

# REFLECTIONS

Remembering the people and dogs of  **Guide-Dogs**  
FOR THE BLIND

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 2013

## Sherby Says Goodbye

**Sherby (May, 2001 – February, 2013)**

Submitted by Natalie Martiniello

Dear mom,

It is so strange to say good-bye. We've never really said good-bye before. Sometimes, we've had to part for short moments. When you told me I was ready to retire and that it was your turn to take care of me, sometimes you'd have to leave in the morning without me. But I knew, and you knew, that these moments apart, and the distance, would be short-lived – that we would always come back to each other at the end of each day. Each night, I would find you in the house. I would loyally rest my head on your lap. You would scratch my ears and hug me. You would tell me that I was a good girl. Then, we'd walk together to my big pillow, and you'd say goodnight. But at the end of each dark night, we knew we would see each other again.

Somehow, I know that this time it is different. I saw it in your eyes. I felt it in the air. Something in my heart told me so. I do not know words as you do. I cannot find the words to say what this thing is. But I know it is different, and that we would have to approach this time apart differently. For both of us, it was different and it would require us to be stronger than we've had to be in the past.

You are laying here on the couch. My big pillow is right beside you on the floor. Carlina is curled up against me – her head resting on me, our paws intertwined.

I don't think any of you know that something has happened yet. We are all just resting, living in the silence. It all just seems to be a normal day... until you call me for dinner. I do not come.

I know you are thinking that is strange. I am thinking the same thing. There is food waiting for me in the other room. Why am I not getting up? Wait. I realize I am trying... but it is not working. There is a weight pressing down on my back legs. I am trying to pull myself up... but it is not working. You come to see me, to try to help me up. I know you are thinking it is just my old bones, but something inside me tells me it is more than that this time. so

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much more.

I stay laying on my pillow. Everyone is beside me, trying to see what is wrong, and I know you recognize the signs. It is just as it was a few weeks before. My head feels funny, like it is off to one side. My eyes are not working very well at all. I am sniffing the air, trying to find where I hear your voice. You touch my ear and I flinch because I did not see it coming. But when I know it is you, I wag. I hear you laugh and say "only sherby would still wag, even during a stroke".

This word, stroke, is a strange word to me. I've only heard you use it once before. A few suppers ago. It was when I felt strange inside, just like now. When my legs weren't working and my eyes and my ears too and my mouth couldn't close properly. I wagged then too.

I need you to understand why I wagged then, and why I wagged now. Because I am happy. I do not need many things to be happy. I've only ever needed you. well, the food and the strawberries helped. That just makes me wag harder. But if you are sad now and wondering whether I suffered during my final moments on this earth, I want you to remember that love is so simple, and so constant. For it touches us all and carries us forward and nurtures us and does not desert us, even when our bodies and our health do. I wagged because our love was still there, and still is there now, so what is there to be sad about?

I heard you use the phone, that funny thing that makes noise sometimes. Anthony came home. He approached me and my tail wagged some more. Together, Anthony, your mom and dad transferred me onto this funny flat thing, and I was lifted into the air. Usually, I would have found this very strange and probably would have tried to jump off. Puppies don't really like to be so far from the ground. But though I was wagging and happy, my bones were tired and I couldn't move, and so I let them and your love carry me forward. I did not protest or try to jump off. I remembered your words, and let you take care of me this time.

In the car, you stayed beside me. You pet me and held my paws. You touched my soft ears. I was trembling a bit because I know the car means we are going to the puppy doctor, and I never liked that very much. But then I started to relax, because, you were here with me and telling me it would be okay. You always trusted me, and I have never doubted you.

At the puppy doctor, I was brought into a room. The doctor looked into my eyes and looked at me all over. She spoke to you but I did not understand. I heard words that sounded like "cancer", and that word again "stroke". Then you were silent for a moment and said something else. And she said something that sounded like "...quality of life" and "she had a happy life". The puppy doctor patted my head gently. Everyone seemed sad, but I didn't really understand why. Actually, I was really wondering whether anyone forgot that we left the house without my supper. It was getting to be way past my eating time, and this is a big deal to me, you know.

The puppy doctor and your mom left the room for awhile. It was just me, you and Anthony. I like Anthony. He cares for you a lot like I do, but I know that even though he's around, you still have always loved me just as much. It makes me happy that many people care for you. this has always been my job, but I like to know that when you leave each day, others do the same.

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#### ABOUT ME



#### Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB)

We provide skilled mobility dogs to legally blind individuals across the US and Canada at no cost to them.

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You were on the phone. I think you were calling that happy place in California that I still have not forgotten. What a happy place. You spoke to a few people there. I could tell they were so understanding. I could hear it in your voice, that whoever you were speaking to, they understood what was happening and were supporting you, helping you make some kind of important decision that looked to be hard, but right. And I'm okay with tough. As long as you think it's right, I will never doubt you.

This is how I see it. Sometimes, in my life, I have had to make very tough decisions. I have had to decide whether to walk forward, or around an obstacle. I have had to put your safety and your happiness first, and the path was not always clear. Sometimes I was afraid, or unsure, but all I had was my training and my love and my instinct. You had the same this night too, and I know from experience, that these things are never wrong.

A lot of time has passed by. A lot of talking between you and Anthony. A lot of hugs and petting. I am wagging and wondering why everyone is making such a big deal about things. I have you and that is all I need, though I was happy to get that cookie jus now. I am wagging. Wag, wag, wag. I want you to know I am grateful, and happy, and thankful. I am so grateful, and happy... and thankful.

I am being moved to what the puppy doctor calls "a more comfortable place". I am resting on warm blankets. Anthony, you, your mom and even your brother sit beside me. Everyone is petting me and telling me how good I am.

I especially notice you.

I notice you beside me.

I notice your hands looking at me, as though you are trying to remember me, imprint me in your memory in your heart forever. But oh, my best friend, my soulmate, remember that it is not the way we look or sit or the things we do that leave lasting pawprints on the heart. It is the thing itself, we call love. It has no substance nor does it look like anything in specific. But I promise you, you will never forget what my love feels like. I will cloak you in it, even when I am called away. And even though you say it is your time to care for me, we both know, I have never stopped watching over you... and I never will. Your brother brought me a basket of strawberries. My most favourite thing in the whole, wide world. Now I am really happy. I even try getting up. You have to admit, that was a really good try this time, but it still doesn't work so well. No matter. I'll eat. As long as I have a labby tongue to lick, those strawberries will find a way in my belly. And they do. You each take one to feed me.

The last one I eat was given by you. this was my last strawberry, and my last meal. And I am so happy you thought to give me my favourite food.

The puppy doctor is back. I think I am starting to understand the tears, and the words. And what this strange feeling is. A little voice inside me is telling me I need to go. I think it is strange because I do not go anywhere without you. I must stay beside you always throughout life, for that is why I am here. I hear you struggle with something very new in your heart. Throughout our time together, your instinct has been to protect me. You have always fought to get me the best vet care. You have always opted for the treatment, the pills, the care that would keep me going, keep me happy and healthy and well. But I see the struggle in your eyes, because something will be happening very soon that you are allowing, and it is something that feels unnatural to you – because your instinct is telling you that you should be

fighting for me still, and instead, the right thing to do this time is to let it happen, and to let me go. I hear the words in your heart, as you ignore the urge to say, "stop", to protect me one final time.

And that is when I know. this time, you have to let me go.

Now, I know you said it was your turn to care for me, but as I lay here thinking about those strawberries I just ate, I know that we have never taken turns – I have cared for you and you have cared for me. This is how it works, and how it always will. And though I cannot talk, this is what I want you to know.

It is okay. Please don't hurt as you say this goodbye. Please don't believe for a single moment that letting me go means that I am gone. When I was very young, I left the happy place in California and I went to a special family who loved me so very much. But then I had to say goodbye and return to the guide dog school. I worked with a special person who trained me to care for you. but then I said goodbye to her and started my journey with you.

Now it is my time to leave you on this earth, but this goodbye is different. It is different because we are strong for each other, and because the memories we have forged will hold us up and keep us close, even after you let me go.

Everything is becoming quieter, yet also, strangely, louder. As if, I truly hear what you are saying. I am resting my head on your lap, and you tell me I am good. And I truly believe you. and I truly feel loved.

I did not feel the needle. I need you to know this. I did not hurt.

Images run through your mind. Our first walk. Our memories. Our times together, both happy and sad. Both public and private. Like a film, they run through your mind, and before my eyes, and I think, "what a beautiful, beautiful story we have shared".

Those final few moments lasted forever, as though we forced them to linger as long as we could, but so quickly, my head felt heavy and I rested it on my paw. I wanted you to know that I would just be sleeping. I hear you say "you look like you are resting" and I am happy. Because it is peaceful, and the very last thing I hear you say before my eyes close for the final time are these words:

"thank you, sherby, so much, thank you".

And as my eyes droop and I begin to float away, I think, no, my precious friend, my loyal companion....

...thank you.

I am floating. It is light. I have not felt this healthy and young and whole for so long. I can move and jump.. and fly. Was this how it felt when you first held my harness and walked with me? You said then that it felt like flying, and what a beautiful, free feeling it is. I am happy I gave that to you.

You are getting up, and I hover around you, cloak you in my love, where I will, instinctively, remain forever, tucked within your soul, carried within your heart. I am far away, yet still so close beside you. and that is the beauty of love.

I know you were not ready. That you would never truly be ready. But I am writing this now because I want you to be at peace, as I am. I am floating, higher and higher. There are big, pearly white gates. Someone is calling me forward. I know this word, and I go because it feels safe, and warm, and

right... and home.

I looked at you far below, and I know that where I am going, I will continue doing what I do most best of all. I will watch over you, and truly be the angel you have always said I am. I will never stop watching over you.

Here the ground is soft and warm. The sun shines brightly and heals my body. I am surrounded by love. There is a buffet of strawberries from every country in the world laid out before me. A platter of dog cookies, and kibbles, and more strawberries is put before my nose. I sniff approvingly and take it all – and the platter keeps refilling.

I see all the other guide dogs that have gone before me. They each wag and prance and seem so light and free. We have all we need to feel whole here, and best of all, we each possess a window, buried deeply within our hearts, that lets us see down to where you are, so that we can continue guiding you forward – even after our time on earth.

And I will continue guiding you my friend. I will hold you up and hold you strong. I will continue showing you how much you can accomplish each time you take a step ahead. I cannot guide you with a harness or down a paved path. But I can guide you through your life and within your heart.

And at the end of your journey, I will be hear to welcome you, just as you always welcomed me.

Do not be sad for me my friend. Be happy, because what we shared is beautiful. This thing called life is not always easy, but what we shared was momentous – and far stronger, and greater, and more worthy than life itself. It runs much deeper, and thus, does not die, even after I do.

So know this final thing, my friend. I am not gone. And just as you explained to me once I retired, it is never truly goodbye. This goodbye feels more permanent, but I will always be right there beside you. and as I close this final tribute to our story, I want to end by telling you the very same words you told me as I closed my eyes to my time on earth.

Thank you, my friend, thank you so much. For loving me, and always doing what was right. Even if it felt so hard. For giving me all that I gave you in return. Thank you, for letting me go, so that I could take my place in the sky and become an angel who will always shine high above you.

Thank you... so much... thank you.

Posted by Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) at 8:22 AM



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