



A Toast to Willie

5/30/2002-5/28/2010

Willie was not just another family pet that I saw when I got home from work, he was my work colleague, traveling buddy and bestest friend who was by my side every minute of every day. Everywhere I would go people were amazed by Willies attitude, mannerisms and services that he provided me, and everyone would always ask tons of questions about him. Therefore, to minimize the number of times I have to retell this story I have wrote this little bio, which turned into a long story, of who Willie was and how his life transpired.

No response or comments are needed to this sad news, **so please do not send me any "sorry for your loss" comments.**

We are all saddened by the short time we had with Willie, no one knows that sorrow more than me, thus I do not want to be reminded time after time of our loss. Others have also tried to console me with their stories of how their pets have died and how they felt. Again **please do not send me these stories** of your dying pets. I have great sympathy for all of you that have lost a beloved pet, but again I do not want to hear these sad stories. If you must respond or comment you may do so by sending me a memory you had of Willie, a story you have about Willie or how Willie has touched your life. At the very least I ask the next time you find yourself enjoying your favorite cold beverage, raise your glass and give a toast to Willie (maybe spill a little on the ground, he use to love to lick up the leftovers).

I cannot thank Canine Companions for Independence (CCI) enough for providing me with such a great partner. They have provided me with lots of support over the years and have also agreed to help pay a percentage of Willie's last months of exams and final cost. They have also provided the same great service to hundreds of other individuals throughout the country.

So that CCI can continue to provide this great service to others you can make a donation on behalf of Willem (Willie) Days to the North Central CCI office using the attached CCI form.

Who was Willie?

Willie was born a Labrador /golden retriever mix on 5/30/2002 in Santa Rosa California, the headquarters for Canine Companions for independence. His given name was Willem, but the name sounded to proper for us and my like for Willie Nelson lead us to modify his name to an easier Willie. He passed all the temperament and joint and hip test and was given clearance to be put into training to be a services dog. This is a very prestigious honor in that only 40% of the dogs that CCI breeds have the attitude and structure to graduate as a service animal.

Willie was put on a plane and flown to Delaware Ohio to the North Central CCI facility where he began his more formal training and temperament testing. Willie was doing great at his training and was given to a couple in Chicago who volunteer to raise and train him for the next 10 months. When Willie was a little over a year he had mastered his basic training and was sent back to CCI in Ohio where he began a more specialized training on how to serve those with special needs.

After being on a waiting list for several years I was invited to attend a 2 week training course in Ohio to see if they had a dog that would be able to assist me in some of my day to day activities. There were 8 people/families there to be paired with a service dog and about 12 dogs that we all would work with to see which dog worked best for us. The first couple of days we all had the chance to work with all of the dogs. At that time the class was given a survey to see which dog they liked the best. Pretty much everyone in the class had Willie as one of their top 3 choices. Not only was Willie the most handsome dog in the group, he was also the funniest to watch. He was the fastest, strongest and had an attitude that he was the dominant dog of the group. Anytime the group of dogs got their breaks they would play all together chasing balls around. No matter what toy was thrown or where, out of the whole group Willie would always come up with the ball.

After the first week of training the CCI staff paired all the people/families with the dog that they thought best fit each person's specific needs. I was paired with a little golden retriever mix that I began to solely work with. No one was paired with Willie because he was most likely going to be taken out of the program and was not going to be placed as a service dog due to the fact he was so big, strong and dominant that the CCI people thought no one would be able to handle him. I continued to work with my golden for the next few days. I noticed that the golden was very timid and when I would correct her she would shiver in fear. When I would take her out, she would also shiver in fear if we were around men. This was a concern to me since for work I would spend the majority of my time working with men in the utility business. I knew I needed a dog that had the confidence to be comfortable in the situations I would put the dog in. I confronted the group of CCI trainers with my concerns and asked if they had another dog that I could work with. They all agreed that Willie would have the confidence I needed in a dog and would do fine in the situations I would put him in, I was also doing well enough with working with the other dogs that they all thought I could handle Willie. I was very pleased to have the chance to work with Willie and the next 4-5 days Willie and I trained together 24hrs a day. Everything worked out great and Willie and I graduated from CCI's training and were given a public certification. I was sent home in February 2004 with a fabulous dog that I was so proud to have. For the next 6 years Willie was by my side 24hrs a day 7 days a week, except for the 10-15 days a year where he got to spend the night with some of his beloved doggie sitters (thanks Mom & Sherri, it was obvious he knew and loved you both in his own special way) who would watch him when I would go on vacation or take long trips out of town.

Working for the Alliance of Indiana Rural Water for the last 8 years, Willie and I traveled all across Indiana and surrounding States assisting water systems and their communities with their many different problems. The Alliance of Indiana Rural water has over 600 members and is the Indiana affiliate of the

National Rural Water Association who has over 20,000 members the majority of which knew and loved Willie. Including all the friends and family from around the world, Willie touched the lives of so many.

Willie's Last Days

Willie worked and served me the day he died and never showed his real pain until the last few hours we had with him.

As many of you know Willie was been having spells where he would cry in pain while trying to find a comfortable spot to curl up into. We later found out that these episodes were probably little tumors rupturing within his blood vessels, which caused his discomfort. His first episode occurred in January 2010, where he moaned and groaned all day and night and walked around all hunched up. We took him to the vet the next day expecting them to say he pulled a muscle, pinched a nerve or ate a stick. However, after taking x-rays and blood test the Vet had no answers to what he had. The Vet sent us home with some pain pills. Willie had 3 more similar episodes: 2 in February and 3rd in April where he hunch up for a couple days, we feed him pain pills and 2-3 days later he would be fine and all ready to play fetch. After his 3rd episode on April 19, 2010 we took him back to the Vet. The Vet did a wellness exam which included an extensive blood work to determine if all his organs were working OK. Everything came out normal and we proceeded to get all his vaccines.

5/15/10- Another episode, so we took him back to the Vet. The Vet still could not figure what his problem was, so we invited an animal acupunctures and an animal massage therapist to see if they could help. We planned to set up an appointment in 3 weeks when both Vets were available to start his acupuncture and massage to help loosen up some of the knots in his muscle, chiropractic services to make sure his bones and joints were in there right structure and range of motion, the acupuncture would help him deal with the pain. We still didn't know what was going on with him, but we were happy that we would be doing something to try and treat him. And in the next few days Willie was back to his normal playful self.

5/25/10 Tuesday-we loaded up and went to Bean Blossom of Patricksburg's South West regional managers meeting where Willie was doing fine and even got on film when WFYI interviewed me. We got home around 2:30 pm and went for a walk/played catch with his favorite bird toy.

5/26/10 Wednesday-left for Purdue for the IWRA workshop at 11:30 am. Willie laid around snoring like he does during boring meetings. During the breaks we went for walks around campus. We left Purdue at 5:00pm and drove to the Hampton Hotel in Seymour. I feed Willie and we played on the hotel bed, which he loved because that was the only time he was allowed to be on a bed. We walked to the Cracker Barrel next to the hotel for dinner, got back to the hotel around 10:00pm where Willie started to act like he was going to have another episode, so I gave him 3 pain pills. Took him out to potty and back into the room where he didn't want to get on the bed to sleep. Instead he went to a corner behind a chair to sleep.

5/27/10 Thursday-Woke up at 6:30 am and went to feed Willie, which he didn't want to eat. I lead him back to the food, stuck his nose in the bowl, which he then ate. We went to an INDOT meeting at 7:30am. Willie was fine until about 11:00am where he threw up during the workshop. I took him outside where he threw up 2-3 more times. We went back into the class, where Willie was very anxious, moving around a lot trying to find a place to hide or crawl under. At 12:00 we went outside where I ate my lunch. Willie was very hot, panting and tried to find a place under a truck to find a cool place to lay. He just couldn't get comfortable. I ate fast and took Willie back inside to cool him down. After about another 15 minutes later I had to take him back outside to throw up again. I waited for the instructor to get back from lunch and told him we were leaving. Took Willie back to the hotel where I put him in the shower and soaked him with water to cool him down. After 30 minutes of soaking him he finally started to stop panting so much. We laid around until 6:00pm when I tried to feed Willie. He would not even take a peanut butter coated pain pill. At this time I'm thinking Willie just got over heated and really wasn't too worried about him, so I loaded him up and took him to the Kent Water's board meeting. I knew Willie was hurting so I left him in the car while I presented to Kent Water. I left early from that meeting and took Willie back to the Hotel in Seymour. By this time Willie wasn't looking good and I started to get worried. Throughout the night Willie was very anxious we got up to go outside 3-4time, where he didn't have to potty, but just wanted to be outside. Each time we went out we went for a little walk. I finally fell into a deep sleep from 5:00am to 9:00am.

5/28/10 Friday-When I got up Willie was laying by the door like he wanted to go out again. I put food in his bowl and asked him to eat. When he tried to get up he was real wobbly and fell over. I told him to lay down and stay. I quickly packed everything and took it to the car. I asked the Hotel staff to help me get Willie in the car. When I asked Willie to go he got up fine and walked and jumped into the car on his own. This was the last time Willie walked on his own. I drove an hour and half to our Broad ripple animal clinic. At 11:30 am they came out and carried him into the clinic. They took some blood samples and examined him. Again they couldn't find anything wrong, they wanted to do another round of test and exams, similarly to what they did a month before. Since I was hesitant in doing the same expensive test we did a month earlier, I decided to leave him there to get fluids to see if he would perk up. I went home and made some calls to Canine Companions for Independent (Organization where I got Willie from) for some advice. They said they would help with the cost, so they wanted me to do all the tests necessary and advised me to find an internal medicine specialist. I found a specialist, but they were going to close in an hour. I had my vet contact the specialist saying this was an emergency and the specialist agreed to wait and see us. I went to get Willie to take to the specialist at 4:30pm. When I went to pick him up they informed me that he threw up just before we got there and he wasn't perking up even after get fluids all day. On our way to the specialist Willie threw up again and smelled like sewage and he was looking really bad at this time. We got to the Specialist at 6:00pm they wheeled him in and began to exam him. The specialist came to tell us what she thought the problem might be. She suspected that he might have tumors that ruptured and that he was bleeding internally. She said that this is typical for labs. I agreed to have an ultrasound to determine if he did have tumors. She came back to confirm that he had tumors on his liver, spleen and on his abdomen. She couldn't tell if they were malignant. We could do a biopsy but that could be very risky and even if they weren't malignant

to have them removed would be risky considering they were on major organs. There might also be other tumors throughout his body. If there were no more tumors I would try to do surgery, but wanted to see if there were other tumors so I had the specialist do another x-ray of his chest. Looking at the x-ray I could see all the tumors in the blood vessel surrounding his heart. Even if we removed some of the tumors, others would eventually get bigger and rupture. There was no hope and we had to make the hard decision to put him to sleep. By 7:00pm I was stroking his ear, saying my goodbyes as his beautiful brown eyes drifted into a less painful world.

Even though it was only an hour from the time we figure out what was wrong with Willie until we had to put him down. Willie was in great pain in his last hour and I have no doubt that I made the right decision. Although things went fast and unexpected I think it was the best for all of us. He didn't and we didn't have to go through a long drawn out painful time knowing he was sick and watching him slowly wither away. He was strong covering his pain while continuing to serve me up until the very end. Willie was 2 days away from his 8th birthday. Cheers my brother.

...Grieve not,

Nor speak of me with tears,

But laugh and talk of me

As if I were beside you...

I Loved you so-

Isla Paschal Richardson