



# thePLUM *line*

BY MICHAEL SHARP, MD

## cully

**T**wice a day. Every day. For nine years. Either Kathleen or I would get our boots on and take them both to the open place out beside the shop. One would go into a down-stay and the other would get a stick thrown as far as the arm could throw. Off either Osa or Cully would hurl, racing to get it and bring it back to lay it at our feet, going pell-mell past as we threw another stick the opposite direction. Back and forth like this until we were all tired in our own way. Cully was the best at this, unailing in the drop, unailing in the chase. Unailing in letting Osa have her turn. Osa's enthusiasm is a bit less disciplined and she'd reliably break the rhythm to try and get there first.

Twice a day as the time got close for this event both of them would begin to bark. *"Let's go! What's the hold-up? Isn't it a little late today? I know where I left mine. I'm first, you're slow. This is fun! What's the hold-up? Seriously—this is important! Why can't we do this more often? Here we go!"* Cully would often come to get me and put his mouth around my hand as if to say: *"Here, I can show you the way, let's go together."*

He taught me much. The very first lesson came on the first day he came into our lives. I was in a slump. My father was dying. I had been fired from a job I loved. My youngest son was off to college. I had been admitted to hospital in guarded condition with pneumonia of unknown cause.

After a prolonged search we found his litter of German Shepherd dogs and I went to pick him up the day after my biopsy came back positive for cancer and had scheduled a surgery that promised to lay me low for three months (although I didn't know it at the time). Things looked bleak. I wanted something or someone to cheer me up. I got so much more.

I went to get him in a vintage, banged up, white Dodge pickup truck. I brought a kennel and belted it onto the bench seat. He came easily and willingly, leaving his mother, litter mates, mistress, and his home without looking back. He sat upright in the kennel calmly facing forward like it was the most natural thing in the world to look into a completely unknown future as if it held nothing but promise. I could do as well. I'd try. I do now.

In Chinese Medicine all modalities do one thing, they move *Qi*. Acupuncture, *Tui Na*, *Chi Gung*, herbs. Illness is stagnate or misrouted *Qi*. Healing is flow.

My own exercise program is a constant argument. Left to my own instincts (or maybe learned behaviors) I would not get out of bed so early to get my *Qi* going. Guilt is not a good motivator for me. And of course, as Cully taught me, there are other reasons to do things. I don't think Cully did anything from guilt. He did it either because I told him to, because he thought he could get away with it, or from sheer joy.

There may have been other reasons. I described Cully's pursuit of turtles in a column a few months ago. I had been learning about the Native American energy of Nakomis and Cully seemed to be an agent for a lesson to me about a form of movement that doesn't come easily to me—the value of quiet and slow. I wonder that our animals have such power over us because they see more clearly into the other worlds.

Cully started to vomit three months ago. Then he stopped and we were glad that it was nothing. Then it started and something very dark unfolded. It was a tight donut of adenocarcinoma around a segment of the jejunum. He never recovered from the surgery. Ten long and anguished days and at the end we buried him under the Mulberry tree next to Jack and Maple. The grief was and is as intense as the simplicity of the relationship. There doesn't feel to be much movement in it. It is too close. So we sit with it as Nakomis would have us. Healing is flow even when the bend in the river slows too much because it digs so deeply. We ponder the memories of his gifts. My mind goes back to the twice-a-days. There is an urgent nugget of a simple truth in that daily exercise. I think he was trying to tell me to have fun. I think that's a worthy lesson. I'll try it in honor of him even if it's especially hard right now.

To your health. 🍌🍌

*This column was originally published several years ago. I read it occasionally to remind me of what is important. Like play—and simple love. It seems a seasonal reminder.*

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