



Sept. 12, 2017

Finn stopped by to say hi again last night. It was startling and real enough that I got out of bed and ran my finger across his name on the box of ashes on my bookshelf.

Then I listened to the wind and rain outside.

And then I smiled because it was so good to see my old boy again. He'd ridden back on the wings of a dying hurricane to tell me it was going to be alright.

If it was just a dream, it was a curiously vivid one. I caught a whiff of sun-baked hay in the room. His fur smelled like that the day I held him close...and then had to let him go.

It's always been my experience that once a loved one passes, there's radio silence afterwards. It's not that I don't believe in spiritual encounters. But in my own life, they've been so rare. I never hear from my brother, mother or father. Naturally Finn would be the exception. We who live with Irish wolfhounds know the bond of love and devotion is a powerful, pure force. Now, I'm convinced that it's an eternal one, too.

When the remnants of Hurricane Irma spun up into Tennessee last night, it was nothing like the monster that marched up the Florida peninsula over the weekend. We never lost power. No trees came crashing down here. The rain was a thin coat the wind wore as it marched in shudders and puffs across the hills and the night.

It kept Peggy and I up, through. The weekend I drove to Florida to pick up and bring home another wolfhound, Oisin, a freak storm took out seven trees in my backyard and I spent the rest of our puppy's first summer sawing, hauling and burning the mess. So I listened for the sound of trees falling again with dread.

It had been a long weekend watching an historically dangerous hurricane hook towards Tampa, where many of our dearest friends live, wolfhound people and Finn's favorite people on the planet, his trainer Jan and her husband, Jim. As the hours crawled by there were storm surges, terrible winds, boats tossed like toys and trees and power lines taken down. Slowly, one by one, we heard our friends were all okay.

And then Irma, weakened to a tropical depression, spun through Georgia, across north Alabama, and sent her ragged wings of rain and wind across us in Middle Tennessee. Around midnight I tossed in the towel and tried to sleep. "Tried" being the key word here.

Some time later I was with Finn at the groomers, which should have been my first clue that I was dreaming. We never took Finn to the

groomers. We always bathed him, clipped his nails and groomed his coat ourselves. But there we were and the man in charge looked embarrassed. He said the girl who does Finn's nails hadn't made it to work yet. Would we mind taking a seat and waiting?

Instead, Finn and I went through the screen door and took a stroll out back. And here's the part that gets me. Finn was doing his happy walk. As usual, I was power-walking behind him to hang onto the leash and keep up. It was his special leash, a nice leather one with silver Celtic medallions I'd gotten when he was one. We don't use that one anymore. He wore it last night as I followed my boy and watched him strut and prance and do the mischievous glide he did when he was excited and happy.

Then I was back in bed, smiling...So that's how it was going to be.

Finn left us in May, just days short of his tenth birthday. There'd been wind that day, too, a stiff, oddly persistent wind that made me think of the afternoon four years earlier when he'd stood in a bandshell on the shore of Dunedin, Florida, his fur standing straight out as another hurricane churned up the far side of Florida. He stood in that gale, grinning. He was a happy, contented boy, no matter what his circumstances.

A strange wind took him away from us in May. Another brought him briefly home last night. And I'm still smiling this morning from the sight of him so happy. My heart feels lighter knowing my old boy dropped by to say, "Be happy, everything's going to be okay."

I can't wait for our next talk. Maybe his time I'll remember to hold him tight again....