

DOWN HOME Faithful companion & beloved friend

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I miss Betsy most in the mornings.

She and I were the early risers in our family. Most of the time, especially on weekday mornings, when the alarm went off long before dawn, she'd get up to give me company. She'd hang out in the bathroom while I shaved, and she'd eat breakfast with me in the kitchen. I miss her quiet, faithful presence in the mornings.

Still, I miss her almost as much when I arrive home from work in the evening.

Years ago, when my daughters were little, they ran to the door to hug and kiss me when I came home from work. Eventually, they got too busy. But Betsy always came running, at least until she grew old and nearly deaf and couldn't hear me. Even then, as soon as she figured out I was home, she'd come to greet me. I miss the way she always seemed happy to see me, no matter what happened that day.

Then again, maybe I miss her most late at night.

Whether I was working or reading or just watching TV, she always lingered

nearby, usually only a few feet away and sometimes right by my side. She didn't demand much. For her, it was enough to be in the same room. After the 10 o'clock news, she followed me to the bedroom, ready for rest and anticipating a new day. I miss her loyal, trusting companionship.

I miss Betsy more than I dreamed possible. Her steady, sweet disposition always cheered and comforted me. Her big, brown eyes always persuaded me to do whatever she wanted. And her genuine affection always made me glad I did.

Unfortunately, even beloved pets succumb to the cruel, irrepressible ravages of age. Betsy arrived in our home in November 1991. Joanna and I bought her as a puppy for our daughters' birthdays, when Lindsay turned 8 and Molly 5. She grew up with our girls. If you asked anyone about our family, everybody mentioned Betsy. She was a Knox.

But just as the force of time altered our family, it took its toll on Betsy. This fall arrived, and Molly left for college, Lindsay anticipated her December wedding, and the debilitations of old age set in for Betsy.

I watched her change, even as I denied it was happening. Week by week, however, the signs of her decline (I won't degrade her dignity by reciting them now) became increasingly obvious. As much as we loved her, we didn't want to see her suffer, and we came to realize prolonging her life would be selfish on our part. If we truly loved her, we had to let her go.

When I took Betsy to the veterinarian's office, he confirmed our feelings—an act of grace I will cherish all my days. He gently reassured me, and as I told her how much Jo and Lindsay and Molly and I all loved her, Betsy died in my arms.

Now, I know that with all the pain and evil and suffering in this world, the death of a pet is a relatively minor tragedy. But still, the passing of a noble friend—even of the canine variety—is an event to be mourned. And a life to

be celebrated with gratitude.

-Marv Knox

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