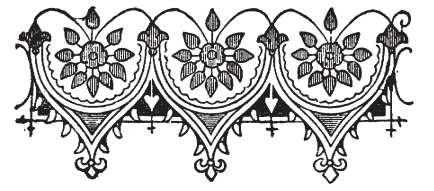


Health & Wellness



Silky, A Eulogy



Dr. Kate Thomsen and Silky

There's a reason that dog is spelled backwards – all love, all the time. And that is how it was with Silky. There was more love inside her than her little body could hold and it oozed from her aura every hour of every day to every person who ever met her. I must have heard, "Aw, what a sweet dog" a thousand times! She was my shadow, my best friend and a loving companion for 17 years. She came to open my heart.

In 2005 I was thinking about getting a dog and, after having lived with a few bigger dogs, I thought I was ready for a small dog. I had a story in my mind though, that since they had small bladders, they would need to go out a lot – even during the night. I did no investigating of the truth behind that belief or of available dogs. I was busy establishing my medical practice in my new location and taking care of my mother who was residing in an Assisted Living facility quite near my home. One August evening while I was preparing to take a bicycle ride with a friend, a white "something" ran across the back end of my yard. It was so fast that it startled me. I went out to see what it was but it had vanished. As my friend and I were getting ready to ride off, a car pulled over next to my driveway to ask if we had seen a small white poodle. We got their phone number and rode off on the bikes. Hoping to find the dog, we rode in the direction where the white "something" had run. We never found the dog. But later that evening, as I was closing the back porch door, the little white poodle was sitting there on my porch stoop. As I opened the door, it walked right in. Shocked, I gave the dog water and some meat. We sat down together on the couch while I called the owners and asked them to come the next day. It was late and I wanted a chance to test my theory on the frequent potty calls of small dogs. The dog's name was Moriah and

the owners had just picked her up from a shelter. When they stopped for some food, she bolted out the car door, across the highway and several yards (including mine), and stayed elusive until I found her on my porch. Apparently, she had a reputation as an escapee and the shelter named her Moriah as she could run like the wind. That night Moriah proved me wrong. She was easy to care for and I secretly wanted to keep her. When her new owners came to pick her up I told them to call me if it didn't work out with Moriah. I would take her.

With less than 24 hours experience in small dog ownership, I felt I was ready and casually started to mention to friends that I was looking for a small dog, preferably a small white poodle. Within days a friend asked me to check out this dog online who was in foster care, whelping her new puppies. She was a 3 year old schnoodle (schnauzer/poodle mix) who had been in a puppy mill and after several litters, she was dumped at the kill shelter – pregnant. Her name was Silky and she was born in August 2002. I made a date to meet her 2 weeks later and, to balance my bleeding heart tendencies, arranged to have my level-headed niece with me.

The path forward got complicated when Moriah's owners called to tell me she wasn't working out well there. They asked if I wanted her. I felt somewhat committed to this new dog, Silky, since I had filled out the adoption paperwork and had a probable "pick-up" date. I put them on hold while I called a dog psychic (a very good dog psychic) who told me she would talk to the dogs and get back to me. She called back to say that the little white poodle was not my dog and only came by to tell me that I should/could get a dog. She said Silky was my dog.

My niece and I went to see Silky on the appointed day. I was disappointed inside as Silky was a black and grey schnoodle and not a small white poodle. Silky was also very attached to her foster mother and didn't seem thrilled to meet me. And to confuse the matter even more, there was Louis, a very sad old hound dog whose owner just died. Desperately needy, he was looking for any lap to sit on. We took Silky out for a short walk. She did not know sidewalks or lawns or leashes – it was all new to her. My niece told me I had to get this dog

and, while I liked Silky, I didn't see what my niece could see right away because of my crazy white poodle expectation. Of course we took Silky home. Having Silky only one day I had already learned some important things: 1) Don't make up stories in your head about something you know nothing about (like small dog bladders); 2) Pay attention to the messages from the universe (like white poodle dog angels); and 3) If you narrowly define your desires, you may miss great opportunities. Be open to possibilities.

Silky barely left my side after that. I took her to dog school which she loved!! She excelled and made it to the top of her high school and college class, and almost top dog in grad school. She did have the most complicated trick (a sequenced and very dramatic "play dead") for her thesis which wowed the class. But she never did pass the "meet and greet" course where dogs are supposed to be polite when their owners meet and stop to chat. I could understand her fear of stranger dogs having spent 3 years in a puppy mill, probably defending herself and fighting for scraps of food. Now that she had a loving and bountifully providing pack-leader, she was going to defend me at all costs. Seeing another dog on a leash, even on the opposite sidewalk, would send her into "exorcist" mode – barking and spinning 360 degrees around from her halter hook. Honestly, it made me laugh every time!!

The staff where my Mom lived in Assisted Living used to tell me, "your mother is so sweet!". My Mom called Silky, "Silly". In December 2005 Mom was transferred to a hospital and then to a Rehab facility where she was fading in and out of life. Silky and I stayed with her 24/7. I was by her side when she died and Silky was under the bed. I often think my mother dropped an ember of her spirit onto Silky to dissolve her past trauma and show her the sweetness of life.

Silky and I spent a ton of time at Washington Crossing State Park. We knew all the trails, the resting spots, the watering holes, and all the places we thought were special, almost magical: the hidden house, the little people, the Trilliums and the Jacks, the talking tree, the beaver in the canal, firefly nights. We were like two little kids discovering a new world – neither of us could wait to

get out of the car. She brought me back to my love of the woods and my awe of Mother Nature. It was the best!

Silky seemed to want to be everything I was. I was a runner in my younger days with resultant knee issues. When Silky was young, she ended up with knee injuries from playing turkey-ball (fetch a ball, get a piece of turkey). She got hit by a car, like I did when I was young. She had a dislocated left shoulder when she was older, just like I did when I was older. I showed her my resilience, she showed me hers.

She had such personality! She made friends with the neighbors and would often go there for lunch (or dinner). She knew that the elderly man living next door was in the early stages of dementia and would never remember if he had given her a treat or not, and would give her another. She got chunky for a while... She also had dog friends. What do you think the chances are that her best friends would have been Pinky and Oreo – 2 white poodles!!

Silky was the office dog. We called her Dr. Silky and she had her own bio on the website! In the early days, she would only follow me. Not allowed in the exam room, she would get as much of her nose under the door as she could and sniff and snort loudly trying to smell if I was still there. As she got more comfortable, she would go out to the waiting room and greet the patients. Everyone looked forward to seeing her with her tail wagging and her sweetness exuding. The staff fell under her spell as well and they cared for her until the end.

Amazingly healthy, Silk ate the BARF diet, had regular chiropractic treatments, was treated by a fantastic holistic vet, played in a chemical free yard, drank filtered water and never got vaccinated after her puppy mill days. Her rabies titer was so high that I just proved her immunity with bloodwork each year. She was a "can-do" dog. In her last year she became blind and deaf and lost the use of her back legs – but nothing would stop her from wanting to be with her people, her growing pack of caretakers, and sharing love.

The spring and summer of 2022 were hard on us both. To keep her safe, I made a "rubber room" in my porch. I thought it was fool-proofed and went out one day for a few hours. When I got home, she had gotten her back

leg tied to a table leg with a lamp cord. I am sure her leg was dislocated. It never moved quite the same way again, but Silky never complained – never. From then on, I hardly left the house – only for short periods when she was sleeping. I slept in the reclining chair on the porch in case she needed me. Being blind, she did not know day from night and would get up at night and bump into things. Of course it would wake me and I would spend time trying to figure out what she needed or wanted. Sometimes I would get it, sometimes not, and sometimes I would just get mad at her for making me so sleep deprived. But Silky never had an agenda. There was always a reason why she would do something, but I couldn't always figure out what that was. It was a good lesson because it is the same with family and friends and with patients. I might not understand why they are or act a certain way, but that doesn't mean there isn't a good reason.

It was hard watching Silky trying to push herself up and walk when her back legs were lame. She would push and pull around for hours. It was too hard to watch so I bought her a set of dog wheels. She did love taking her walks again for the next 2 months.

I had arbitrarily made Silky's birthday August 1. We always had a big birthday party every year. In 2022, her 20th birthday, Silky ate her filet mignon while standing in her dog wheels. She still loved it and had many more nights of filet mignon or meatballs (her favorites). I was so proud that she had made it to 20 years old! But she still had more life left in her and she was going to squeeze out every bit of life juice she had. Silky died on September 1, 2022. I think this was purposeful since we didn't really know what day in August her birthday really was. Even if it was August 31, she can still say she made it to 20! I miss her so...

Dr. Kate Thomsen's office for holistic health care is located in Pennington, NJ. She is trained in Family Medicine, and Board Certified in Integrative Medicine. She is an Institute for Functional Medicine Certified Practitioner. She has been practicing Functional Medicine for 23 years. For more information see www.drkatethomsen.com or call the office at 609-818-9700.