



Aug, 14, 2017

Oona and Oisin were at the Cherry Blossom Festival in Nashville

where hundreds of Japanese visitors milled in the crowd on the Metro Courthouse plaza on a sparkling spring day.

We edged along the fringe, clinging to shadows and hiding behind decorative trees, trying not to cause a commotion. A Japanese drum troupe was putting on a spectacular show on the stage and the last thing we wanted to do was to detract from them. All it would take was for someone to shriek, “Look at those DOGS!!! and the mob would shift over.

It’s not easy taking an Irish wolfhound on the road.

We were making nearly two feet every five minutes because excited people wanted to see and pet and ask about Oona and Oisin. Finally we got to the outer edge and stayed put in the gloom under the trees.

And that’s when a guy with limited English exclaimed, “Harry Potter dogs!!!” and started snapping photos.

And the jig was up. In the seconds before the crowd rushed over, we nodded hugely and agreed with the man from Japan, “Yes, thank you, *Harry Potter* dogs.”

Technically, it was a Scottish deerhound, Cleod, of Kilbourne Deerhounds of England, who played Padfoot in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. They dyed him black and in some scenes, digitalized him. If you’re looking for an animal who evokes castles, mystery and magic, the deerhound is a spot-on choice. They’re huge and hold the eye with their eerie elegance.

They’re the smaller, more delicate cousin of the Irish wolfhound. I’ve lived with both breeds and loved them all like no other dogs. Sure, they’re big as ponies and can hit 40 mph in a heartbeat. Yes, wolfhounds were used to snatch fully-armored knights from their saddles and break their backs. But their real magic is what flickers

inside these ancient hunting hounds. Their huge personalities caused Celtic heroes and Viking princes to declare wolfhounds the equal to any man.

I'd just never thought of the Harry Potter connection before. And I have two living on my couch. I pinch myself every time I see them to be sure I'm seeing straight.

About 2% of Harry Potter enthusiasts who take the patronus test at the official Potter site, Pottermore, draw a deerhound as the corporeal form of their patronus protection charm. Star Trek actor Wil Wheaton recently tweeted that he'd gotten one. From the comments afterwards, it was clear there was only a vague notion of what deerhounds really are. Big, shaggy grey hunting hounds, sure. But there's so much more that absolutely takes your breath away. Moreso with Irish wolfhounds.

They were war dogs, once. In one Bronze Age account, a wolfhound caused an Irish war chariot to crash to the ground leaping into it to get an enemy chieftain. He escaped in the commotion, so she bit the head off the driver instead. And snipped off the heads of five warriors and killed all the horse pulling the chariot. This is the Irish wolfhound of legend. Unstoppable, ferocious, a force of nature.

It's counter-intuitive, but these powerful giants were also famous friends and companions of Irish heroes and kings, capable of hellish battle one second and calm, loving camaraderie the next. Because wolfhounds were never mere savage beasts, but individuals of keen intelligence, intent and formidable will. They gaze into your eyes and you feel your soul in their embrace. A wolfhound will change your notions of what an "animal" is.

"Practically human" is what they often say upon meeting one. My girl, Oona, seems *more* than human. We doubt, we stray from our natures, we lose focus. Oona is my north star, perpetually true to

herself, bigger than life and rock solid. She looks into my eyes and I hear the wild calling. And I remember. A part of me belongs out there, running with joy through the forests and along the ridge tops, free in the wind with my giantess.

Then she gives me a sloppy kiss and goes through my pockets for cheese.

Magic is alive for those who can see it. And a wolfhound will insist that you look.