

If Millie could talk, Dan and I said she'd sound like the deep, melodious voice of Mary Louise Kelly on NPR. Millie is a substantial and muscular mix of Rottweiler and a bit of lab mixed in for good measure. We figured her voice would be commanding and confident like Kelly's. We adopted her as a rescue after our youngest child left home for college. We promised each other we wouldn't become one of those silly oldsters who talked for their dog. Yet this didn't stop us from saying what we thought she'd say IF she could talk. And then we would laugh.

It's true. Millie brought us so much laughter. Really there was so much joy in how she approached every day. She never tired of getting up from her comfortable dog bed to welcome us home with wiggles and what we called her snake dance. She'd roll around on the ground scratching her back waving her legs in the air and then pop back up to invite us to play with a puppy bow. She loved snow and would bury her snout and then keep going up to the top of her neck to sniff out hiding field mice, all the while her tail was wagging in the air. Then she'd leap to the next spot with ice and snow covering her face. She showed such gentleness with each new little grandchild that entered our family. She patiently put up with their curiosity and petting earning her the moniker of gentle giant. She ran with us every day for most of her life. When she tore her CCL trying to keep up with the grandchildren several years ago, we were able to mend her with a couple operations. We arranged vacations around if we could bring her, making the three of us mostly inseparable over the last thirteen years.

During Covid, when Dan and I had to work from home, she became the best office assistant anyone could ask for. She'd stay with Dan for part of the day as he met clients remotely, and then venture down the hallway, and sit on my feet as I taught classes over Zoom. Sometimes her snoring got so loud, my students would laugh, and I'd show them how Millie was dealing with the stress of the times. It seemed to help everyone.

Dan and I have a phrase that we've repeated many times: Everyone loves Millie. During our downsizing and moving to new locations, Millie was our ambassador to meeting our neighbors allowing easy conversation and introductions.

Millie taught us good stuff too. She was found as a stray. She had been in the shelter isolated from other dogs and adopted and returned by several families before we brought her home. Although she was always great with people, she

could be fearful of other dogs. At some point, we found help from knowledgeable folks regarding dog reactivity. We gained new insights into what our behavior was communicating to Millie and learned how to read Millie's apprehensions expressed in her movements. She grew our awareness and sensitivity to how dogs really communicate with each other. It has profoundly changed our view of animals and how much as humans we don't see or seek to understand.

Millie was the best dog. She filled our lives with love and constant companionship. I can't believe we have to come home each day without her. I know some people don't understand how a dog is truly a member of the family, so I write this to honor her. We are family.

I had a conversation with my brother the other day. I was telling him about Millie and how we didn't want her to suffer now that her organs were failing. He said, "I know we don't know what heaven is, but I'm sure if there is one, our dear dogs will be there waiting for us." And then he paused and added, "I don't think it could be heaven without them."

Till we meet again our dear Millie. We are so grateful for all the joy you brought us. We will always love you, you will never be forgotten, and we can't wait to see your snake dance in heaven.

Del and Dan Bright