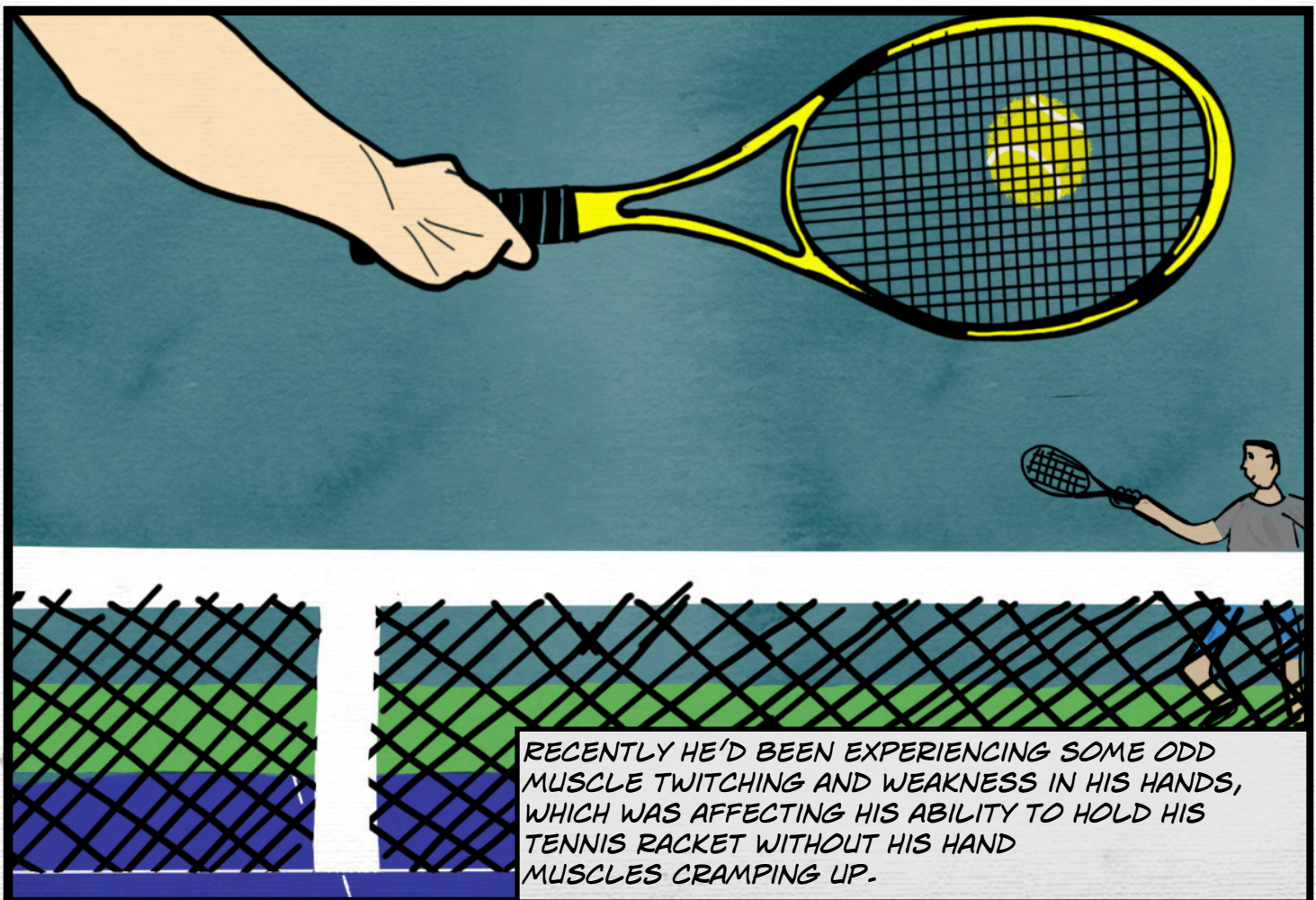
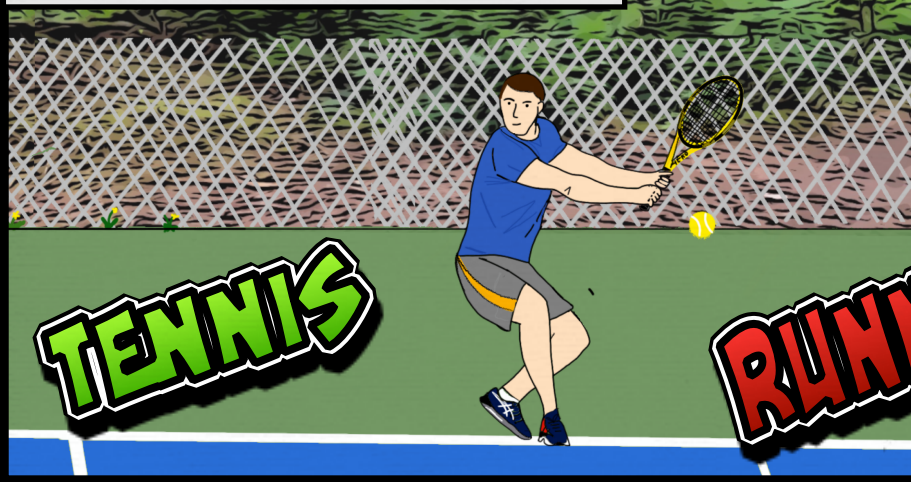


THE BATTLE OF ALS

BY GWENYTH R.

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE LIVED A 50 YEAR OLD MAN NAMED JUSTIN. HE ENJOYED AN ACTIVE LIFESTYLE.



RECENTLY HE'D BEEN EXPERIENCING SOME ODD MUSCLE TWITCHING AND WEAKNESS IN HIS HANDS, WHICH WAS AFFECTING HIS ABILITY TO HOLD HIS TENNIS RACKET WITHOUT HIS HAND MUSCLES CRAMPING UP.

ONE MONTH
LATER...

SO I'VE BEEN EXPERIENCING SOME SLIGHT WEAKNESS AND CRAMPING IN MY RIGHT HAND FOR ABOUT ONE MONTH NOW. I FIRST NOTICED IT WHEN I WAS GRIPPING MY TENNIS RACQUET, BUT NOW, I NOTICE IT WHEN DOING SIMPLE THINGS SUCH AS BUTTONING UP MY SHIRT OR HOLDING MY TOOTHBRUSH. I JUST WANT TO MAKE SURE EVERYTHING IS ALRIGHT.

IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN EXPERIENCING SOME MUSCLE TWITCHING. MUSCLE TWITCHES HAVE A VARIETY OF CAUSES, MANY OF WHICH ARE MINOR.

BUT SINCE YOUR MUSCLE TWITCHES HAVE BEEN CONTINUOUS, AND HAVE CAUSED WEAKNESS IN YOUR HAND, THIS MIGHT BE A FIRST SIGN OF A NERVOUS SYSTEM DISORDER...

I WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU AGAIN IN TWO WEEKS FOR FURTHER EVALUATION. IN THE MEANTIME, KEEP TRACK OF ALL YOUR SYMPTOMS.

JUSTIN'S SYMPTOMS PERSIST. AFTER SEVERAL MORE DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENTS OF EXERCISES AND TESTS, THE DOCTOR REFERS JUSTIN TO A NEUROLOGIST FOR FURTHER EVALUATION.

HI JUSTIN, MY NAME IS DR. DIEM. I SPECIALIZE IN DIAGNOSING AND TREATING DISEASES OF THE BRAIN, SPINAL CORD AND NERVES.

...

TODAY WE WILL DO SOME TESTS THAT FOCUS ON MUSCLE STRENGTH, REFLEXES AND COORDINATION, TO RULE OUT POSSIBLE CAUSES OF YOUR SYMPTOMS.

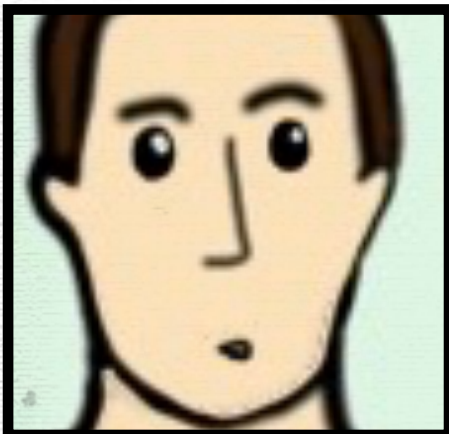
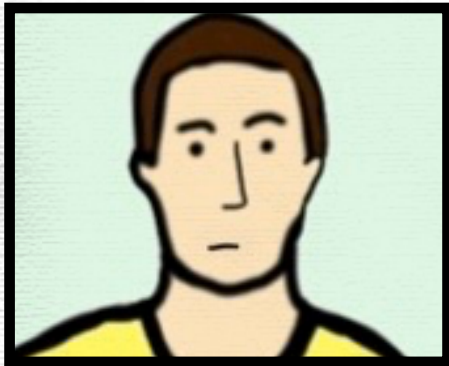
3 APPOINTMENTS LATER...

HI JUSTIN.

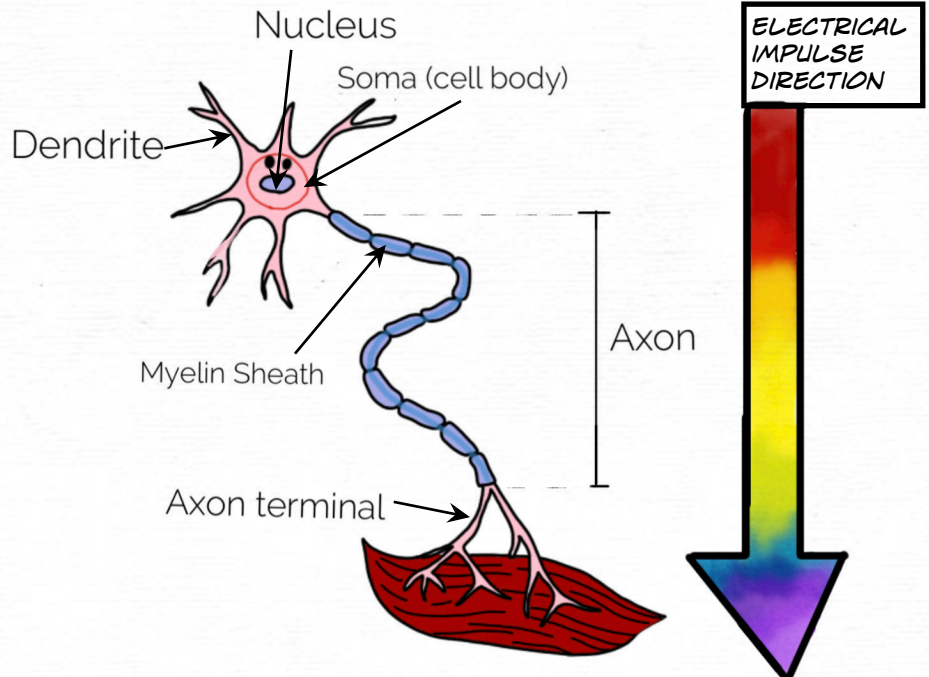
THIS ALREADY SOUNDS LIKE BAD NEWS.

ME AND MY TEAM OF SPECIALISTS HAVE REVIEWED YOUR TESTS, MRI AND EMG* SCANS, AS WELL AS YOUR BLOOD WORK. YOU HAVE A RARE NEUROLOGICAL DISEASE CALLED AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS OR ALS FOR SHORT.

OUR BRAIN IS CONNECTED TO OUR MUSCLES THROUGH MILLIONS OF SPECIALIZED EUKARYOTIC* NERVE CELLS, CALLED MOTOR NEURONS.

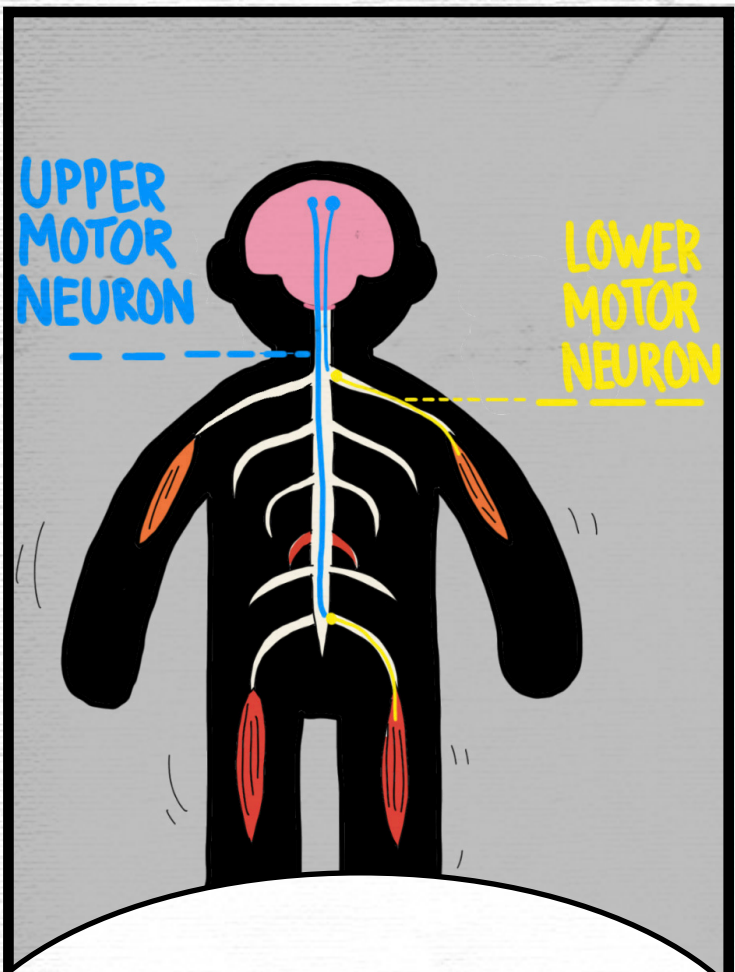


- Healthy Neuron -



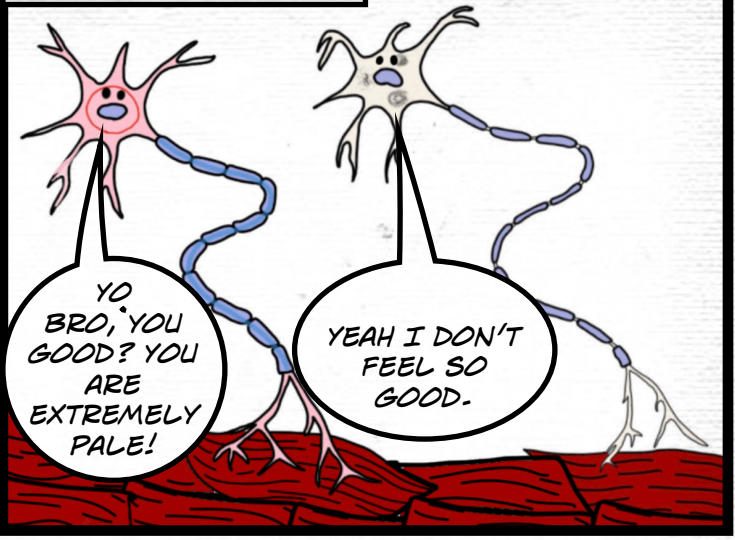
*ELECTROMYOGRAPHY (EMG) IS A DIAGNOSTIC PROCEDURE TO ASSESS THE HEALTH OF MUSCLES AND THE NERVE CELLS THAT CONTROL THEM.

*EUKARYOTIC: CELL OR ORGANISM THAT HAS A CLEARLY DEFINED NUCLEUS



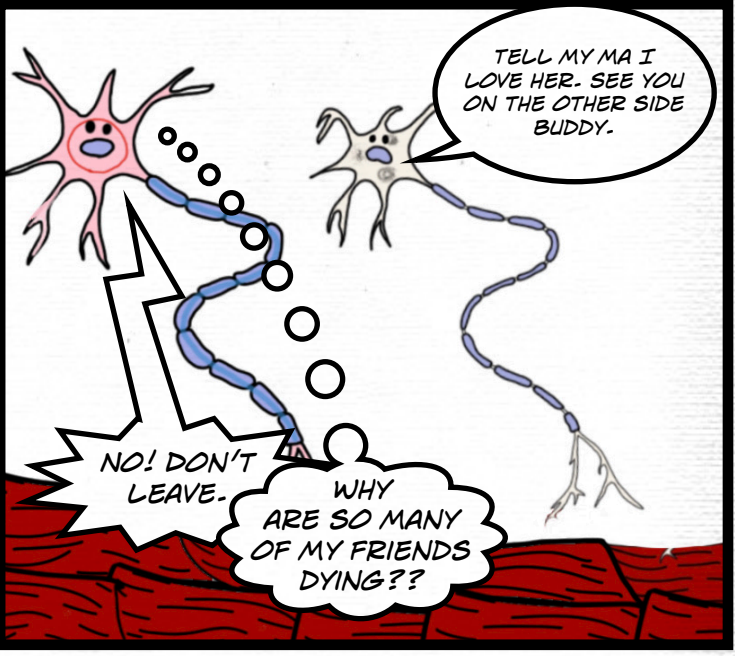
THE BRAIN SENDS ELECTRICAL IMPULSES ALONG THESE MOTOR NEURONS TELLING A MUSCLE TO CONTRACT, AND ENABLE US TO MOVE OUR BODIES AS WE CHOOSE. IN ALS, THESE MOTOR NEURONS STOP SENDING SIGNALS AND THE MUSCLES WEAKEN, LEADING TO PARALYSIS.

INSIDE THE BODY...



YO BRO, YOU GOOD? YOU ARE EXTREMELY PALE!

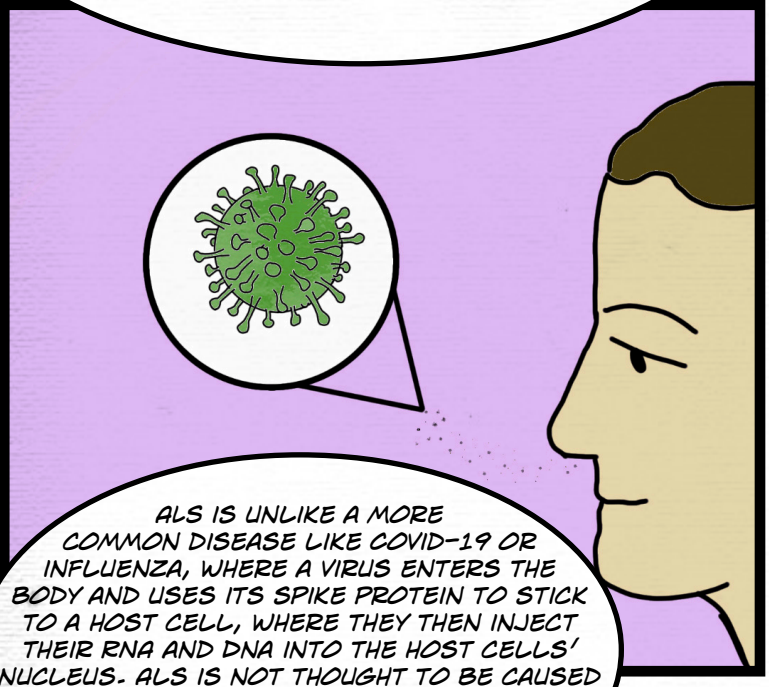
YEAH I DON'T FEEL SO GOOD.



NO! DON'T LEAVE.

TELL MY MA I LOVE HER. SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE BUDDY.

WHY ARE SO MANY OF MY FRIENDS DYING??

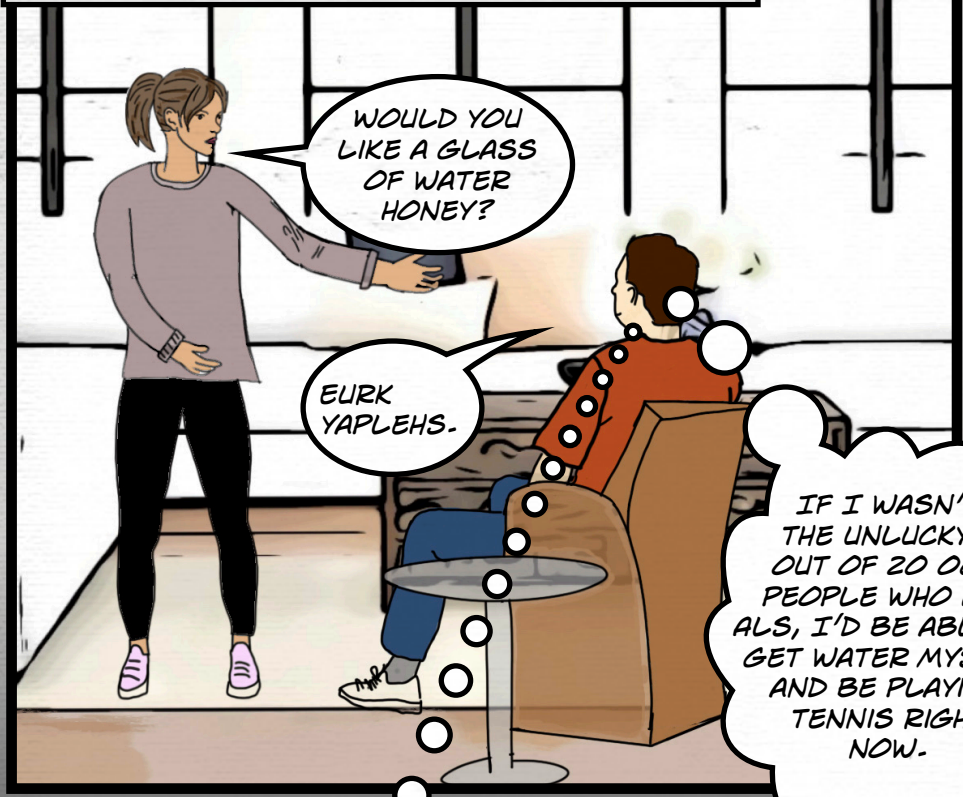


ALS IS UNLIKE A MORE COMMON DISEASE LIKE COVID-19 OR INFLUENZA, WHERE A VIRUS ENTERS THE BODY AND USES ITS SPIKE PROTEIN TO STICK TO A HOST CELL, WHERE THEY THEN INJECT THEIR RNA AND DNA INTO THE HOST CELLS' NUCLEUS. ALS IS NOT THOUGHT TO BE CAUSED BY A VIRUS, A BACTERIA, A FUNGI OR PARASITE. IT JUST RANDOMLY SHOWS UP IN PEOPLE TYPICALLY AGED 50 TO 75.



AND UNFORTUNATELY, THERE IS NO WORKING CURE EITHER.

AS HIS MOTOR NEURONS ATROPHY AND DEGENERATE OVER THE YEARS, JUSTIN GRADUALLY LOSES HIS ABILITY TO PLAY TENNIS, RUN, WALK, TALK AND SWALLOW. LIFE IS FRUSTRATING FOR HIM.



WOULD YOU LIKE A GLASS OF WATER HONEY?

EURK YAPLEHS.

IF I WASN'T THE UNLUCKY 1 OUT OF 20 000 PEOPLE WHO HAD ALS, I'D BE ABLE TO GET WATER MYSELF AND BE PLAYING TENNIS RIGHT NOW.

I DIDN'T PLAN TO RETIRE THIS WAY.....



MAiD
Medical Assistance in Dying

There is some suffering that only death can end.

About the author



Gwenyth has finished off her first grade 8 PLP year. She is a learner that pushes herself to achieve her life goals and academic goals. When she's not in school or doing homework, she's probably doing a sport (hockey, tennis, swimming, field hockey, skiing), on a dog walk, or hanging out with friends. In her spare time she enjoys baking, journaling, art and suspenseful books.

She lives in Vancouver with her family and Hugo, her almost 1 and a half year old yellow labrador puppy. For more information about Gwenyth, visit her blog.