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The passing of a beloved pet brings back bitter-sweet memories



BARB GUY

This week we said, “Adios” to Cinco.

Our fluffy eight-pound terrier mutt had become the punch line to a sad joke. He was epileptic, had lost a leg to cancer years ago, and now, at sixteen, he faded to six pounds. He also was afflicted with a creepy skin condition, cataracts, dental disease, a weird open sore on his throat that wouldn't heal, and, for the last several days, whenever he would awaken and try to get up, he would squeal out in agony. (Lost dog: Answers to “Lucky.”)

The vet came to our house. He agreed Cinco was in pain and near the end of his life. Within minutes, our little friend lay lifeless on the couch. Soon after, Chris, still a farm boy, was digging a straight, deep hole in the back yard.

Cinco was my mom's dog. The year my dad was dying, Chris and I took Millie to the Pima County

Animal Shelter. They chose each other through the chain link, this funny little rag mop and the sharp-dressing, delighted-by-life older lady. They loved each other from the start. It was just before Mother's Day, the fifth of May, and we christened Cinco with rounds of margaritas.

For the ten years my mom lived after my dad died, Cinco was her partner. She taught him to growl when a certain car dealer's commercials came on television. She took him out for french fries. She made Halloween costumes and Santa hats for him. He went with her to the bank, the doctor's office, the grocery store, the hair salon.

Cinco was as at home in Tucson as Millie was. Even on the hottest days, they both would lay among the rocks and bougainvillea, soaking up the sun. But in the end, they shared a lot more than a love of sunshine, junk food and each other. They both lived longer than they should have, both ending up tragically far from the joyous beings they had been.

Cinco was a faithful friend to Millie as she began losing all the pieces of her world. She moved to Salt Lake City, getting a place near us. Then she had a stroke. Cinco visited her every day in the hospital. When Millie and Cinco couldn't live in their house anymore, we found an apartment for seniors that allowed pets. As Millie's cognitive ability went

down and down and down, we started to get as many calls about Cinco as we did about her.

Millie was incessantly dialing zero on her telephone, thinking she was calling the front desk of her “hotel.” Unsupervised, Cinco was cavorting through the assisted living center's fancy restaurant and peeing on its fine carpets.

So Cinco came to live with us. By the time Millie was moved to the nursing home she didn't notice whether Cinco visited her. I was her only child, but soon she didn't have any idea who I was. I hope she didn't notice she had traded lovely carpets for linoleum, wine with dinner for fruit punch, and caring nurse's aides for disinterested men who would hose her down in a giant roll-in shower. On the day Millie finally, finally died, Cinco was curled up in bed with her as I sat holding her hand.

The passing of Cinco is the passing of the last piece of Millie and it really hurts. But what's worse is that after seeing the hopelessness and unbearable suffering, I was able to make a courageous, terrible, loving decision for a little dog, but we live in a culture where there's nothing you can do for a mother.

BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.