

From: friendsofnikki@comcast.net

Sent: Wednesday, May 4, 2011 1:12:45 AM

Subject: A Bitter-Sweet Week

Dear Friends and Family,

This Friday, May 6th, our little Lilly will be celebrating her 2-year birthday. Saturday, May 7th, we will be remembering our precious Doogie, on the first anniversary of his crossing over to Heaven. It is a bitter-sweet week.

When Lilly came to us last June, I had no doubt that Doogie had something to do with her finding us. We were deeply in pain, and missing him so much. Our home, which had been filled with canine love and energy for 35 years (Ziggy, Nikki, Danni and Doogie), was suddenly very quiet and empty. As many of you know, we initiated the adoption process just 3 1/2 weeks after Doogie left, thinking it would take some time for everything to fall into place. We hoped to find another little baby to join our family by mid-summer. Since the rescue group required the name of a dog we were interested in, and I could barely even look at their photos on the website at that point, I went with a little one named Nikki, just to get the application started. Not even 2 full days went by, and I received a call from one of the volunteers. She told me that Nikki, who happened to be a Japanese Chin, was pending adoption, and not available. This rescue group dealt mainly with Shih Tzus, which is the breed we had decided on (Nikki and Danni were Shih Tzus). This very kind lady, Sue, continued to explain how they recently got another Chin into foster care, a breed they rarely get, and that "Lilly" would be available that weekend, if they could do the home assessment, etc., that day, or the next. They had other dogs being transported down from the Syracuse area to North Jersey, and she could go as well. This was moving too fast, and not what we had planned, and yet as I sat with it quietly, I had my suspicions that there was a little Peke actively involved in the process, as I had asked him to be. We did have our home eval done that next evening, but we asked if they could wait on transport, as we were having some roofing work done, starting Monday, and didn't want our new dog until after everything was finished. I guess this sent up a red flag, of sorts, since she knew that it had only been a few weeks since Doogie's death. She told us there would be others, although probably not a Chin, but that the right one would come along, at the right time. It was OK to wait. Lilly was now on their website, officially ready for adoption, so I was able to see her beautiful little face. Jim and I talked. I strongly felt that things were falling into place too easily, and that this Japanese Chin breed was meant to come into our world. Jim was interested in her, but was concerned about the noise and stress of having a roof replaced. Maybe, too, we were a little afraid of this new commitment of love. I asked them to contact us if anyone else expressed interest in her, which they agreed to. Our references were checked, but the head of the organization said she had some concern that it may be too early in our grief process, and suggested we consider that possibility. Well, I perked up when I heard this, considered all aspects, and talked with Jim. I knew in my heart that we were ready. Doogie and I had the discussion about Mommy's need for canine love many times, as we prepared for his leaving. Well, I contacted the person in charge, had a lovely conversation, shared Friends of Nikki with her, and by the end of it, the decision was made that Lilly was ours, and they would foster her until after our roof was completed. The roofer came out Monday, and to our surprise told us that only a small portion of it was in need of repair, not a full replacement. That next weekend we made plans to go to East Syracuse to pick up our little girl, ourselves. This entire ordeal took place within 2 weeks. The timing of everything convinced me that Doogie was leading us to Lilly.

They thought she was just under a year old, so we were planning to make up a birthday for her. After she was delivered to our hotel room, I opened to envelope holding her paperwork. There was one document only, proof of her vaccines from a vet in Florida, where she originated. Under "Date of Birth" was 5/6/09. I felt the blood rush out of me, and all I could say was "Oh, my God!". Doogie declined drastically on 5/6/10, and was brought to the ER just a little after midnight, as we made the

decision it was time for euthanasia. Between the vet exam, some discussion, and our our final time to say goodbye, the actual euthanasia was at 1:15AM of 5/7/10, but 5/6 was actually his last day with us.

Jim had found Doogie at a pet store, 15 years earlier, and we always said that "Daddy picked him out of the bunch!". The date of her birth (although a year earlier), and all the circumstances around us getting her, made it clear that Doogie had, too, picked Lilly "out of the bunch" for us, to bring us love and joy, in his absence.

As I approach the painful first anniversary, of a whole year without him, I am trying to focus on the many gifts of his life. As the day gets closer, I feel a sense of unease, anxiety, and sadness, that I haven't felt in months. Fortunately, I have the blessing of celebrating the birth of this other little being, named Lilly, the day before. Am I thinking less about Doog, remembering him any less, missing him any less? Certainly, not. I've talked for so many years about seeking the gifts that come from, or in spite of, the loss, and I think Doogie has only strengthened my belief in this philosophy of grief. He had given me so much throughout those years, and our bond is so deep, that I know our physical separation could never stop our expression of love for each other. He will continue to love me through Lilly, and now through Tommy, until that day we are all reunited, - Ziggy, Nikki, Danni, Doogie - and all the other souls I have, or will, share my life with.

I apologize for this lengthy message. I wanted to share my feelings with those who understand, because they, too, have loved a "non-human person" (that's a new one; a bit of an oxymoron!), whether they be furry, feathery, or scaly. I know this won't be an easy week, in many respects, but it does reconfirm my belief that grief is a normal, healthy process, that we can get through with time, support, and baby steps. I will acknowledge the pain of missing him, honor him more this weekend, but I will not focus on that last day, as our life together was so much more than his illness, or that decision we made to end it.

As I celebrate Lilly's birth and Doogie's life, may each of you hug your present pet/s, and remember all those who have left this world a better place simply because they loved you.

Warmly,
Donna