

World's Tallest Dog Dies

By Kerri Danskin

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I heard this morning that Gibson, the world's tallest dog, passed away from bone cancer yesterday. He was only seven years old. My heart braves for Sandy Hall, his owner, who learned in April he had the disease. The poor fella, who was a Great Dane, had to have a leg amputated earlier this year and then Hall made what must have been a very difficult decision to euthanize Gibson when she learned the cancer had spread to his lungs and spine and was untreatable.

I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Gibson at the Luxury Pet Pavilion trade show in Los Angeles two years ago when he made an appearance at an early-morning press event there. He was one of the gentlest beasts I have ever seen. At one point, he was having his picture taken with various people and dogs. His trick was putting his front paws up on someone's shoulders to show off how tall he was. Standing on all fours, he was three-and-a-half feet tall, which is incredible, but up on those hind legs, he was an absolute giant.

My favorite memory of Gibson is the moment when photographers were trying to get a picture of him with a tiny dog—a Chihuahua, I think. The little dog was feisty, as so many little dogs are, and I kid you not when I tell you that Gibson was shrinking away from the other dog, clearly afraid. It instantly reminded me of an elephant showing fear of a mouse. What a sweet, sweet boy he was.

Ms. Hall, I am so sorry for your loss and for all the sadness you must have experienced this year.

Last night while reading *The Slippery Year* by Melanie Gideon, I cried my face off when I (SPOILER ALERT – I AM GIVING AWAY SOME OF THE PLOT HERE) got to the part where her Lab, Bodhi, died. It's been a while since I cried like that and while the story on its own was very sad, I think it also brought back memories of the euthanasias I assisted with when I worked at a veterinary clinic after college.

For some reason the vet at this office liked to have me in particular with him when someone had made the tough decision to end the pain for their pets. The other vet assistants started calling me the Angel of Death behind closed doors. Sometimes the doc would give the injections and then leave the room with just the pet, the owner and I present. These were intense times, very sad and almost indescribable.

I will never forget the young man whose 17-year-old cat, named Bear, became ill while the rest of the family was in Europe on vacation. After several emergency visits in the course of a week, this poor guy had to make a decision (on his own, if I remember correctly, as he couldn't reach his parents) to put Bear down. As if there weren't enough uncertainty around that decision, he had to do it without the advice of the other people in Bear's life.

The vet administered the injections and left the room and there I stood with this tough young guy who talked softly to his pet and told him goodbye, petting his poor little head and crying. It was a peaceful end for Bear; he drifted off and his heart slowly stopped beating. I held up OK and just let a tear or two out during this final goodbye, wanting to be strong and professional. But when it was all over and the client had walked out the door of the office for the last time, I had a good long cry in the exam room with the door closed.

The end of a pet's life is such an intimate thing to witness and such a pivotal moment in the life of a family. There is nothing you can say or do to make the loss of that unconditional love between a pet and owner any less desperately painful. I think often of the families whose pets took their last breaths in the room with me. I know they made the best, most compassionate decisions for their animals and I hope they've gone on to love other pets deeply. But I also know that there's no replacing the hole in your life that each lost pet leaves.

So in memory of Gibson, and my own pets who have passed on—Durango, the best Golden Retriever ever to walk the planet and Tiger, the wild and sweet tabby—I'm reminding everyone to give their pets a little extra love today. A few more minutes spent on that walk or that play or training session will mean everything to them.