

Life lessons from Callie

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 24 May 2013 13:49 -



News Editor

She was the most vivacious pup of the litter that bounded into Betsy's 10-year-old lap. A bundle of fur the color of a freshly shined penny.

A week passed before "Callie" was named, part of an indigenous custom that helps reveal personality and character.

Mainstays at the Harvest Festival dog show, Betsy once dressed them both in leis and bikinis to dance to Beach Boys music.

Although I didn't realize it at the time, Callie offered our family several opportunities for growth.

Gratitude for simple things like a tossed tennis ball that was always fun to retrieve.

And that it's okay to show fear.

Callie would give wide berth to Betsy's squawking clarinet, even when the instrument lay dormant in its case.

Loving and accepting everyone with a wagging tail and giant smile were her most noticeable teachings and she always asked for what she needed—pats and hugs.

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Most of all, Callie taught me how to be present to the moment.

A lesson that became very difficult when she was diagnosed with an aggressive tumor and started leaving us in small increments in just a few days.

As I prayed for a miracle and hoped the medicine I pushed down her throat would work, her breathing became more labored.

I struggled with trying to control the situation (which I couldn't) and honoring both her dying and my grieving processes.

Under a fingernail moon last week, I took Callie for her last walk in the park. Later, I brushed and sang to her in the moonlight and laid down with her in the dark.

My face was buried in her red fur and my arms held her when she began her journey into the next world.

The lake reflected a soft, pink sunset as our family let the physical part of Callie go. Pungent cedar boughs lined the bottom of her grave and her beloved toys were at her side as we sent her on her way.

A screech owl trilled. And I knew she was letting us know that she'd crossed over safely.

One last loving message from Callie and I was present to hear it.

“What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the winter time.

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It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the Sunset.”—Crowfoot, a Blackfoot Elder