Pepper

is my soulmate.



She had a big personality, a huge sense of humour, and absolutely ran our household. She was so gentle that even crows didn't fly away from her. But a stray feather in the grass could send her jumping straight into the air.

We were from Winnipeg, and she travelled with me across Canada, from Montreal to Vancouver, and through California, Oregon, Washington, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Illinois. She even went to wineries in California.

She trained in advanced agility, earned her Canadian Kennel Club K9 Good Neighbour certification, and came to work with me at BC Women's Hospital, where she had an award of her own. Once, while the COO was speaking in a meeting, Pepper walked right up to her, sat down, and hit her with her paw because she wanted a pat.

All my professional bios have included her, and her face is tattooed on me because she has always belonged in the story of who I am. Through some very hard years, she was my most consistent, safe presence, beside me while I learned to let myself feel. She taught me about rest, love, and persistence. We spent 11 years, 11 months looking for each other and finding each other, and so much of being home was knowing where she was.

There was so much care between us, including 6 years of managing copper storage disease and immune-mediated hepatitis. She survived a serious dog attack, went through major ear surgery, and this year recovered from surgery for liver cancer before another tumour and liver failure brought us to the end. Through years of medications, appointments, worry, and recovery, we kept having a life together.





As her body changed, I wanted her to have palliative care that could change with her. It was hard on me to see her body change and begin to fail her, and I kept thinking about what it means to die well and how to help her feel comfortable and enjoy being here.

I rearranged furniture into the middle of rooms so she had better views, put a ramp beside the bed, and laid mats everywhere so she wouldn't slip. I got her a stroller and rigged up our front step so she could lie in a bed and watch people go by, because she had always loved to watch.







There was a wipe warmer for when she had accidents, and when she wasn't keen on food, we shared the tiniest pieces of a croissant over hours.

We were still finding things to do together.



I had been communicating with Lifting Stars for about 1 month. Early on Sunday morning, when I knew she needed help that day, I was frightened we wouldn't find someone who could come; I wanted her home, and I had felt so settled on them.

They called a few minutes before they opened to say there had been a cancellation and they could come at 10 that morning. It felt meant to be.

When the vet arrived, she asked permission to touch Pepper and say hello, which meant so much to me. She took the time to meet my girl, and we sat on my patio in the sun with Pepper for 30 minutes. I never felt rushed, and when I was ready, I carried her inside to bed, on my own terms.

Later, while the vet was preparing her medications, we were discussing Pepper's medical history. "She's a bit of a lemon, hey?" she said. I perked up because I had lovingly called Pepper that for years, and then she added:

"But she makes great lemonade."



It was such a familiar way to speak about my girl, with affection and humour, on a morning when I was saying goodbye to so much that was familiar.

Afterwards, we went to get flowers for her altar. I wanted something to keep the little clipping of fur the vet had saved for me, and at the flower shop I found a small tin with a lemon on it. Her fur is there now.



11 has been my favourite number since childhood, and whenever anyone asked why, I never had an answer. That morning, I said to my partner that perhaps it was because Pepper was 11 years, 11 months old, and it was October 11. Later, I checked the message I had sent telling someone she was gone and saw that I had sent it at 11:11.

A friend who came over afterwards told me 11 made her think of twin flames, mirrors, and 2 beings parallel to each other. I keep picturing those 1s beside each other, and it is still how I picture us.

Thank you, Lifting Stars, for taking the time to meet Pepper, for those 30 minutes in the sun, and for helping me care for my girl at home to the end. I will always be grateful that we had that time, and that you took such care with it.

Pepper, I will bring you everywhere, and I will always be hoping to find you.

Wherever my life takes me, you will always matter this much. I can make that promise for every version of me I haven't met yet.

Whoever I become will have been loved by you.