

Sweet Poet

When Poet came into our lives 7 years ago, she wasn't the prettiest dog. In fact, some might say she was downright homely. Her fur, what she had of it, was sparse and rough, growing in random little tufts over her rear thighs. She had a little bald spot on the very top of her head. She had scars everywhere – some looked like burns. It was pure torture to imagine what she must have endured to get scars like that. She had huge, worried eyes that darted around in fear and distrust. Her skin was paper thin, easily tore, and she had scabs from where it was still healing. Her teeth were disgusting, as was her breath. You could see her ribs – which they say you're supposed to on a greyhound. But still.

She was afraid of everything – her tail a dead giveaway: it would point immediately under her legs if she were scared or uncertain. It seemed like that's where it belonged.

When people came to the door, or gathered in our home, she would run upstairs and hide in her bed, which was actually our closet, which she claimed as her own in the middle of a thunder storm one night. If people tried to pet her or play with her, she would stand perfectly still, tail between her legs, ears erect, as if she just stood still long enough, no one would notice her.

Today, Poet has shiny, downy-soft hair covering most of her lean, strong body. The fur on her throat is the softest I've ever felt, and I take pride in its shiny, thick softness. In fact, of all the things I've done in my life, the fact that her fur is so soft and shiny is at the top of what I'm proudest of. I know it's because she is healthy and eating well. Her scars are no longer visible. She is a healthy weight. When she runs, it's because the spirit has moved her, and she runs like the wind, in circles and figure-eights around her own yard. The bunnies she chases are real. She is neither rewarded nor punished if she catches one.

When the doorbell rings, she greets visitors with a wagging tail and curiosity, trusting that people are good and kind and not going to hurt her. The only time her tail goes between her legs is in the vet's office or during a thunder storm.

At home, Poet is bossy and maternal with her brother dog, Lucky. And when she is happy or excited, she forgets herself and hops like a kangaroo on her hind legs. That makes me happiest of all.

I know Poet's days are numbered, and yet, she still seems like the puppy she never got to be.

When she came into our lives, my modest goal was to make up for the first five years of her awful life on the track: I wanted her to feel loved and safe. I didn't know how long she would be with us, and I certainly didn't foresee the lessons she would teach me about life, love and facing one's mortality.