

Shining Memory: Eulogy for a Golden Retriever-Chow

Oct 27, 2010, by Laura Bernell

Beloved dogs bring beauty, love, and even a sense of the divine into the homes and lives of their people. Their loss leaves memories of those eternal gifts.

These words are an attempt to express the depth of grief at the end of the life of a beautiful Golden Retriever-Chow called Billie-Girl. They are also an attempt to express the depth of gratitude for being blessed with her gentle, protective presence for 14 years.

Gentle Guardian

All who knew Billie-girl knew a sweet-gentle presence and a resolute protectiveness, embodied in a golden fleeced canine. She was the gentle guardian. That is what Billie-girl was: a gentle guardian. She guarded her mistress on the hiking trails. She guarded the household's other dog, a feisty little terrier named Waldo. She guarded Waldo against bigger dogs that he antagonized. She even guarded the peacefulness within our home, when humans arguing disturbed that peace, and she moved calmly from person to person, as if to say, "Shhh. Be calm. It's all right."

She guarded us in our home, letting intruders or strangers know with one insistent, jarring bark that they were being watched. But she welcomed all whom we did with loving gentleness, extending her paw - literally - to the people we trusted.

Offered meat to eat by human fingers, she was always careful to take the morsel gently, without even slightly grazing the hand that offered it. Wary that a human whom she did not know well was coming too close to Waldo, she quietly set herself between that human and her little-brother dog. And there she lay herself down, steadfast, vigilant.

Shining Golden Retriever/Chow

When Billie comes to mind, she comes to mind shining. Her Golden Chow/Retriever fur glistened like filigree. But more, her soul glowed. She illustrated how substantial is the quality of sweetness. She never had to be right, or better, or have more or even as much as Waldo. She gave in to Waldo almost every time, and when she didn't give in, she didn't so much fight as simply firmly assert her right to her bone, or a ball. There is much to be learned from Billie-girl, the Golden Retriever-Chow. Much to be learned.

But after 14 years, there recently came a day she could no longer rise to her own four feet to greet our coming through the door. Her spine had degenerated, leaving her legs useless. It was the only time she ever audibly complained, letting out a piteous but not too loud mewl - unable to lift herself and be a dog with dignity, and hold a dignified place in our home.

Ending a Gentle Life, Gently

It was time to put her peace before her willingness to do whatever might have pleased us, which would have been to continue to keep us company. She would have done just about anything I ever asked of her. But to live unable to get up - well, that was too much to ask of her. So a veterinarian came to our home, and gently ended a gentle life.

Now this is a dogless house. And it is indeed - less. It is a house less ennobled, less imbued with spiritual presence, with less beauty. It is a house without Madame Golden Retriever/Chow, Billie-girl. But being in our memories, Billie is still in the world, shining.

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