I AM HONEY

Georgia King-Brown

Imagine for a moment how you would've felt.

I had followed Georgia's dad to the gate to check the letterbox, and we had stopped to talk to Mark Guscott, the neighbouring farmer, on his quad bike, which was a furry mess of wagging, barking dogs.

Georgia's dad wanted to introduce me to Mark, to make sure he wouldn't shoot me if I wandered into the lambing paddock. He had just told Mark that my name was 'Hun' short for 'Hunter' when his dogs suddenly grew silent. It was only when I looked down at what they were staring at, that I knew why.

Earlier that morning, my big sister Georgia had painted my claws all colours of the rainbow with her new Dora the Explorer and Peppa Pig nail polish. And at that moment, I definitely looked more like a 'Honey' than a 'Hunter' which is a good thing I suppose because that is who I really am.

I am Honey, a twelve-year-old Labrador Retriever Cross. Georgia was four years old when she named me after my honey-coloured coat. My full name is Princess Honey Bell Ivory King-Brown. Don't ask me where the 'Ivory' comes from; it's just always been there.

Actually, I have been called many different names. When I am being good it's 'Honey Bunny Wunny' or 'Hun Bee'. And when I'm not so good it's ..... well, I can't say that stuff here; it's farm language, but you get the picture.

Life on our lifestyle block was awesome. Georgia was the best big sister to me, and I was kept busy playing dress up and being a pretty princess or unicorn for a very adventurous and extremely imaginative Georgia. I remember one Christmas, Georgia's mum nearly had kittens when I escaped from Georgia's bedroom wearing antlers and red nose with Georgia yelling, "Rudolf, come back!"

We would go exploring along the banks of the Waitawatautau river that ran through our 12-acre property, looking for treasure, chasing dragonflies and running from pirates. Once during a bad drought, Georgia and I saved some eels by digging them out of the mud and taking them to a much bigger water hole we knew about. Georgia had done a project at Martinborough School about the endangered long finned eels and she was pretty sure these eels were long finned.

And I can't tell you the number of tea parties we had together. We even had high tea in Georgia's adventure playground once she'd taught me how to climb the step ladder and slide down the slide.

But then my life changed overnight and I knew things would never quite be the same with the arrival of ....my worst nightmare - Piper.

Any of you who has an annoying little sister who takes your toys, uses your things, steals all the attention, and always gets you into trouble, will know what I mean.

Georgia's dad says we got Piper for succession planning. I don't know what that means but a lot of my friends my age get a puppy to look after when they get older and I'm not sure why. I think I might google 'succession planning' later to find out.

Piper is a Labrador. She is not like me in any way, apart from the obvious fact that she is a dog. And she is black, cheeky, mischievous, self-confident, exceptionally rude, and always hungry.

When she was only about six months old, we took Piper on her first possum hunt. It was late at night when we finally got the possum that had been raiding our fruit trees and Georgia's dad left it on the back porch intending to bury it the next day, before going to bed.

Well, Piper was somehow left out all night. When we found her the next morning, she was lying in the sun on her back on the deck, her tummy bloated to twice its normal size. The possum had been reduced to four sets of claws attached to a head by long thin strips of furry skin.

It's not going to be easy but I have promised Georgia that I will teach Piper everything I have learned in this world, like not eating too much chicken poo, not chewing and burying Georgia's

toys and jandals and to never ever, under any circumstances, leave the property looking for love.

Which Piper did one day when she first came on heat.

Once we got her back, we took her straight away to see Reidun Nicholson, the Martinborough vet to see if she was pregnant. Reidun lived on the next-door farm where, incidentally, Piper had been found, and she said she was pretty sure Piper wouldn't be pregnant since there were no good-looking dogs up her way.

And so it turned out.

Georgia was always pestering her mum and dad for a kitten and it didn't matter how many times she asked, the answer was always a firm no because of the threat to native wildlife.

Georgia was undeterred, however.

Wild cats were a problem in our area and I used to track them so that Georgia's dad could dispatch them. One day I saw a tiny abandoned kitten tottering near the pizza oven, obviously starving and on its last legs. I barked to alert Georgia's dad and he swore when he saw it, and turned to get his rifle. Fortunately for the kitten, Georgia was standing right behind him and asked where he was going. Changing direction surprisingly quickly, her dad headed for the fridge which I thought at first was a strange place to store the gun and he got some of our dog tucker out to feed it.

Apparently, if you catch a wild kitten before it is six weeks old you can actually tame it. So Georgia tamed it and MacKenzie, or 'Pud Pud' for short, is an affectionate and very grateful addition to our family.

A couple of years ago, Georgia's parents started talking about moving to a place called Superbia so Georgia could be closer to her school and school friends. Piper was worried until I told her that while things would be quieter, there was sure to be other animals there and no doubt some of the cats there would be pretty feral which she thought was quite cool and eventually agreed Superbia didn't sound so bad after all.

I mentioned earlier that Piper and I have completely different personalities. Well, we had only been in Superbia for one day when I thought she went way too far - even for her. We were busy unpacking when I saw a stranger walking up the driveway with a black dog on a leash. Yep, you guessed it. It was Piper.

“Is this yours?” he said to Georgia’s dad.

He did not sound at all happy.

“It came into our house and jumped on our bed,” he growled.

At that moment I was so pleased I had fur because it was hiding a face that was bright red with embarrassment. I just wanted to melt into the ground. Meanwhile Piper was wagging her tail, tongue hanging out, with a big stupid grin on her face. As it turned out Cameron, our new neighbour, liked Labradors having had several over his lifetime and Piper was quickly forgiven.

While she is mostly embarrassing all the time, there are times when Piper really cracks me up. Interestingly, she has always been a very private dog when it comes to going to the toilet and invariably heads towards a bush or hedge when the urge takes her if you know what I mean and I think you do. But it’s what she does when she gets there that reminds me of a very young Georgia playing hide and seek with her mum and dad and covering her eyes believing this ensures she remains hidden. Piper always goes to the toilet with only her head and shoulders hidden in the foliage. I have told her, I don’t know how many times, that these very personal moments may not be as private as she would perhaps like to think, but she won’t listen.

So, all in all, my life so far has been quite a roller coaster ride and I have enjoyed every bit of it.

Things have slowed down a bit for me lately though. Georgia seems to have given up on finding treasure and those pirates have apparently moved out of the area, but I really don’t mind because I like to spend more and more of my time sleeping.

And when I fall asleep, I always dream I’m having high tea in the adventure playground, or exploring the riverbank and running through the forest with my sisters Georgia and Piper.

Now if you'll forgive me, I'd better let you go because I've got some important stuff to do. I might have a little nap first though and oh, before I forget, I do need to check out the meaning of 'succession planning'.