We comfortably engaged in the usual light-hearted banter that helped us avoid the reason for the house call we were making. It wasn’t far to drive but we still managed to decide who was going to be leaving Bake Off at the end of the night’s looming episode.

All too soon we pulled up outside our destination - a small timber bungalow on brick foundations that had once been fastidiously tended but was now showing signs of disrepair and neglect. It nestled in a well established but overgrown garden and was surrounded by new brick McMansions that over recent years had replaced all the houses just like the one we were visiting. The age of knock down and re-build had arrived in Lennox Street and left old Jim Waterson’s humble abode the odd one out.

He was leaning against the old wooden gate, awaiting our arrival and gave a slight nod of acknowledgement as we got out of the car.

‘He’s inside’ he called, turning to hobble up the path to the steps leading to the front door.

I grabbed my house-call bag from the back seat and followed my nurse, Cindy, up to the front door.

Inside, the house was old, the paint yellowed with age, each room austerely decorated with furniture that had seen better days. Photos of long ago snapshots in time - of family and places visited – some sepia, some black and white and some faded colour, were dotted around the walls and sideboards. Jim led us into the small kitchen that seemed now to be the hub of his life where the faint smell of onions and meat and musty dog told us that dinner was simmering on the hob and that Digger was in his usual spot on the rug under the kitchen table.

‘I think it’s time Doc. He can barely walk now and the tablets don’t seem to help much more’ Jim said, pulling out a chair and sitting at the table.

Digger was a Labrador I had first seen as a puppy fifteen years ago. He was one of those dogs that didn’t have a mean bone in his body and even now, as we gently pulled the rug bearing Digger out from under the table, was still wagging his tail. Perhaps not as vigorously as in his youth, but a tail wag it was.

‘You sure about this?’ I asked Jim, giving him one more opportunity to change his mind.

‘Yeah – he can’t go on like this. I know he’s suffering with his arthritis and he’s right off his tucker. Was a time he’d eat the bowl as well, but now, he just gives his dinner a sniff and a few licks. He’s been a good companion for me, especially since Mavis died three years ago.’ Jim bent down and ruffled Digger’s head. ‘I’ll miss the old bugger but I know his time’s up and I’d rather see him go peacefully.’

‘Do you want us to take care of his body Jim, or do you want to bury him at home’ I asked as I loaded my syringe with euthanasia solution.

‘I’ve already asked young Nick next door if he’d help me bury Digger in the backyard’ he replied.

I knew his neighbour Nick – a decent young man with a family, a successful plumbing business and a Jack Russell Terrier called Jessie that didn’t have a stop button, so it didn’t surprise me that he had offered his help.

‘I’ll just get you to sign this Consent Form Mr Waterson’ Cindy said as she placed the form and a pen on the table. He hesitated for a moment as the gravity of what he was about to do hit him, then signed his name with a still firm hand then he eased himself onto the floor to sit beside his beloved Digger.

As I shaved the fur from Digger’s foreleg, Cindy knelt down on the other side of Digger. ‘You can hold his head and talk to him Mr Waterson’ she soothed as she then held the vein up on Digger’s leg.

Digger’s tail was still wagging as I gently slipped the needle into his vein, drew back to get the flash of blood in the needle hub to tell me that I’d found my mark, and slowly pushed the plunger on the syringe to send Digger on his final sleep. As he slowly sank his head to the ground telling me that Digger’s spirit had left him, I’ll swear that something slumped in Jim as a small part of his spirit left him as well. We carefully laid Digger on his side and I reached for my stethoscope to listen for a heartbeat that I knew wouldn’t be there.

‘There’s no heartbeat Jim, so Digger has gone.’

‘Gosh that was quick, but at least he’s not suffering any longer’ Jim replied as his eyes misted over.

‘Do you need a hand moving him out the back?’ I asked.

‘Nah, I’ll be right Doc. Nick’ll be over soon to help me. I’ll just leave him here on his favourite rug. Now, how much do I owe you Doc?’

We settled the bill and Cindy and I said our condolences and left Jim to his memories.

It was a few months later that Nick came into the Clinic with his tear-away Jessie for a vaccination, that I learned that old Jim had passed away about four weeks after he had helped bury Digger.

I don’t know whether there is a heaven or after-life for dogs or humans, but I’m certain that Digger and Jim are still enjoying each other’s company.