

July 25, 2016

Saying Goodbye to Our Last Pet

We had to put poor Shilo down today. He was our 15-year-old tricolored beagle that we'd had for twelve years. An ultrasound showed that he had prostate cancer that had spread to the bladder and the urethra. His spleen was being invaded as well and the vet estimated that it would burst in two weeks. Our entire family of four (two sons, 18 and 20) would attend the next, final, and necessary visit to the vet. It was the sixth animal we've had, three cats and three dogs; but this death was the hardest to accept. I don't know why. And yet, it was the gentlest passing. He was put under peacefully, as though for an operation, before being given the heart-stopping shot.

Oliver with Shilo in March 2006



I remember my first meeting with Shilo. Again, the whole family was there. Oliver was 6 and Spencer was 8. It was at a local foster pet home and 3-year-old Shilo was sitting on the couch with several other dogs. He didn't take immediately to our petting and appeared to be wary of strangers. I thought that was pretty normal and didn't hold it against him. We talked with the foster owner and she said that he was great with people. In fact, she said he was "a snuggler." We completed the paperwork and took him home within the week.

He started out as an energetic fellow, charging up and down the stairs and leaping on and off the couch. He was indeed a snuggler. He loved nothing better than napping right up against us on the couch or bed. He had an independent streak too and frequently took advantage of any inattentiveness by slipping the leash. Off he went, charging off after his nose. If we couldn't catch him within the hour, some neighbor would sight him and we could pick him up.

Here's a plush doll with small eyes. Mar 2016

All of us loved to play with him. The kids would wrestle with him. Jennifer discovered that Shilo was captivated by big-eyed plush dolls that squeaked. She'd wave that toy just out of his reach. And by turning it left and right, it looked like its eyes were following Shilo. That got his full attention as the doll looked like it was alive – and being aggressive. The doll would stare at Shilo first with the left eye, and then with the right eye. The suspense would build with the standoff. Before long, Shilo would lunge for it. But Jennifer was an expert tease and always managed to pull it away just before he reached it.



She kept this game up for minutes, but could have gone much longer, before letting him capture the doll. We'd watch as he'd work at it trying to find the squeaker inside. Never taking more than a couple days, we'd come across the doll off in a corner somewhere. Most of the fluff would be pulled out and the little squeak mechanism would be lying alongside it.

I tried playing the same game with Shilo, but never reached Jennifer's level of expertise. My favorite game was a form of play fighting. I'd reach out and try to trap his snout closed with my hand. He'd guard me away with his teeth, growling menacingly. I picked up on this and started growling too. Sometimes he would win and sometimes I would win. But he never broke the skin of my hand with his teeth. It surprised me the first time he won at how gentle he held my hand. He was very careful. And he enjoyed the game as much as I did. I enjoyed the looks from my young kids as they thought me quite brave to risk those teeth. (They had seen the results of his gnawing away at a heavy duty plastic clothes hanger – not the thin plastic, the thick plastic. We used to think they were indestructible until Shilo worked his teeth all around one and turned it into a jagged mess.) I'd end each of these games with a rough petting or a whole-body hug.

David with Scout and Shilo in Nov 2006



That was one dog that enjoyed his food too. Invariably he wolfed it down. It was so bad that we had to feed our second dog Scout, an older beagle, in the bathroom. Otherwise, Shilo would finish his food, then bulldoze Scout out of the way and take what was left of his food. As it was, whenever we let Scout out, Shilo always raced in and licked his entire bowl. Sometimes, but not often, he'd be a lucky boy and Scout would leave him a morsel or two. Funnily enough, despite being a champion eater, or because of it, we had to wet his kibble down first. Otherwise he'd chew it to dust and start to choke.

He would grow up to become a more mature dog - less apt to run and jump. He was also less apt to wake up and greet us when we came home. He lost his playmate Scout 2½ years ago and had to adjust. For months, he'd sniff Scout's doggie bed. But he handled it surprisingly well. The worst thing was not being able to tell him what had happened to his poor old friend. Within this last year we've seen Shilo struggle to jump up onto the bed and he'd now carefully walk up and down the steps. (The same progression we'd experienced with Scout.) In the last six months we often had to help him into the bed and down the stairs. He could go up all right, just couldn't quite go down without tumbling.

But he kept slowing down and slowing down. Jennifer knew that there was something wrong but multiple ailments prevented the Vet from pinpointing the cancer until just this last week. It started with excessive drinking. He was diagnosed with canine diabetes. The medicine resolved this issue but had a side effect of making him lethargic. Then, blood in his urine was caused by bladder stones, revealed by X-rays. A special diet was instituted to dissolve these sharp crystals. And after six weeks, it appeared to be working. The blood disappeared. But a new bout of extreme lethargy ensued. Testing showed that he had a deer tick illness. This called for another round of antibiotics. He showed immediate improvement, but the lethargy returned, and it was worse. This was coupled with too much gratuitous peeing in the house. And he strained way too much when he peed. Ominously, the traces of blood in the urine returned.

Spencer with Shilo on June 29, 2016



Jennifer took him one more time to the vet and an X-ray revealed that he had some form of mass in the abdomen.

A script was written for Shilo to see an ultrasound vet specialist to determine how bad the mass was. After which, we got our diagnosis of cancer. The specialist came to me with the results and started it off with, "Well, I'm sorry, but I couldn't have much worse news for you." And we talked. So, Jennifer was right after all.

We continued to watch Shilo. He got slower and slower and it became harder and harder for him to pee. The blood returned. And finally he went off his feed. We discussed it and made the

appointment to ease his mounting discomfort for 2 p.m. today, July 25, 2016. Shilo slept most of the morning. His last meal was four biscuits, which he seemed to enjoy – given out by Oliver after a short walk.

The most difficult part of putting down an animal is that they don't know what's going to happen. While filling out the paperwork, Shilo contentedly waited at the door.

Waiting for us. Asking us to take him home. It was heart-wrenching seeing him at that door. Trusting us. Over and over again, I told myself that we were showing him a mercy. I'll have to keep on telling myself that for a long time. I would follow the Vet into the examining room expecting one of the kids to take Shilo's leash and bring him in. I was mildly surprised when I looked up and Jennifer was carrying him instead. Shilo didn't want to come in. Just kept looking at us with his big brown eyes. Still hoping he could leave.

April 2016



It was a somber choked-up group of us in the vet's office. We stayed afterwards for a few minutes to pet him. His eyes remained open. I found myself worrying that without his leash he might fall off the stand. It was hard to accept that he wasn't going to wake up. Of course we still talked endearments to him, even knowing he was gone. He was an ordinary dog but he was a wonderful dog. He was one of us and fit right in to our family. I had petted him a lot through the years. Now I think I should have pet him more. We would make good use of the tissues that the vet was kind enough to leave behind.

I'll always remember Shilo with Scout as I walked them together, each on their own leash. They were good with each other and would stop pulling when one or the other was peeing. That always surprised me. They were almost human that way.

June 2016

Scout in August 2014



Just four hours since Shilo left the house, it dawned on me why losing him was so hard. He had been in the family for 12 years, longer than any other pet we'd had. He was a constancy throughout all that time: always being there, always ready to offer companionship, and always lying there looking up into our eyes with a look of love and contentment – especially in his later years. We miss him, Scout too.

Rest in peace my friends.

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