

July 1, 1997 ~ June 9, 2012.

Our dog, Miss Bodacious, aka Bodie, went into a seizure yesterday morning around 6:30. Or maybe it was a stroke. Paralyzed on her left side and unable to stand, she kept pawing in circles with her right leg, trying to rise. Her breath came in hard rasps and pants, and her brown eyes were suddenly gray and lifeless, as if she were blind. And – like a downed giraffe -- she repeatedly arched and flopped her thick pit bull/boxer neck. She would have smashed into the bookshelves if I let her, but of course I held her tight and kept whispering encouragement in her ear.

Fight it, Bodie! I said. Fight it! Best friend, loving companion, unwaveringly loyal . . . all of these adjectives fit. Bodie sat patiently while I graded papers when I was teaching, then reminded me it was time for a walk. I easily walked her more than a thousand times in the park near our house: winter, spring, summer and fall. Sometimes twice a day. We were easily each other's best friend.

But now Bodie wasn't getting any better. She kept turning in circles, trying to get up. But it wasn't happening. Shaking, panting and straining, she would have smashed her neck against the wall or floor were I not holding her tightly. By this time she had also emptied her bowls and bladder on the floor. Sandra helped me carry Bodie on her blanket downstairs to the backyard. It was 7:30 and a beautiful summer morning in Omaha. The grass was cool, a gentle breeze blew. Perfect. Our Bodie, so tiny she fit into both hands when we brought her home as a puppy, was outdoors now. *C'mon, Bodie-girl! Get up and run, girl!*

Instead, she kept arching her neck and turning tight circles on the ground. She'd work her way off the blanket and I'd lift her back on it, only to have her scootch off it and repeat the process all over again. I'm not sure how aware of this she was; it felt like she was there but not there. But I have to believe she heard me. I kept holding her and telling her to be strong and brave. I also told her how much I loved her and how I would always be with her, especially now. I kept wiping off the hairs from her shedding coat, which had mixed in with the tears that sometimes streamed down my cheeks. 7:30 became 8:30, then 9:30. Ian arrived. I'd texted him earlier: *Bodie is in very bad shape. She has had a stroke. Cannot stand. Flailing, banging her head. This may be her last morning.*

Coincidentally, our daughter, Sarah, was in town with her family, so she came over and the four of us got Bodie loaded up in the car, then hightailed it to the vet. We were all in the room together when the vet came in. Her guess, based in-part on Bodie's neck-arching behavior, was that Bodie had a brain tumor. That and the fact that our little puppy girl simply wasn't recovering were the final hard nails. The vet noted that seeing as how Bodie was half boxer it was remarkable that she'd lived this long, more than 14 years.

Bodie's gray chin and face were arched in the crook of my supportive left arm. I kept patting her white chest with my right hand. Ian, Sandra and Sarah held paws and petted her. She was still breathing hard and panting, but not moving as much as she had been. You could tell she was worn out. She'd been struggling hard for more than 4 ½ hours now: pawing, panting, straining.

We all kept touching her and stroking her and whispering I love yous, dreading the next move, crying unashamedly.

When the first shot hit her she let off a sigh and went right to sleep. The four of us smiled as she began snoring a little. That's our girl! How wonderful to see our Miss Bodacious peaceful at last. If only this were just a nap and she'd wake up and want to go home like she always did. But it was not to be.

Bodie would have been 15 in two weeks. She will be waiting for us all, I know, when we who loved her cross over. We'll no sooner get past Saint Peter and the Pearly Gates, I reckon, when she'll meet us on the path with her leash in mouth. C'mon, Craig, she'll say: time for a walk! In the meantime, she's where hip dysplasia never slows a dog down and rabbits and squirrels always get caught, then let go, because no creature ever suffers in heaven. Bodie was only a dog. But we cried so hard. She was our dog. She was part of the family.

