. She experiences occasional bouts of canine dementia, wandering around the house without realizing where she is going. (Some of this behavior can be attributed to her incipient blindness). She may start barking at the radiator, or a curtain, or a corner of the living room.

The first two problems can practically ONLY be addressed with cortisone. The latter issues are aggravated by cortisone, so best to prescribe it as rarely as possible.

A few weeks ago Giada confronted her most recent mélange of issues — arthritic pain, abdominal spasms, mobility issues, brain inflammation. The vets administered a cocktail of shots, including painkillers for her abdominal cramps and cortisone for the cerebral and joint inflammations. My dog wasn't happy about getting these shots, but they worked: I had to carry her into the vet's office but she walked out on her own steam.

The vets laid out a regime for continuing medication, and insisted that cortisone not be a regular part of it. "The cortisone is good for her brain

seizures and joints, but it isn't great for her mental acuity and is very bad for her stomach." So I continued with oral doses of stomach medicine and general painkiller. No more cortisone and, for a week or so, she didn't seem to miss it.

Then a relapse a few weeks later. Without the cortisone, her legs stopped working. She couldn't move. I had to carry her in and out of the elevator, up and down the steps to our building, down the street to the grassy patch for her *toilette*. Then one evening she threw up her dinner and didn't want to eat anymore. This was a Very Bad Sign, because Giada eats EVERYTHING. I couldn't convince her to take her pain pills, even wrapped in peanut butter (the ultimate irresistible for canines).

So I carried my pet back to the veterinary clinic. The two vets observed, reread her history, shook their heads, and decided that cortisone was again on the table. What? They had been so adamant about the damage it could do. What made them change their minds?

Without it, she won't be able to walk, I was told. It will help the inflammation in her stomach and brain, as well as her joints. She will feel better. But the drug will damage her pancreas and stomach. It will weaken her muscles and immune defenses. Long-term, it could induce Cushing's disease, a serious condition.

My decision, the vets shrugged. It's a tradeoff between my dog's length versus quality of life. Maybe if she were half as old, their advice might be different, they admitted. But she IS of a certain age, and why not ensure that whatever time she has left be lived as pleasantly and pain-free as possible,

to hell with the long-term consequences. Because there is little likelihood of “long-term” for an old dog.

So we are back to my real-life melodrama. Giada would live longer without cortisone, but arguably not well. Just like a human, a dog in pain is restless, unhappy, unable to move or rest comfortably. Worst of all, a dog in pain doesn't enjoy eating, which is a primary pleasure for all living creatures. I do not want my loyal, loving animal companion to experience such undue suffering.

On the other hand, Giada has bounced back so many times from life-threatening crises that she seems more like a cat than a dog. I didn't think she would make it to the end of the year, but this month she has insisted on walking up and down the front steps of our building on her own. She refuses to be carried, as she was not long ago. She eats everything in her dish and begs vocally for more. She prowls for edible garbage on the street and greets neighborhood dogs with a tail wag and a bow to play. How ethical is it to shorten — by months or years maybe — an animal so engaged in life?

I have reduced her cortisone from every day to every other day or every third day and watch her daily for signs of pain or distress. If she would only tell me what she wants . . . but she can't, in words. So I have to decide whose life it is, already knowing the answer in my heart. It's *our* life, intertwined.

###

Dogs

Pets

Euthanasia

Life

Animals



## Written by CFlisi

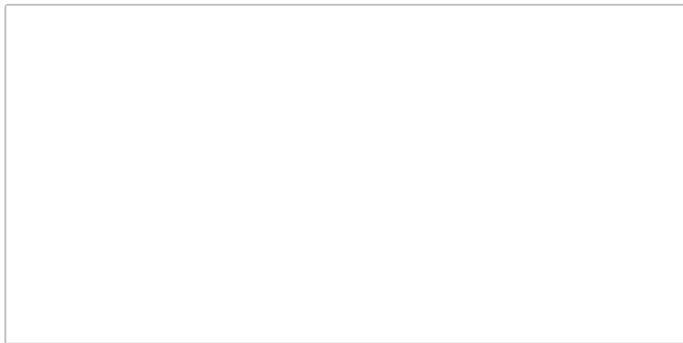
Edit profile

230 Followers

writer, PR professional, mother, dog-lover, traveler. See more at [www.paroleanima.com](http://www.paroleanima.com)

---

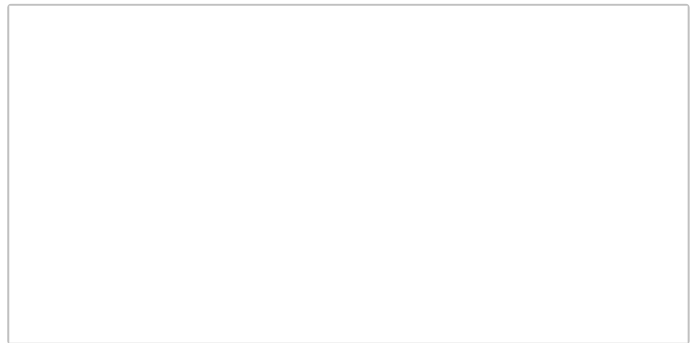
### More from CFlisi




 CFlisi in ILLUMINATION

### MUSEUMS MADE IN ITALY, WITH AN INDUSTRIAL TWIST

Italian museums offer much more than



 CFlisi in Hello, Love

### There's a dinosaur on my wedding cake!

When I was six years old, I wanted to be a

✦ · 4 min read · 2 days ago

 140  2  



 CFlisi


## A Moving Experience: Italy vs. the US in the healthcare shell game

A shell game always involves deception or fraud. You'll find plenty of online videos to...

✦ · 5 min read · 4 days ago

 20   

✦ · 5 min read · May 7

 73   



 CFlisi in ILLUMINATION

## Eulogy for the Divine Ms. G

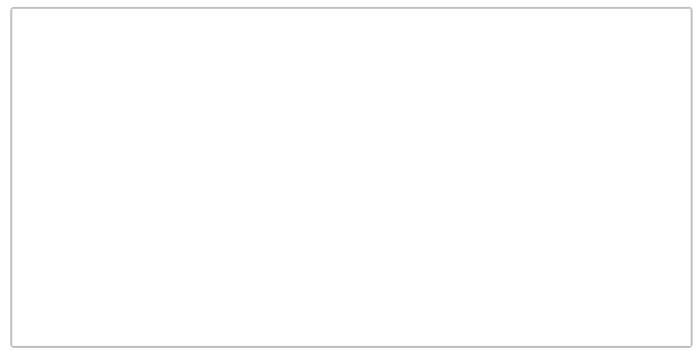
Dogs howl at times of great emotion. Humans sing. One of the great emotional...

✦ · 10 min read · May 3, 2022

 33  1  

See all from CFlisi

Recommended from Medium



 Alex Mathers

 James Michael Sama 

## 14 things I wish I knew at 25 (now that I'm 38)


I'm writing soon after my 38th birthday. It's a time to reflect.

 · 4 min read · Dec 27, 2022

## 15 Phrases The Most Confident People Tell Themselves

How you talk to yourself creates your reality.

 · 14 min read · May 10

 12.4K  222  

 1.6K  28  

---

### Lists



#### A Guide to Choosing, Planning, and Achieving...

13 stories · 53 saves



#### Stories to Help You Live Better

21 stories · 53 saves



#### How to Find a Mentor

11 stories · 21 saves




#### Productivity 101

20 stories · 64 saves

---




 Alexander Nguyen in Level Up Coding

## Why I Keep Failing Candidates During Google Interviews...

They don't meet the bar.

★ · 4 min read · Apr 13

 3.8K  120  

 Kristen Walters in Adventures In AI

## 5 Ways I'm Using AI to Make Money in 2023

These doubled my income last year

★ · 9 min read · Feb 16

 6K  124  



 Fiona Renate

## I started five businesses this week

It is all about turning ideas into action

★ · 8 min read · May 5

 2K  55  

 Darius Foroux 

## 3 Habits That Sabotage Your Life

These habits are destroying your self-discipline

★ · 6 min read · Jan 4

 9.8K  227  

[See more recommendations](#)

---

[Help](#) [Status](#) [Writers](#) [Blog](#) [Careers](#) [Privacy](#) [Terms](#) [About](#) [Text to speech](#)