

A Note From the Other Side:
Posthumous Reflections of a Poodle

Hey Everybody,

It's Momo. So yeah, I'm a black Standard Poodle. I want to share my life (and death) story so that my insights might help others on the terrain that we will all eventually trot. I'm writing because it was suggested to me that I "journal" my recent experience while it's fresh in my mind. Contrary to what the experts claim about my species, my memory is much longer than three minutes. (Geez, give us some credit). Nonetheless, "putting it out there" for posterity will take the pressure off having to remember all the details.

So, last night I was just hanging out in one of my favorite spots next to the piano when I was presented with McDonald's fries and a quarter pounder. What? I even got chocolate, which I'd never before tasted (can I just say: it's not overrated). Then I got really sleepy, stretched one final time, and dreamed that I finally caught that super annoying squirrel on the bike path. He's had it coming.

All day I knew something was up because my mom and my adolescent brown Poodle brother, Louie, were being really moribund. The rain didn't help their already dour moods. Louie doesn't like going outside when it's raining because his hair frizzes and his curls get wiry. But I've always liked the tingly feeling of raindrops gently settling into my fur. It's the thunder I could live without. Although, come to think of it, my hearing has gotten so bad lately that even loud crashing noises like the blasting from the construction site next door doesn't faze me. I used to get such severe anxiety that I had to wear this totally ridiculous-looking thundeshirt to help me relax. Oops, sorry, my dad would tell me I'm getting off point. Where was I? Oh yeah, so following this dinner of all dinners, I was lying around like I do every night (and day, for that matter), getting a total body massage from my parents (heretofore referred to as "Mom" and "Dad," they're not my biological parents. They're the humans who took me home with them when I was seven weeks old. My birth parents were Mindy, a bitch somewhere in Maryland who produced so many kids she didn't even give them names. I remember having to fight my way through the crowd to get a few gulps of milk, but I didn't get to spend any quality time with her; and Rufus, a stud who was a deadbeat dad in every sense of the term. Once he'd procreated, he took off, completely guilt-free. Not even a tinge of remorse about not seeing (much less co-parenting) his offspring. I sometimes wonder how I share their

genetic traits because I'm so different. I'm my own dog. But, you know, we do tend to mock what we are to become.

Anyway, it was a hot July 4th when I came to live with Mom and Dad—I remember the date because I was freaked out by the fireworks and so many strange, unfamiliar scents. Looking back on it now, I was such a naïve pup! Even so, to this day I don't like the smell of smoke. Or low tide. Or parmesan cheese. Or Yves Saint Laurent perfume. Ew. (Perfume should be *subtle*, like animal carcass or horse manure).

I was named Momo, which means "dumpling" in Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan where Mom and Dad had traveled shortly before they got me. Mom is obsessed with dumplings. She can put away like 16 in one sitting. "Momo" finally stuck after they tossed out hundreds (no exaggeration) of potential names and went back-and-forth on the decision. (Side note: people are SO indecisive and capricious! Why can't they just do what dogs do? Know what you want, set your goal, design a plan, and boom, it's done. For instance, I hated that enclosed crate I slept in when I first arrived.

Too cramped, no soul. I broke out of there in no time flat and decided to carve out some of the sheet rock of the adjacent wall in my escape. Case and point.

Ok, I'll cut to the chase: man oh man, did I ever live the life. People call a luxurious, carefree existence the "life of Riley," but it should be changed to the life of Momo. I had a great run of it for 14+ joyous years, living in a manner to which I became very accustomed: occupying all soft surfaces of the house; high-powered hikes through the woods with Dad (he moves at a pretty good clip on only two legs); trotting daily alongside Mom who I always have to pace because she tends to over do it; vacations in the vast soft grasses of the Berkshires; finding my bowl filled with the choice piece of salmon or tuna that was meant for Dad's lunch; basking in the sounds of classical music which emanates from the piano 24/7 (well, *many* of the 24); meaningful petting sessions with people who confide in me and tell me I'm a really good listener; being loved up by my three girls who helped raise me and who I helped raise; licking an eclectic group of friends and lovely visitors and, oh, the new babies! I tried my best to be gentle with the grandkids, but as my arthritis kicked in, I got uncharacteristically cranky. I'm not proud of having growled upon occasion, but I know my family understands;

I love looking into the distance of the ever-changing river colors, following the flight paths of those long-winged great blue herons and cormorants and egrets and osprey (cute but definitely NOT nice birds); boat rides, car trips, even hotel overnights. So, yeah, these are merely a few of my favorites just off the top of my head. I mean how can I possibly encapsulate a lifetime of memories?

By the way, I should probably mention that I'm much more of a person-dog than a dog-dog. Other than Louie, my predecessor Zoey, and a couple of like-minded friends, I'm not a fan of other dogs. Just don't connect with them. And one more complaint /minor correction: Mom and Dad: I love you like crazy, so don't take this the wrong way, but when you talk in my voice, the voice you imagine is mine, you get it completely wrong. That low-pitched intonation, tongue-tied thing you do —that's not at all how I really sound nor how I hear my own voice. Just sayin'.

My voice might be a good segue to the hard part of my story: leading up to last night. And here's where I hope my experiences might enlighten others—people and canines alike. But first, another (important and pertinent) side note: you may wonder how I got to be smart and learned to express myself so articulately/eloquently. I attribute some of my skills to the genetics of the Standard Poodle, as we are a very intelligent breed. The rest I credit to osmosis—keeping my eyes and ears open at all times. It's amazing all the information you can pick up by watching and listening. Mom and Dad had high expectations of me but they weren't too pressuring or demanding. Mindy and Rufus may not have been emotionally present, but they each came from stellar pedigrees. Being the daughter of champion lineage on both sides, I've always held myself to the highest standards.

Ok, moving forward...

Hearing about my wonderful adventures and all the love in my life you might ask, "so where's the problem?" In fact, you're right to ask that, and there is no real problem. It's just that it was SO difficult for Mom and Dad and even for me to know when it was time for McDonalds, chocolate, and my send off.

I didn't just stop breathing or contract a fatal disease, nor was I in obvious pain or distress. I'm not saying that those situations are easier for all involved, but in the absence of some of the typical end-of-life measures and indications, my situation was less clear. Even veterinarians (who study us, keep us healthy, and know us pretty well), don't share a unanimous opinion. I sat in on and was

pacing around during many emotional conversations between Mom and Dad in which they agonized over if and when to have me “put down.” (Side note: why does death need a euphemism? “Put down “sounds unnecessarily negative and scary. Our favorite position is lying down! Recumbency is our middle name! No need to sugarcoat it. Please just call it what it is. Euthanization. We’re cool with it. We’re okay with death). For months, I could see the sadness on their faces. I could feel it in their hands, which seemed to rub me in a grasping way I hadn’t felt before. Their overwhelming love for me was palpable; they didn’t want me to know a moment of discomfort. For my part, I tried to show them that I have complete trust in their judgment and I’d be fine with whatever they decided.

Because we dogs rarely hear humans discuss death, I was surprised to find that virtually everyone has a strong opinion about it, especially when it comes to *our* deaths. And apparently, there’s a strong need to express those opinions even when they’re not solicited. (Right?) There’s a great deal of speculation about what we, your pets, are thinking and feeling, what we experience, what we want, what’s most important to us, what determines our quality of life, etc. With good intentions, one frequent point people make is: “Think about if ___lived in the wild. What would he do now?” That one did NOT resonate with Mom. It’s pretty obvious how Poodles would fare in the wild. Then there’s the perspective thing: “Keep in mind that it IS just a dog.” True enough. Can’t argue with that. Yes, of course there is a hierarchy of life value. So if that line of thinking helps you, great, run with it. (Grrrr) But you and I both know that the comparison isn’t so important; our relationship is unique, our spirits connect in ways that are sometimes deeper and more profound than with our own species.

Still other people advised Mom and Dad to talk to me (I kid you not), to ask me to give the signal when I’m ready. Across the board, people offered absolute assurance that it would be clear, that Mom and Dad would know when it was the right time, that I’d give them “a look” or a sigh, or an unmistakable sign of resignation. But the truth is I couldn’t: I wasn’t ready. I would never be ready.

Last (most important) side note: we pets are grateful that you can and do help us end our lives with dignity. On behalf of all of us, thank you for taking care of us, loving us, bringing us into your warm homes and families. The fact is, there is no “right time.” But we trust you to decide when you think it’s best to let us go.

There’s just never enough time.

Wishing you all a great life and a peaceful death like mine,

Momo

P.S. Dad, you often joked that in me you had found your perfect woman. When you gave my paw a gentle squeeze, I squeezed you back. I know I don't need to tell you that my return squeeze meant that in you I had found my perfect man. I wasn't joking and I suspect you weren't either.

Momo as dictated to Stacey Rose