



Duli

9-28-06 to 3-19-08

By Robert Francis

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Duli (pronounced Doo'lee) was a Jack Russell Terrier who lived with our family through most of his short life. Our daughter Sarah and our son Peter brought him home one day when he was only about five or six weeks old. He was born September 28, 2006 and died on the last day of winter, March 19, 2008.

From earliest puppyhood, Duli was afflicted with a condition of the cerebellum that caused him to be extremely uncoordinated. He couldn't stand still in one place but would wobble, side to side. His little stub of a tail could not wag but only bobbed up and down with hesitation. Running for Duli meant bravely making a series of stiff-legged jumps in the desired direction, never being sure, from leap to leap, exactly where or even if his feet would land on the earth. He fell down a thousand times a day, but from each fall Duli always picked himself up to get on with the business of living. Climbing steps was a major undertaking. Most days, he was outdoors all day long, playing with the older dogs, visiting with the cats, some of whom were among his best friends, chewing on bones and keeping a close check on everyone and everything. Except on very cold or very hot days, Duli never came inside the house until after supper. He spent the evenings socializing with the family and napping in the living room or dining room before retiring for the night in our daughter Sarah's bedroom. He never complained, except to sometimes whine or howl at the door if he thought he was being left out of some interesting activity.

Duli's life was filled with challenge and pain, but he lived life with constant joy and was a source of joy for others. And then one day, Duli lay down and died. Earlier that day he was fine. He'd been walking with our son John up on the hill. Not fifteen minutes later, our son Luke found Duli lying on his side in the barn, panting hard, as though severely overheated. Luke carried Duli to the house. My wife Janet held him in her lap while we tucked wet, cold towels around his stiff and quivering body. His neck and head seemed to be the only parts of his body that could move, but he was still conscious. I called to him softly, "Duli. Where are you Duli?" and his eyes focused on my face. Sarah took his temperature and found it to be 110+. Duli was quite literally burning up with fever. We spread a towel on the kitchen floor and laid more cold towels over him. His heavy panting quieted as his lungs filled with fluid and his heart raced with an irregular rhythm. I watched his eyes shift focus from where we were to where we cannot see, and I whispered, "You're a good boy, Duli. It's OK. You can go there. You can go." Gazing

into the unseen distance, he growled and snapped his teeth once, then quieted himself. A moment later, Duli was gone.

Our son John and I dug Duli's grave under the white pine tree, up above the osi (sweat house). Janet picked the spot. It's one of the places where Duli used to enjoy afternoon naps in the sun. Sarah and I carried Duli out, wrapped in a sheet. The whole family gathered around, my mom too, as she was at our house visiting. We opened up the sheet, and the other dogs came around to sniff Duli's nose and walk sadly away. We laid Duli's body in the grave, offering tobacco and prayers, and our sons Peter and Luke filled the grave with earth. Afterwards, we covered the grave with rocks. I looked around and noticed how quiet everything had become, all the animals and birds and poultry were still. Even the ducks, normally in constant chatter with one another, were sitting on their feet, their heads under their wings.

Duli's short life was an inspiration for many. He taught us that although life will always have its challenges, pains and sorrows, the purpose of life is in the living and in giving ourselves that others may live.

I have never been accused of treating a dog like a human being. But I understand it to be, as P. T. Travers wrote in the children's book *Mary Poppins*, "We are all made of the same stuff, remember.... The same substance composes us – the tree overhead, the stone beneath us, the bird, the beast, the star – we are all one, all moving to the same end."

Notes:

The quote is from P. T. Travers' book *Mary Poppins*, chapter 10 entitled "Full Moon."

Dr. Sheri Moellinger, our family veterinarian, close friend and my clan sister, told us the fever is what killed Duli. She said a fever of 110+ degrees will cause cellular breakdown and general failure of all the organs in the body. We don't exactly know what caused the fever. It was a cool day, not hot enough for any animal to suffer a heat stroke. The condition progressed too quickly to have been caused by an infection. There was no sign of any injury, and there no poisons on the place that could have caused this.

There is a possibility of some sort of stroke or brain hemorrhage related to his lifelong brain condition, but we don't know for sure.

Dog Stories

By Robert Francis

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My wife Janet refuses to watch “dog movies,” which she would define as movies in which dogs are cast as main characters. Janet will not watch “horse movies” either, seeing them as a sub-category of “dog movies,” horses being, from our point of view, simply very large, vegetarian dogs that happen to have single-toed hooves rather than paws. Put in a video recording of *Old Yeller*, *Sounder*, *Where the Red Fern Grows* or *Black Beauty* and Janet will quietly vacate the room.

The reasoning behind Janet’s prejudice against “dog movies” is that “All dog stories are sad.” Actually, she is probably right. I have sat in talking circles that have “gone to the dogs,” so to speak. If one person in a circle tells a dog story, everyone in the circle will have a dog story to tell. Before long, eyes are streaming and noses are running. Everyone feels better afterward, but in the meantime, it gets pretty messy. I think the reason that dog stories are so sad is that although dogs are our best friends, their lives, on average, are much shorter than ours.

You, the reader, may be wondering where I’m going with this. “Is he going to tell a dog story?” you’re thinking. And it could be you remember the story I wrote about our little terrier Duli. From feedback received, I know the “Duli” story had people weeping from New York to Washington State. But the answer is yes; I *am* going to tell another dog story, so either stop reading now or grab a handful of tissues.

In January 1995, Janet and I, along with our four children: Peter, Sarah, John and Luke moved from the farm near Advance, in southeast Missouri, where we lived in a mobile home next door to my parents, to the tiny Bates County town of Amsterdam, in western Missouri, just one mile from the Kansas line.

A few weeks before we moved, a little dog came to the farm. She was a miniature Australian Shepherd, but having never seen or even heard of a miniature Australian Shepherd before; I thought she was a mixed breed. My, wasn’t she a pretty little thing – white with blue merle markings. She wanted to be with us but was afraid to come within 40 feet of anyone. I finally won her trust by lying flat and motionless on the cold ground until she gained the courage to gingerly approach and lick my outstretched hand. From that time she was our dog and we were her family. John named her Little Feather. Her hair looked feathery, and when she ran across the fields, she looked like she was floating, with her feet hardly touching the ground. It was good to have a dog. At this time, the only dog we had was the Great Pyrenees, named Caleb. Caleb wasn’t really a pet; he just guarded the sheep. Moving is always hard, especially for little children

leaving the comfort of grandparents' arms. Little Feather made the move easier for all of us. She rode curled up at Peter's feet in the floorboard of the big U-Haul truck I drove while the rest of the family came behind in the family station wagon.

I was to be the new pastor of the Amsterdam Baptist Church. This may be a curious revelation to some readers. And our family was to live, at least temporarily, in the Baptist parsonage. This was a difficult transition for all of us. We are not town folk. We planned to immediately start looking for a small farm of our own but had no idea how long this might take. In the meantime, we were going to be able to keep a few sheep on a parishioner's farm in Kansas as soon as we could fix the fences properly and make another trip to southeast Missouri. Just as we were not town people, Little Feather did not adapt well to being a town dog. The day after we arrived in Amsterdam, she stopped a gravel truck on the street in front of our house. Australian Shepherds are "headers." They like to get in front of things and stop them, be they sheep or cows or trucks. Little Feather was very proud that her small but fierce presence in the road had actually brought this monstrous truck to a screeching halt. She tried the same thing the following day. This time the driver made no attempt to stop or even to slow down, and Little Feather lay crushed and dying on the pavement.

On a Saturday in early February of that same year, we loaded our family into the station wagon and drove to Joplin for a White River Band Cherokee social. After midnight we were headed home along a lonely stretch of Bates County Highway F. I was the only one awake in the car, a good thing, since I was driving. Up ahead I saw what I first thought to be a skunk lying in the very middle of the highway. As I drew closer, I detected some movement in the supposed skunk. This prompted me to slow down. Approaching more closely, I saw that this was no skunk at all. Bringing the station wagon to a complete stop, I got out of the car and a moment later dropped two small puppies into the laps of our sleepy children. One pup had the distinctive black and white markings of a Border collie. The other, with black and tan markings on a short coat, appeared to be a rottweiler mix. They were no more than six weeks old, and both were female.

The rottweiler mix we promptly named Chance in honor of our unexpected discovery of the puppies. We named the Border collie Guess, after another Border collie we had seen in a movie (not a "dog movie") whose owners had great fun with people trying to *guess* the name of their dog. We kept Guess but would eventually give Chance to my parents.

In the summer of that same year, I opened the door of the parsonage one morning to find a strange dog on the front step. She was young, around the same age or just a bit older than Chance and Guess. Around Border collie size, this dog was black with sticking-up ears and a rather wolfish appearance, not unlike some of the old-time Indian dogs and with a peculiarly intelligent look in her eyes. "Git! Git out of here!" I shouted and promptly chased the dog off the doorstep and out of the yard.

During the next week we continued to see the mysterious black dog around Amsterdam. First in this yard, next in that yard, she seemed to be making the rounds of the entire little town. About a week after I had first seen her, she was back on our doorstep. "Git out of here!" I shouted, "You can't stay here! We have enough dogs."

But this time she didn't run away. She just backed out if kicking range and kept looking up at me with those uncanny eyes. As I crossed the street to the church, the dog followed at a safe distance. A couple of hours later, when I came out to walk to the post office, the dog arose from where she had been lying on the church porch and followed along. From time to time I would turn to berate her. I even threw handfuls of gravel at her, but she continued to follow.

"Looks like you've got yourself a dog," quipped the postmistress with a smile as I entered the post office. Through the window she could see the dog waiting just outside the door.

"No I don't," I said. "We have more than enough dogs as it is."

"Looks like that one has other ideas," the postmistress answered. "She's been all over town. Seems like she's chosen *you*."

The dog followed me back to the church and lay on the porch the whole time I was in my office. When I went back to the parsonage for lunch, she followed and lay on the front step, until I was ready to go back to the church. Then she followed me back to the church and back to the parsonage again at the end of the day. Each time I yelled at her, kicked at her, stomped my foot at her and threw gravel at her. The next day, the same routine was repeated. By the third day, I was yelling less vociferously, stamping less vigorously, kicking with far less conviction and throwing gravel not at all. When I reached the parsonage door at the end of the day, I turned around and spoke to the dog. "Looks like I'll either have to shoot you or keep you," I said. That night I fed her along with the other dogs, and for the first time, I reached out my hand and petted her. As I stroked her head and looked into those mysteriously intelligent eyes, I understood that this was a medicine dog. She chose us, not because she needed us, but because we needed her. We named her Girty.

Two years later we moved out of the Baptist parsonage in Amsterdam and came to the little 11 acre farm on which we have lived ever since. Guess and Girty were very happy to move with us. They enjoyed hunting together along the nearby creek and roaming through the woods and pecan groves. In the years before we fenced the place, we marveled that the "granny girls," as we eventually came to call them, were never killed on V Highway that runs along the north side of our place. At least three other dogs that came here after Guess and Girty had their lives brought to premature closure on that highway. Girty did get hit by a car once. In fact, I was driving the car. You see, Girty never liked for all of us to go away at once. When we did so, she would chase the car. One Sunday morning, shortly after we moved to the farm, we were heading off to church. I was still the pastor after all. On this particular morning, Girty ran fast chasing the station wagon as we left the driveway. She ran just past us and veered in front of us so close I couldn't see where she was. I hit her pretty hard, knocking her off the highway. She ran yelping up the creek bank disappearing into the woods. I stopped the car, and we got out and called to her. Some of us even walked up to creek looking for her but finally had to give it up. "We'll search some more when we get home from church," I said, and was fully convinced we would find Girty either dead or too badly injured to save. But when we arrived home from church, along with Guess, Girty was there in the driveway to greet us, walking stiffly but otherwise no worse for her experience. She was more careful with her car chasing after that, and of course she never chased anyone else's car, just ours.

Girty remained a medicine dog. Each morning she was there to greet me when I first came out of the house, and when I left she was there to greet me when I returned, even if it was at midnight or later. If I was dealing with some crisis or some inner conflict or discouragement, Girty always seemed to know about it. She would seek me out for one of her long petting sessions. It's hard to describe or explain, but at such times I could feel the strength and encouragement, the good medicine coming from her. I think others of our family have had similar experiences, and even some outside our household, have told me that when they have been here and were feeling down or sad about something, Girty would seek them out and nudge them or brush a pant leg with her paw until they sat to pet her and receive some of her special healing.

There are many stories of medicine dogs – dogs which come into the lives of human beings, sometimes mysteriously, but always bringing some healing, some wholeness to the people they choose. In the fall of 2000, my dad was in the later stages of Parkinson's disease. Momma mentioned that she wished they had a dog. Chance had died some time before. Janet and I decided we would buy my parents a rat terrier puppy, bring it through the housebreaking and early socialization and obedience training stage and present it to Momma and Daddy at Christmas time. The plan was to not even to tell them about the puppy until Christmas. We named the new puppy Jackson. A few days after bringing Jackson into our home, I was talking with Momma on the phone when she suddenly said, "Oh, we have a dog now."

"You do?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "Just a few days ago, this dog just came here. He's not a puppy. He's an older dog. He's short-haired and mostly white with some darker markings and a short tail. I thought he was a rat terrier, but someone else said he looks like what they call a Jack Russell, so we named him Happy Jack. He sure is something," she continued. "When the nurse comes to see about your Daddy, or when anyone else comes just to visit, Happy Jack walks out to their car and escorts them to the house. He looks very important when he's doing this, and he makes everyone feel good. He makes us happy, because he's always happy. And when someone is ready to leave, Happy Jack escorts them back to their car."

"Well," I said to Janet after hanging up the phone, "It sounds like Jackson will be staying with us longer than we figured."

On a certain day in October, Happy Jack stayed closer than usual all day long. At 6:00 the next morning, Daddy smiled and quietly rose from his bed, leaving his body behind. In the days leading up to the funeral, Happy Jack did his best to bring some cheer to everyone who came to my mom's house.

About a week after the funeral, Momma called to say, "Happy Jack left today. When I first went out this morning, he looked up at me and said 'Good bye.' Oh, he didn't say it in English," she added, "but he did tell me 'Good bye' just as surely as if he had said it in English. Then he trotted off across the field. I called to him. 'Happy Jack!' I called. 'Come back!' He stopped and looked back. He looked at me for just a moment, wagged his little tail and told me 'Good bye' again. Then he turned away and went on across the field. I called and called, but he just kept going. I know he won't be back. He was here when he needed us. Now he's gone to help someone else. So, I guess I don't have a dog anymore.

“Well Momma,” I said. “Actually, you do have a dog.” At Christmas time we took Jackson to his new home.

On Tuesday, November 11, 2008, Girty left us. On Monday, November 10, she was here and looking well for a dog of 14 years old or thereabouts. Her teeth were sound. Her eyesight and hearing seemed good. Upon first getting up, she moved rather stiffly, but she could still run when she wanted to. On the afternoon of November 11, Janet asked, “Has anyone seen Girty today?” No one had. During the next two days we searched the whole place for Girty. The entire farm is fenced now, with upper and lower pastures established and fences surrounding the house, barn and gardens in between and gates across the driveway. The “granny girls” have never gone beyond those fences since they were built. We searched everywhere within the fences and even outside the fences all along the highway. Girty used to always climb up on top of the osi or sweat house when the tarps were on it, so Janet wanted to bury her near the osi. But we couldn’t bury Girty, because for all our careful searching and double searching and triple searching, we never found Girty. Girty, the medicine dog, left as mysteriously as she arrived.

As I write this on December 1, 2008, Guess is still with us. She has cataracts and seems selectively hard of hearing. Aside from that, she is, just as Girty was, in good shape for a dog of nearly 14 years in age. We also have Chloe, the current Great Pyrenees guard dog. Both, especially Guess, mourned for a few days, as we all did, after Girty left us. But then, I don’t think Girty has gone that far away. She is still watching over us and knows that although she has gone on ahead, we are all following close behind.

What’s Your Dog’s Name? Guess

By Robert Francis
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It was February 1995, and our family was coming home from a White River Band Cherokee social that had been held in Joplin. Just after midnight, on what was now a Sunday morning, I exited Missouri Highway 71 at the village of Passaic and headed west on Highway F across the Bates County prairie toward our home in the little town of Amsterdam, just one mile from the Kansas line.

The engine noise of the old Mercury station wagon and rhythmic breathing of my sleeping wife Janet and our four children was all that broke the silence. In the distance, illuminated by the car’s headlights, I saw what I first took to be a dead skunk lying in the middle of the road. Detecting movement, I slowed the car, not wanting to hit a still-living animal that might suddenly dart one way or the other. Drawing close, I saw that what I had originally thought to be a skunk was, instead, two tiny puppies huddled together in the center of the pavement. As the car slowed to a stop, the rest of the family began to stir, wondering what was wrong. Without a word, I got out of the car and

scooped up the little vagabonds. Returning, I dropped the puppies in our son John's lap and continued driving down the lonely highway toward home.

We estimated the puppies to be no more than six weeks old. We had no way of knowing whether or not the two were littermates any more than we knew exactly why they came to by lying in the exact middle of a highway, far from the nearest house, on a cold February night. One puppy had short black hair with tan trim and had the look of a rottweiler mix. The other, by all appearances, was a fluffy, black and white Border collie pup. The rottweiler-looking puppy we named Chance. Later, Chance became my mom and dad's dog. She died more than a decade ago. The other puppy, the one that looked like a Border collie, came to be called Guess.

Guess has been part of our family for almost 15 years. A little over two years after we found her on the highway, she moved with us from the town of Amsterdam to the little farm on V highway on which we have lived ever since. In spite of having a joke name copied from a Hallmark movie, Guess has always been of a serious, if not always practical from of mind. After moving to the farm, Guess enjoyed daily forays with our other dog, Girty, through neighboring fields and pecan groves or along the banks of Pecan Branch Creek. The first Christmas we had here was a White Christmas, just as this past Christmas was. I remember Guess, as a young dog, walking out ahead of us as Janet and I took a long walk that day. How pretty she was, her black and white form contrasting and blending with the snowy landscape. With strangers, Guess was watchful but never aggressive. Before we fenced the place, Guess had the peculiar habit of taking naps in the middle of Highway V, just at the end of our long driveway. I wonder where she got that habit. If a car or coal truck came along, stopped and honked, Guess would always take time for a leisurely stretch before yielding the right-of-way. Watching that, we never dreamed Guess would live to be an old dog, hobbling around with arthritis, almost completely deaf and nearly blind from cataracts.

During the frigid cold of the past several nights, we've been bringing Guess indoors to sleep in the utility room. She's been spending a good deal of the daytime indoors as well. We are all very used to having Guess around. I am sure our youngest son, Luke, cannot even remember a time when Guess was not part of the family. Janet says, "All dog stories are sad." I suppose this is no exception. Just after midnight last night, Janet was awakened by a little bark or yelp that Guess made. Janet got there just in time to see Guess breathe her last. Guess's body is lying in the snow now, out near the sweat house where she liked to nap in the sun after the fence denied her access to her beloved highway. As she has lain there Janet, Peter, Sarah, John, Luke and I have all paused in contemplation and remembrance, as have Chloe the Great Pyrenees, Burley the Australian Shepherd and Geelie the Lab/terrier (?) mix who very recently found her way here and has also become part of our family. We will bury Guess there, near the sweat house, sprinkling tobacco and offering words of farewell and encouragement to her spirit. The memory of Guess will long be with us.