

A Letter to My Unsung Hero

Category: Unsung Heroes

written by Laurel Hunt | April 18, 2023

Dear Veterinary Technician,

It's been thirty years, but I remember how softly you entered the exam room, holding Marmaduke's leash. I remember your porcelain skin and beautiful long hair framing your young face. I dabbed my tears with a Kleenex. I didn't want Marmaduke to think I was upset with her. She'd endured surgery and four months of chemo, but now it wasn't working. I'd viewed the X-ray of her lungs dotted with metastatic tumors. Hope had turned to cold fear and despair.

"I'm sorry," you said, a gentle but profound acknowledgement of loss hovering in the room. You might have assumed your clinical posture, reviewing the bag of prescriptions you handed me, then directing me to check-out. Instead, you were quiet for a moment, allowing me space. You understood that I was in a fog of anticipatory grief. I couldn't absorb any clinical language; I wanted to grab Marmaduke's leash and run as fast as possible to someplace where cancer couldn't find us. My mind swirled with questions I couldn't bear to ask. How and where and when would the end come?

I had little experience with pet loss. My childhood collie, Sheba, died from heart failure at home, one evening while I was at a school dance. Years later I would learn that my dad, a physician, had euthanized Sheba with morphine from his doctor's bag. I thought she had died in her sleep. A pall hung over our house until we adopted Sherry, a lively English shepherd pup. I was away at college when Sherry died; mostly, I remember the sadness in Dad's voice when he told me. After years in no-pets-allowed apartments, I'd adopted Marmaduke. She wasn't an easy dog, but she was a good one. We'd bonded deeply through her cancer treatments, as I became closely attuned to her symptoms. But would I know if she was suffering?

"You will know when it's time," you said, as if reading my mind. A brief hesitation, and then you added, "God will take care of her when you no longer can."

I've never forgotten your words. Somehow, they freed me and gave me peace. When Marmaduke's time came, they lifted me up and helped me let her go. They comforted me then, and in all the losses, both human and animal, over the years since. It's time that I said, "Thank you."

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