Her day starts like any other, waking up when she’s good and ready, opening her mouth to show off her pearly whites in a big yawn, and then lightly stepping her front paws off the bed into a back stretch. Yes, paws. Tillie is my dog. She’s nine years old and she loves to go for walks and to sleep on my bed. She’s a mutt, or a mixed breed. You can tell by the way she’s built: slender body, thin legs, long muzzle and floppy ears, that she’s part greyhound, almost half. As for what other breeds she is, I haven’t a clue.

Tillie is what most people call brendle. That means her fur coloring consists of different shades of brown, black, white and gray. In her old age, her soft, short fur is thinning somewhat around her neck under her collar and around her ears. She has a white mark that goes from the top of her black nose to between her eyes on her head, and she has a white chest. Most of the black and white around her mouth and tail are slowly turning gray. Almost tabby cat-ish in her fur pattern, Tillie has dark stripes and multi-colored fur.
not spotty like calicos; she sheds like a cat, too.

Her eyes, big brown watery eyes, make you stop to say, "Awwww!" That’s what pulls you in to her trap. Then her tail, thin and long, starts wagging. She’s adorably cute! You bend forward and lift your hand, patting her head. Now you’re caught. Her head lifts in grateful acception of your attention, but as she gets closer to your nose, her stomach makes a small gurgling noise. Her trap is sprung and like a fly caught in a spider’s web, you can’t escape. Tillie almost smiles as she let’s out a powerful belch. Then your senses are overpowered by a strong smell of chicken and rice flavored dog food and whatever table scraps she has been fed earlier that day. Your mind is sent reeling, “That came out of HER?” Isn’t she cute?

Another of her quirky little ways in which she must make you laugh, is she likes to throw all of her weight in to your chest. Of course this only works if you’re sitting down. Tillie considers herself to be a lapdog. While I and the rest of the family know this is not right, she’s convinced that it’s what she is and she abides by it. She’ll lay her head in your lap and look at you with her big brown eyes, tears in the corners dripping down her muzzle a little bit, and when you aren’t looking, she springs up onto the couch and presses her hind quarters into your chest with all her weight.

On daily walks I sometimes wonder if maybe I’m the one being walked. Tillie, with her muscular legs, decides where we go. She decides what we smell, what we see, who we see, how far we go and what we hear. If she decides to go for a walk around the pond, then we go for a walk around the pond.

Set on a bit of an incline, at the far left side of the pond (when looking from the porch, that is), the field hay comes up to just before the flat top of that side. The top of the sides of the pond create a sort of walking path and on that path, exactly 17 years ago, my father and I planted seven equally spaced pine trees. Every year they give off the same pine-ish scent that Tillie has come to enjoy sniffing. Of the front back of the pond, is an old crab apple tree. Tillie avoids this tree with a passion. Not because she doesn’t like it, but because she remembers an old toy that was left there from a friend that came before her, years ago. It squeaked. The toy, that is and ever since she stepped on that toy and heard it’s shrill squeak, she doesn’t go near toys. The reeds and cat tails surround the water of the pond, like a fence around a garden or yard. A pussy willow stands to the right, with no purpose at all, but to look pretty. This is Tillie’s favorite walking place.

She always has to stop to sniff out a hiding frog or turtle in the reeds. Her floppy ears perk up as she listens to her prey croaking or slipping beneath the water with a “blub.” Of course, we can’t forget to stop to sniff and explore the trees that line the outside of the pond so she can find a place to do her business. She is just precious.

Tillie never stops bringing a smile to your face. She doesn’t like anyone being sad and she’ll help anyway that she can. Even if it means giving you a wiff of what she had for lunch to get you laughing. After she’s made you smile and gone for a walk, she goes back to bed. Slowly creeping up onto the bed and again like a cat, circles a spot for a few minutes before she’ll

In loving Memory of Tilliford “Tilly” Zusy, a beloved and loyal friend.

August 3, 1996 – February 28, 2006

DARK
by Shirlee Dufort

I have split the dark that stopped my sight
whirled the world into smudged tunnels
of peripheral visions

I have slid raw palms along
the cave walls
ankle-deep in murky water
 tripping on the chill stones
bloodying shin and knee

Within the smother
I twisted hard around
found the cave opening
streamed with light
a reach away

I sit the entrance boulder now
cave paintings at my back
feel the cleanse of coming rain
a breath and a breath
still