

Peggy Wallis

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Topic: Fear or Connections

Max

Max stands in the doorway and looks at me, silent and patient. His face is puzzled and he seems to want me to do something, but there is nothing to be done. Last week we took him to the Vet to find out why he was not eating. Not having been an avid eater, even in the best of times, it took a while to notice how long it had been since he finished his food. After feeling his stomach, the Vet told us that there was a lump; most likely a tumor.

We took him back the next day for a sonogram. My husband, who is a neurosurgeon, peered intently at the screen. The picture was filled with dark amoeba like shapes; large splashes of blood. We stood there, in the dark room, looking at the tumors which had spread from his spleen to his liver. "There is nothing to be done," we are told. "It won't be painful. He'll just get weaker and weaker and will eventually bleed out. Bring him back when it's time." "What is time?" I ask. "How much time does he have?" "No more than 2 months; maybe tomorrow."

For the next few days things continue as usual; lots of hiking and lots of hugs. From an active border collie, always herding us from place to place, Max starts walking slower and slower until he is too tired to jump into the car. He now spends his days napping in the yard, but still comes over to be patted and loved.

A remarkable grace and elegance define Max's last days. His happy bark is gone, and he no longer runs circles around me as he tries to anticipate my movements. He gets up slowly, but continues to monitor the squirrels in our yard. As a working dog, he still needs a job to do, even if his joints are creaky and fatigue has slowed him down. He is a shadow of himself, but still a radiant shadow. As things become harder, he keeps trying his best.

Max came into our lives a whirlwind of black and white fur; never meeting a person or animal that wasn't a friend. He filled our lives with joy and a connection to all

that is hopeful, kind and forgiving. Even when unfairly chastised, he has never held a grudge. Animals like Max are the closest we come to connecting with God or the Buddha; absolute love with no judgement.

He approaches death entirely without fear; continuing to do what he can. For him, that is enough.