

WITH ME

I said good-bye to my old dog today. K.C. was a border collie, a herd dog for our cattle and, when we had them, our sheep. KC loved working livestock. He would never have won a sheep-trial, at least under my direction, because I had neither the time nor the knowledge to train him for the precision of the trial ground, but he loved to herd. The highlight of his day was when he brought up the cows. He would range far out in the pasture, circling and provoking the cattle until they moved toward the gate, driving them until they finally arrived at the barn. I don't know what command a dog trainer would have used for this – I always just said, "KC, get the COWS. Bring the COWS". And he would. For sheep, I would tell him, "KC, get the SHEEP! SHEEP!" and off he went, although our sheep were so dog-broken that all he had to do was appear in their vicinity and they would head for the barn. Besides these commands, his vocabulary included "Away", "Lie down", "Sit", "Stay", "Here", "That'll do", "Walk Up", "Kennel Up", "Out", "Drop it", and most important to both of us, "With Me". "With Me" told KC that he should follow me, stick close to me, do what I was doing. Most trainers use "Heel", but I always have preferred "With Me" – it connotes the partnership we had. Today, when we walked into the barn together for the last time, I said, "KC, With Me" and my Best Dog came trustingly along beside me.

KC has been blind for about 6 years as a result of a herding accident, but blind dogs can navigate pretty well and he did. In the last 2 years he has become deaf and disoriented, and a danger to himself if left to roam freely. A few months back he was found lying in the middle of the road several hundred yards from our house. A compassionate police officer brought him home, but when it became clear that he couldn't be trusted to stay in our yard, we had to confine him to the house or kennel, the latter more often than I liked. Last Monday he smelled or sensed me working close by and barked so piteously that I brought him out on a leash to stay With Me while I worked in the forge.

I have always assumed that I would be the one to lovingly and mercifully choose my old dog's final end. It is not an easy decision to decide when his poor quality of life justifies ending it, but procrastination has its own risks. How long would it be before he stopped eating, or just died alone in his kennel? Truly, not an easy decision. Then last month I had a serious heart attack. I have recovered somewhat, but had I not, this decision would have had to be made, probably soon, by someone else. If KC had to take this journey, I wanted to make sure he took it With Me, with my arms about him, with my voice his last memory, laid to rest reverently in the grave I dug, on our farm, With Me. I suppose I made the decision working in the forge with him lying quietly by the door, but it was not until today that I knew I would be able to carry it through.

Our trusted Vet visited us this afternoon bringing what was needed, and KC was With Me when he died. Afterwards I made a place for him in the pasture, a good place for remembering him herding the stock, listening to my voice, doing what he loved. He will forever be part of our farm now.

That's how it was today. KC is gone to where Good Dogs go, safe in my heart for this life and, I believe, on into the next. He is very much With Me still.

Allan Green
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