

Ode to Franki Jo

Written by Wendy Doscher-Smith, BT Contributor
September 2011

Our correspondent says goodbye to her beloved hound



Twelve days ago my best friend of seven years died peacefully in my lap. Her quick demise was unexpected and I am the sole person responsible for ending her life. Before you go calling me Kevorkian, let me explain.

My best friend Franki Jo was a dog who, during the last two months of her 11 years, suffered from lymphoma. My husband and I opted to treat her with chemotherapy (which, unlike humans, most dogs tolerate very well). Franki was one of those dogs, and she had a good quality of life. Then, seemingly overnight, the cancer invaded her lungs and she had trouble breathing.

I rushed her to the oncologist the next morning, thinking she was having a bad or allergic reaction to her new chemo drug. I wasn't even particularly concerned (and I'm always concerned, in general) about this new development because my husband said he had seen her in slightly worse shape right before her first chemo treatment kicked in months before.

Well, as they say, or at least as I have heard from several veterinarians and people recently:

Ode to Franki Jo

Written by Wendy Doscher-Smith, BT Contributor
September 2011

“Cancer does what cancer wants.”

Cancer wanted my dog that Monday. And despite medical advancements, both in the human and veterinary medicine fields, cancer often gets what it wants.

When the news sunk in that Franki was not coming home from the vet, a weird thing happened. I started crying really hard. Somehow this crying was different from my other Franki-related cancer crying. I guess that’s because it wasn’t crying at all; it was wailing. And it was almost comical in its melodrama. Like a scene borrowed from a dusty graveyard, where a mother throws herself upon her son’s coffin. I didn’t think I had it in me.

My decision to euthanize Franki was born of my love for her and my refusal to let her suffer. Yet the “nobility” of the action in no way compensates for the trauma of the experience of her warm body going limp in my lap. That feeling will never leave me.

Being a highly sensitive, detail-oriented person is a blessing and a curse. Sometimes it is both simultaneously. In processing grief, it is helpful to just let yourself feel and do whatever comes naturally. Unfortunately (or fortunately, according to psychologists), I am very good at *not* blocking out traumatic moments.

So while I currently mourn Franki’s death, I replay certain highlights that have stuck in my mind: the feel of her long, velvety ears, the little sideways dance she did in anticipation of treats, the way the vet, after injecting her for the last time, touched her head and murmured softly: “Rest now, rest.”

My grief is fresh and easily accessible, like the first sips of scalding, hot coffee sitting just beneath a cappuccino’s swirled foam. Right now, it takes very little to make me cry. I have cried every day since Franki died.

Anyone who has suffered the loss of a family member knows grief often comes in stages and at inconvenient moments. One of mine occurred when I was getting my hair cut and colored yesterday and, for whatever reason, I thought of Franki. A few seconds later, fresh tears

Ode to Franki Jo

Written by Wendy Doscher-Smith, BT Contributor
September 2011

dropped from my cheeks and chin onto the black, plastic smock, providing a little river for wayward hairs to travel down, before forming a tiny pool in my lap.

I have been through this experience before. In 2008, my dog Nyla, a stunning black Belgian shepherd we rescued from abusive neighbors, died in a veterinarian's office. Although the circumstances were different, I thought since I had experienced the loss of one pet, I'd have the one-up this time around.

I couldn't have been more wrong. In life, building a bond in every relationship is different. And in death, so is every goodbye.

Franki Jo was what my husband and I described as a "bagel," as she was part beagle and part basset hound. Really, what this combination made her was what we coined an "über hound," or hound to the highest degree.

Now you, or anyone who knows dog breeds, might have an idea as to the typical temperament of a hound -- or, in this case, a double-decker hound. Franki was high-strung but never yappy, determined but patient, strong-willed, loyal, and protective of her "pack" -- the other three or four dogs who lived with her, and with us, at any given time.

But above everything else, Franki was a highly spirited character. That dog was a grunting, snoring, jowls-jangling, howling handful! I suspect her, er, zest for life is what caused less appreciative owners to surrender her to the high-kill shelter she was bound for when I intervened and took her in years ago.

Franki was a double-decker hound, all right, with cheese and extra pickles. She would eat anything, including entire packets of Double Stuf Oreos, large bags of dog food that she climbed up on counters to get, and Starbucks Frappuccino lids. I will never forget taking her to the vet when my lid went missing and watching the doctor furrow her brow and say, "I can't palpate her middles!"

Life had not been good to Franki before we adopted her, but as is the canine way, she

Ode to Franki Jo

Written by Wendy Doscher-Smith, BT Contributor
September 2011

continued to be good in life. She tolerated all kinds of animals throughout the years, including an ornery parrot named Eggsbert, a curious ferret named Pickle, and a rambunctious puppy named “Li'l Man,” whose favorite sport was to climb on Franki and then slide down her back, before toddling to Franki's front and yanking on her leash.

I've lost count of the number of Halloween costumes Franki willingly wore over the years, just as I've lost count of the number of sweets she managed to sneak. Most recently she got into a cake I frosted with food-colored icing and startled us, rounding the corner of the living room with a half-blue face.

The absence of Franki does not make sense to me. Rationally, I understand what happened. But emotionally, there is a disconnect. I don't know why there is no crazed howling at mealtime or why her bed is vacant. Losing Franki has given me a new perspective. There really are few precious moments in life and they sometimes can get, inexplicably, yanked away.

I promised Franki her own box of Krispy Kreme donuts before she had to go. She wouldn't have to sneak them or maneuver cabinets with her pudgy paws to get at them. I never got a chance to deliver. I hope wherever she is now, there are many Krispy Kreme shops and that their flashing, red-lit neon signs, indicating a fresh batch is ready, are always on.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com