

Tribute to Nugget

1994-2006



My constant companion for the last ten years, Nugget, a little tan Chihuahua, got her wings last night. I gave them to her at the emergency vet's office. I did not choose to watch her go to sleep, but did say my goodbyes to her as she lay trembling but otherwise docile in her little bed on the vet's table before giving her over to their care. She had suffered enough, I felt, through the apparent neurologically-based problems she had been having for the last 5 years.

This year it had gotten progressively worse, with the deterioration of her eyesight and the worsening of her rear legs. I was constantly attending to her: rescuing her when she was too weak to get up with only the traction of her front legs; or rushing to prevent her from falling off uneven ground or steps or from bumping into things she couldn't see below her nose. I even had to hold her rear down when she ate or drank to prevent her from rising off the ground or twisting around and falling into her food or water dish. It must have been extremely frustrating for her. In fact, it did affect her weight, as she was a mere 4 lbs. and you could feel & see all her bones.

She became "my baby" and I attached a lot of meaning and love to her. She reminded me of many life lessons: Persistence, faithfulness, even-temperedness, a positive and expectant attitude no matter what. That tail was always wagging! And most of all she reminded me of God's own love, faithfulness, companionship and comfort to me in times of trouble. I was never alone. I talked to Nugget all the time. It seems as if I had never loved anything as much as I had loved Nugget. I felt so alone all of a sudden when she was gone.

I went home and removed all her things and the pillows that had barricaded the family room to protect her from banging into things, or from escaping to the non-traction kitchen floor. Then I vacuumed up all the nuggets of her dried food around the place. I could not stop the tears from flowing, as I realized my little friend was gone forever, and there would be nothing or no one to ever replace her and the memories we had together.

Nugget was with me during times of great loss, and now she seemed to be my greatest loss. I could not stop from bawling like a baby. And I knew going to my art gallery where she was "The Gallery Dog" would be harder still. At least I knew she would be immortalized in a painting I did of her wistfully looking out the front door of my home with the light shining on her in an amazing way. I feel this was my masterpiece painting. And how many dogs have their own calendar?! She was immortalized in many ways. There are hundreds of photos of her taken over the years which capture just how much a part of our family she was. She is shown with everyone in some way, often dressed in the symbolic costume of the occasion – Santa hats, wings & halo, silly hats & sunglasses.

It's not so much the fact that you have the companionship of a pet for such a long time, but the fact that you are the provider and protector of that often helpless creature. I felt so bad for her as she struggled with life's daily routines. She never complained until the last couple of months when I heard her occasionally "screaming" very loudly when she got stuck and couldn't get up after a long while, or whining when she was in pain. I knew then her days were surely numbered, but I prayed to God that he would spare her life until I was through dealing with the issues surrounding my mother's and father's health.

Nugget was a comfort to me when my mom passed away after six months of watching her progress from a seemingly strong, healthy, young-looking and very active 80 year old to a stroke victim unable to communicate logically, while fighting infections and heart problems as well.

Nugget was there the same weekend I got the news that my father, who had been on dialysis for six years, was not expected to live and they were sending him home from the hospital to die. Because of that report, and the fact that he expected his death was imminent, all my brothers and sisters were in town the next day. When I visited my mother that evening, I could see her own demise was imminent as well. So the family had one last hymn sing at mom's bedside, putting a big smile on her face, then met there again the next day just as we got the news she was passing away.

Two weeks later, after round-the-clock shifts by the family at my dad's bedside, he passed away too. So I clung even more tightly to my precious Nugget to console me in my losses, as she was someone who needed me to care for her so much. And she was all I had to hug and talk to during the day when my husband Steve was at work.

Besides, Nugget "knew" about all the losses and times of trials my son Philip (now 25 and out on his own) and I had had in the past 10 years together. In fact, she came to us in an amazing way in answer to a very specific prayer at a challenging time in our lives.

Philip and I were living in Atlanta in 1996. It was the year of the Olympics being in our city and it was very exciting to be part of all the preparation and festivities and events. After the loss of my husband in 1992, my son and I had packed up a year later and moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma to be involved in ministry opportunities and to have a change of venue. During that time we were still going through our grieving process and were very vulnerable and in a new town with not a large support system in place, away from my family in Virginia Beach. I became involved very briefly with an abusive, sick man who isolated us and took advantage of us in many very cruel and hurtful ways. But once we were finally able to physically get away from him (it took a month of waiting for the right opportunity to do so safely), he stalked us to our new home in Atlanta. After quite some time of living in fear of when he would show up and what he would do, a good friend of mine there helped me break free from the bonds he was trying to continually place upon us, and we were finally free from that evil.

It was after that when Philip said he wanted a dog as a companion and someone to care for. I concurred and saw this as an opportunity to help my son rebuild his faith in a good

God and let him see God in action. So we agreed in prayer together to a very specific description of a dog (a tan Chihuahua), the price (free!), and the time limit. We gave it a month, with the end of the Olympics being the deadline.

To make a long story short, we called a blind ad in the paper with no price listed and on the day before the deadline, we took home our tan Chihuahua at no cost and with several bonuses to boot! The older couple who found her said it was a miracle they saw her on the side of the busy interstate I-20 and that when they stopped, she allowed them to pick her up. We knew right away this was our miracle dog! Philip picked her name based on the Olympics motto (“going for the gold”) and her color and size. He was thinking of a gold nugget, so “Nugget” was the name that stuck.

And she was indeed that – a precious nugget, our “angel pup” and a gift from God. Every time I looked at her I thought about the miracle of God’s grace, and his love and comfort for us, sending us a little nugget of himself in doggie form to remind us of eternal truths. She was always an inspiration and encouraged us and many others in her brief life with us. She also gave me the opportunity to share her story many times and witness to God’s direct answer to specific prayer. So it would seem that her purpose on earth has been completed. It is my hope that the love and grace of God would live on in the hearts of many who were touched by her life and endurance in spite of her physical afflictions.

Since the time Nugget has been in my life, I have learned many things about the love and faithfulness of God in many situations. God has been my Rock and Fortress, a Husband, and a Father to the fatherless. And he’s been a Guide and Comforter through the storms of life. Even though Nugget has moved on, God will never change. He knows exactly what I need in my life, and his grace is sufficient for me. His mercy in allowing Nugget to be with me for a couple more months after my parents’ passing has been a blessing. But now it is time for me to let go of her, to give her the mercy and love that has been given me by letting her go to her eternal rest. Thank you, Nugget, and thank you God for your special gift during this time in my life.

Lois Gallo
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