
The Journal

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Animal Control Officers lead the procession for Virginia Kincheloe



Kim Kincheloe took a few moments to play with Yuki at a reception following her mother Virginia Kincheloe's funeral. The Bichon Frise is a member of the Blue-Gray Spirit Keepers Therapy Dogs and sat on Kim's lap during the grave side ceremony.

Marty Van Duyne 23.JUL.08

Spotsylvania, Va. -- The funeral procession wove its way to the cemetery with the usual escort of law enforcement officers.

The Sheriff's Department secured the intersections along the route for the nearly mile long line of cars. But the flashing lights atop two other vehicles were not for traffic enforcement, but rather to lead the way to Virginia Kincheloe's final resting place in Oak Hill Cemetery.

The long bed pick-up trucks serving as lead escorts were driven by Spotsylvania's Director of Animal Control Willie Tydings and Director of the Animal Shelter Toni Thomas. And their presence at the head of the procession was a most fitting tribute to a woman who dedicated her life to animals.

Although she is responsible for many animals being rescued from certain death, she is perhaps remembered most for her dogged determination to bring low cost spay neuter services to the area. She lobbied relentlessly to gain community support and founded Lionhearts, Inc. a charitable organization to help fund the center.

After years of effort, the Spotsylvania County government donated 400 sq. ft. inside their new animal shelter and in March 2000 Virginia's dream became reality.

Named in her honor, the Virginia Kincheloe Spay/Neuter Clinic opened its doors through the cooperative efforts of county government, private industry, and a charitable animal welfare organization. She ran the clinic with the help of her daughter Kim.

With an estimated 25 dogs and cats being able to be neutered on a given day, thousands of area animals have undergone this simple procedure at the clinic in the past 8 years. According to Michele Shipman, the King George Animal Rescue League (KGARL) worked with the clinic quite often.

Additionally, with Virginia's efforts, the rate of dogs that made it out of the Spotsylvania Shelter alive went from about 5 percent to the current 85 percent.

Paws to Remember

Having a number of canine family members and understanding the value provided by Virginia's life long work and dedication, Cong. Rob Wittman (R - 1st District) issued a statement on her passing.

"Virginia Kincheloe made an amazing impact on the Spotsylvania community. Her unfaltering work on behalf of animals has left an indelible mark on the county, and the legacy of compassion that she sparked will continue for generations."

That impact was apparent at a wake and a memorial service as hundreds of people from across the commonwealth came to say farewell to this moving force in animal welfare.

On Monday evening, July 14 a special group of visitors arrived at the Covenant Funeral Home. Dressed smartly in their signature vests, Amber, Diesel, Emma, FiFi, Jessie, Perlie, Wilson, and Yuki padded into the chapel.

According to Sue Peetoom of King George, founder of Blue-Gray Spirit Keepers Therapy Dogs, the team contacted Kim in advance.

With 8 teams paying their respects that evening, it was easy to see that the dogs had an immediate positive impact. "You could see the atmosphere change when the dogs walked into the chapel," said Sue. "When we arrived it became a more comforting situation."

According to Sue, as the dogs quietly padded into the chapel smiles began to creep across the faces of the crowd of more than 50 people that were visiting at the time. And the somber mood lifted as people began talking with each other and sharing their remembrances of Virginia.

Among area residents at the wake were John and Pat Canning who made the long trip from Montross with therapy dogs Wilson and Jessie to bid a final farewell.

Sue commented, "The staff at Covenant Funeral Home was so accommodating to the dogs." □

A Real Pal

"Virginia impacted so many people and not just with the spay/neuter program. She was the founder of the Pet Assistance League (PAL) and so many people adopted their dogs from her," Sue said.

But Virginia helped even more animals get adopted through her outreach. She worked with Pam McAlwee for a number of years supporting her efforts to rescue dogs from the Spotsylvania Shelter and bring them to Northern Virginia to be adopted. She mentored and encouraged the young woman and as a result, Lost Dog and Cat Rescue was founded. And this year the 501(C) 3 charity reached a milestone of 10,000 adoptions.

From their earliest meeting Virginia was an inspiration. When Pam realized that the Spotsylvania Shelter was using a gas chamber for euthanizing animals, Virginia immediately went to work to remedy the situation. According to Pam this tenacious woman had the shelter switched to the more acceptable humane method of injection in record time.

Speaking at the memorial service on Tuesday, July 15 Pam said, "We talked on the phone almost every night of the week at 11 p.m. for about an hour and a half."

A True Shepherd

The cover of the tribute folder for Virginia's service featured a bridge in an idyllic pasture with two figures standing in the center of the span. It was a fitting image as most animal lovers know the Legend of Rainbow Bridge. And indeed, a speaker referred to the joy the animals would have when Virginia arrived on site.

About halfway through the memorial service the traditional strains of Amazing Grace filled the chapel. But a more contemporary selection by Brad Paisley was also played. When I get Where I'm Going had special meaning for the family, but it also had an impact on those in the chapel as many a misty eye could be seen as the refrain rang out saying "But when I get where I'm going, and I see my Maker's face. I'll stand forever in the light, of His amazing grace."

Executive Pastor of Fredericksburg's Spotswood Baptist Church Rev. Jim Stone officiated at the services. He spoke of the similarities between David in his battle with Goliath (1 Samuel 17) and Virginia overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds to establish her clinic.

He noted that from the beginning, God cared for all of his creatures, including the animals for he told Noah in (Genesis 6:1 - 9:17) to take two of each animal on the ark to ensure the propagation of the species.

And although he spoke of death, he also referred to Psalm 37 where "the meek shall inherit the earth." Explaining that in modern terms "the meek" are those that humble themselves to serve others, such as Virginia did in her service to animals.

And he returned to the Psalms (121:1) again, saying "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." He created an analogy between God as a shepherd and the guidance he provides if we just open our hearts and entrust our lives to him.

The Reverend also likened Virginia to a shepherd gathering in the stray animals and taking care of them. However he also said that people can be like sheep and will follow blindly even to the point of walking off a cliff.

As I listened to his words of tribute, I pondered what on the surface seems to be in direct contrast to God's work with Noah. But, as God saved one of each animal to ensure their continued lineage, some men have not served God in exercising control over the breeding of domestic animals. The result has left us at

the other end of the spectrum where we must now control our pets' proliferation to ensure their lineage.

Although it was not mentioned, for those that so believe, God further showed his feelings for animals when his only son was born in a manger. Cradled in a bed of hay, it was an array of animals that stood guard over the babe. And the first visitors were shepherds that had been watching over their flocks.

I have no doubt that as indicated in the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want; he maketh me to lie down in green pastures," Virginia will be joined by her cherished animals that passed before her and together, they will rest in the house of the Lord forever.

And for those of us left behind, if as Rev. Stone suggests we are all like so many sheep and Virginia is a shepherd, those that follow in her footsteps will ensure that her legacy lives on for generations to come.

Virginia Willis Kincheloe

Virginia was born March 9, 1930, in Burkburnette, Texas, but had been a Spotsylvania resident for more than 40 years. She died at her home on July 10. Virginia was preceded in death by her parents, Texas and Anna Willis; and brother Bill.

In addition to her daughter Kim, she is survived by her son Raymond Kincheloe Jr., her daughter-in-law, Kelly Madagan; and her grandchildren, Jeremy, Allyson and Trevor Kincheloe. She also left behind a myriad of beloved pets and cherished friends.

Awakenings

As the weeks passed and Virginia Kincheloe fought her valiant battle against ovarian cancer, her four footed friends came to visit on a regular basis.

One of the teams was Michael Paul of Spotsylvania and 5 year old Bichon Frise Yuki who has made 150 visits to Mary Washington Hospital. Michael said Yuki was certified 3 years ago by Therapy Dogs International (TDI). Although there are many programs in which the dogs participate, such as R.E.A.D, Yuki only makes hospital visits. "I only take Yuki to the hospital, because he is so good at what he does," said Michael.

When they first started visiting Virginia Michael said, "I didn't even know who she was. She was just one of the patients we visited." However, he soon realized just how important the tiny woman was to the area's animals. And Yuki far exceed the accolades given by Michael and proved more than deserving of his reputation.

According to her daughter Kim, at one point about 3 weeks prior to her death, Virginia had not been awake for a couple of days.

During those long hours without any communication, with her ever vigilant family by her side, she was again visited by a Blue-Gray Spirit Keepers team. Shortly after Yuki cuddled up next to Virginia on her bed, she opened her eyes and reached for the pup saying, "Aren't you precious."

Although other Blue-Grey Spirit Keepers had made regular visits to Virginia, Yuki became her favorite. And due to her awakening after he was placed by her side, he also became the family's favorite therapy dog.

As the dog snuggled in Kim's lap, the minister said a final few words at the grave site and the little dog whose presence awakened her mother, continued to provide comfort as she was laid to rest.