

# Helplessly Hoping

by John Farrow

*When things go wrong, so wrong with you,  
It hurts me, too.*<sup>1</sup>

When someone you love is hurting, you will do anything to try and make them better. When you can't, the pain is compounded.

I recently lost Abidjan, the younger and more energetic of our two Labrador Retrievers. Kori and Abidjan have been my best running buddies for years. When we headed out on a run along the North Valley irrigation ditches, their unbounded enthusiasm was contagious. They swam and chased sticks (and sometimes ducks and geese), and Abidjan's belly-flops into the deeper water were exhibitions of some of the most joyous abandon I have ever seen.

That dog could easily run me into the ground. She and I regularly completed a 5½ mile loop that took in several different irrigation ditches as well as the Rio Grande Nature Center. Sometimes it seemed that she swam as much as she ran, always with a stick in her mouth for me to throw into the water for her to fetch. Clambering out of the ditch, her constantly wagging tail traced arcs of water droplets that glistened in the sun.

She was headstrong but always eager to please. Once when she killed a chicken that had foolishly strayed into the yard, she dropped it at my feet – her gift to me – with a look that wavered between pride and a plea for approval.

Despite the fact that she was so active, she had her share of troubles. In her exuberance, she was constantly banging herself up. Early in life, bone cancer took the outer toe of one of her front paws. But even before the vet removed the bandages, she escaped from the yard to run up and down a nearby ditch. Figuring that if she was going to be running against medical advice, the least I could do was provide some protection – I covered her bandaged paw with duct tape. (Our vet has since adopted this practice for his other patients with no time to be injured.)

Recently in the kitchen waiting for a carrot, her favorite treat, Abidjan began to bleed. A quick trip to the vet diagnosed her symptoms as Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Further tests revealed that her blood wasn't clotting properly. Despite IV fluids and medication, things didn't seem to be improving and her red blood cell count remained dangerously low.

She was up and down, but the downs were lower than the highs. A blood transfusion stimulated some improvement but days later, her red blood cell count was even lower than it had been, evidence of an auto-immune disease: her body was destroying itself.

Abidjan lost her appetite, her energy and her sight, but through it all her tail continued to wag. The day before she died, I thought that a short walk along the nearby irrigation ditch where we had run so many times might bring back good memories and help her feel better. Her ears perked up at the sound of the leash jangling, her step quickened, and her tail wagged. But by the time we reached the ditch, no more than 100 yards away, her legs were trembling from exhaustion. Her indomitable spirit was willing but her body simply couldn't go on.

They say that in heaven, God doesn't give wings to dog-angels because they love to run so much. I like the thought of Abidjan running through heaven's fields, no wings, tail moving as fast as her legs. She'd be happy there, I know. But I still miss her so much.

*Helplessly hoping her harlequin hovers nearby  
Awaiting a word, gasping at glimpses  
Of gentle true spirit.  
He runs, wishing he could fly  
Only to trip at the sound of good-bye.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Elmore James, *It Hurts Me Too*.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Stills, *Helplessly Hoping*.

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