

We don't have funerals for dogs. Why is that? Our animal companions can have just as profound an effect, and so leave just as much of a hole in our lives, as our human companions. Funerals are, after all, for the living. And I feel the need to eulogize, so here it is...



He was Gabilan's Perdido (Pâr'-dē-dō.) Named for my Native American roots; a tribe who were displaced and wandered. Spanish and Portuguese for "lost." What better name for a dog destined to search for missing people? He was also: Dido, D, Mr. Deeds, the Yellow Dog, Puppy Noodle (Punoodle), Non-Small, Doodlebug, Booboo, my Super Search Dog, Pumpkin, and Snicker-Doodle. To some, he became the Old Man. But most of all he was my Baby Dog.

As my first search partner, he taught me about scent, searching, being a better partner, and being a better human. He enriched my life beyond measure. I am sure he would have taught me more, had I only listened; his memory continues to teach me even now. I find myself thinking back on snapshots of our time together: the joy he brought me, the trust he gave me, the things we shared. The day I puppy tested him, his tiny nose to the ground "tracking" the piece of chicken I dragged across the floor. Later, following me away from his mother and littermates. The hours and hours of training. Our morning ritual of him hearing me wake and rolling his big body upside-down on the bed, all four feet in the air for a tummy rub. Passing our first mission ready test. Him on his hind legs, towering over my toddler nephew to carefully remove a tiny baseball cap with his teeth. (Maybe I should *not* have used my ball cap as a retrieve toy the previous day!) Our first search when the return trip held no doors – I held him with a death-grip; he just enjoyed the breeze on his face as it gently lifted his ears. The day a coworker sat in my doorway thinking to keep Perdido from leaving for the day. Perdido looked at me; I whispered, "over." He sailed over her head as her jaw dropped. (Did folks think the baby gate across my office door really kept him in?) Him walking through the house with his lips strangely tight; his face saying, "*Nothing!*" I ask him to release and a can of cat food slides out, but his face doesn't change. I ask him to release again and another can drops to the floor and then another. (How did they all fit?!) Demos for scouts when he decided I had talked long enough, he would unzip my pack and remove the frisbee, much to the delight of our audience. His big body laying down and still, breathing slow and easy, his face cocked slightly away from a child afraid of dogs; I remember his eyes lighting up with happiness and the slightest flip of his tail as he felt that child touch his fur. My favorite memory of him off-lead, working a trail at a dead run through a grassy hillside, flat out, nose floating about 6 inches off the ground, taking corners with almost military precision. They say those are the great search dogs; one in a million. He rarely needed me while searching; honestly I was there mostly for his safety. But still, I knew we were a *team*. After finding the subject, he would always come and tell me; running straight at me, leaping into the air and thumping me on the chest wearing a gleeful expression – *I got 'em, Partner! Come on!* He was a loving, snuggly, 80 pound couch potato at home and a ball of fire when working. And he shared it with me.



Most of my thoughts of him are of searching, but he had other skills. For example, he was *the best* kisser. He would, when prompted or whenever you needed it, give the gentlest brush of the lips and maybe the flip of the end of his tongue on your cheek. Not a wet sloppy kiss, but a soft tickle that filled one with a sense of joy and well being. Years ago, a friend was having an engagement photo taken. As she posed staring into her fiancé's eyes, they spontaneously kissed. The photographer said that's how he could tell couples that really love one another. One of my favorite photos is a family shot which Perdido "ruined" by leaning forward and kissing my cheek just as the shutter snapped. I love you too, D.



Sadly, I remember all the things he forgave me for, as well. More, I think, than any human friendship would have survived; certainly more than *I* would have tolerated. All the misguided "obedience" lessons. Shredded pads, imbedded foxtails, and a very painful elbow - all from doing what I asked. Communication from him that I never heard or understood. Countless toenail trims. The inattention I later gave to our training and partnership. Me bringing home one and then another puppy; his replacements. And the first of many days I put on my search uniform and left the house with another dog. And still he never held a grudge, never turned a cold shoulder. He was always, *always* there for me. "Help me to be the person my dogs think I am," has always been a silly saying to me; sitting here reflecting - I finally get it. It's not about being a great and fabulous person or even a dog god; it's about being worthy of what has already been bestowed.

Perdido
August 19, 1996 – May 4, 2009

Perdido was an amazing friend, family member, partner, teacher, and more. He is gone from my life, but will never be absent from my heart...