

Bye-Bye Bitsy

Unexpectedly, and one week short of her ninth birthday, I recently lost my first dog Bitsy. She no longer hogs the couch, 'protects' all the toys and treats, or talks to me in her gruff voices, but Bitsy will be loved and missed forever. I always knew I was lucky to have found the queen of all packs - as totally devoted to me, as I could be to her. But with the unfortunate circumstances surrounding this special dog's passing I have been reminded of just how lucky I really am.

As with many 'no pets allowed' situations, my dogs Bitsy and Muddy were left home with the sitter while I traveled by plane to Colorado. Like many vacations before, I updated my "How to Care for the Dogs" files with contact numbers, vet addresses, and recent noteworthy events. Unlike any vacation before, my sitters needed those emergency files. Bitsy's lack of appetite and inability to keep food down resulted in an emergency vet's diagnosis of dehydration and pneumonia. Over 24 hours later - with no sign of improvement and after supervision by my vet (The Heroic Jane Lomar and the staff at Family Pet Animal Hospital) - a blockage was found in her stomach. Before she could be transferred to the Animal 911 Emergency Hospital, where she

could get round-the-clock, post-operative care on the weekend, labored breathing led to a series of cardiac arrests and Bitsy just couldn't survive.

The day she died was the same day I found out about the illness, sadly from 1000 miles away. Upon learning of the pneumonia, I called home to get caught up. My call came after the blockage was found, with Bitsy's condition serious and her transfer pending. With me updated, I was told to wait with cautious optimism. When I called later to check in, Animal 911 said I needed to call Jane at her office, as she and Bitsy were still at Family Pet. The bad news came quickly and harshly... I had always imagined this unavoidable and unforeseeable time in my life as "inconsolable." And for a while I was.

I would have done anything possible to be there for, and with, her at the end - but there was nothing that could be done to get me back in time. In the best possible, of worst possible scenarios, it was my (and Bitsy's) friends who were there with her at the end, and they continue to be there for me today. I have heard from the staff at my vet's office about the fantastic support system Bitsy and I have. I have also heard from my friends who were at Family Pet during the ordeal, about the quality, care, and determination coming from those trying to save Bitsy. I am so thankful and grateful to everyone who was involved when I couldn't be there.

In the days following my return from Colorado to a much quieter apartment, the outpouring of genuine sorrow and sympathy shows just how sincere the love from and for a dog can be. I wanted to let everyone who's life Bitsy wiggled into (or nipped at), know of her passing, so I generated an e-mail memorial and sent it out with a favorite Bitsy photo. The unexpected



responses caught me off-guard, but really helped me to process my loss. Bitsy anecdotes, tributes, and memorials made me laugh and cry, and showed me how she was more than just my dog: she was everyone's Bitsy.

Not only will she live on in our hearts (and in the sky thanks to a stellar Bitsy dedication), but she will live on in cyberspace. One of the first reply tributes came back in the form of a newly created Bitsy website. Jeff and Blythe Veltman, friends and founders of SouthLoopDogs.com, took my e-memorial and some of the replies and set-up a Bitsy memorial site. The site and all of the things on it show how much more than a dog, a dog can be. If you'd like to see Bitsy's page you can link to it from www.chicagolandtails.com

My thanks and gratitude go out to everyone who shared some of their Bitsy back with me; to everyone who comforted Bitsy at her end; and to everyone who comforts me as life goes on.

