



Paul Azevedo

The Reactor

Farewell, Bingo

Bingo died last Friday. He was old, for a dog. Fourteen. And we had been expecting it. He had been slowing up for a couple of years as befits an ancient Norwegian Elkhound. He was a bit embarrassed, I think, when he fell down, which he had done a couple of times. It probably didn't fit his self-image. After all, Elkhounds can trace their lineage back about 5000 years, to the dogs the Vikings and the ancestors of the Vikings took hunting with them.

We got Bingo when he was six-weeks old. He was born on Lincoln's birthday in 1970. That spring seven-year old Mike and I took a drive from Pacifica to Humboldt County to get the puppy my brother had promised for Mike. Mike and I camped out along the way at one of the Redwood Parks...Standish-Hickey, I believe it was.

Mike's now a college student, but his big achievement on that trip was reading the exit signs. Mike's done a lot of growing up in Bingo's 14 years. So have my other kids. Fourteen years is enough time for little kids to start school, and learn, and graduate, and go on to higher education.

It's time enough for a little girl, Joan, to go from a one-year old to high school. Joan and Marty can't remember a time when we didn't have Bingo. We named him for a song the kids loved, something about "B-I-N-G-O, Bingo is his name," about a child's dog. It wasn't my choice of a name, but it turned out to be one of the longest-lasting decisions any of the kids made at that young age.

Bingo grew into a beautiful gray dog, a good example of an elkhound. He had a deep, thundering voice, a voice that got me in trouble with a neighbor, whose sick wife couldn't take the barking.

Bingo had to be debarked. I don't think he ever realized that his voice had been muted.

Funny thing. My neighbor, having raised my consciousness on the subject, I could hear Bingo more after the operation than before.

Bingo was never a house dog. It isn't in the tradition of my family to have dogs in the house. It was a rule my mother insisted on, and I've followed it in my own house. But as Bingo got old and feeble, we allowed him in the house briefly in cold weather in recent months. He was well-behaved, not like his vigorous younger days when he would have put the house awry in his most innocent manner.

He took to training, but there was always an independent streak about him. I rarely took him for walks, because he could be counted on to give any free-ranging dog a fight.

Bingo's most trying times came from my daughter's cats. They loved to irritate him by staying just out of his reach. I don't know whether it was the enfeeblement of old age or a simple mellowing out, but he got to the point where he ignored the cats.

Perhaps Bingo's death is really the end of my children's childhoods. He was there all through their growing up...to be fed, to be watered, to be petted.

And now he's gone, to wherever the dogs of my own childhood went. So long, pup. We'll miss you.