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Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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The Dog of Our Callings, or Our Work in the World, Dogs and All

He showed up at our door, looked up into our eyes, and without barking or moving told us in a glance that we were his people. It was February, freezing outside, and the chocolate lab-wienheimer mix was emaciated, sick, and haggard. We opened the door and let him in, planning to take him to the local Humane Society in case someone lost him although we knew someone simply abandoned him in the country who-knows-when until he made his way to us.

Two weeks later, after we did bring him to the Humane Society – but only so we could prove to ourselves no one was pining for him – we formally adopted him. Because the Humane Society people named him Dwayne, which seemed so wrong to us, we scurried for a name that sounded similar. We almost named him Shane, but our daughter said that was the name of a total scrumbag from her high school, so we went with Shay instead. Instantly, Shay befriended our very old dog, a lab-mation, and our two cats, and glued his movements to ours, standing to gentlemanly escort us to kitchen or bathroom, sleeping only when we slept, and showing us his not-so-secret powers to turn on the gas stove, open the fridge, and open any door in the house himself. No matter, he was ours, and we were his.

Looking at my life, I would say that the field I helped found, Transformative Language Arts, was an abandoned dog that showed up at my doorstep, but actually, I was the dog, and I showed up first at the door of poetry, which swung open and let me know. I was 14, living in a household torn apart by divorce and abuse, and desperate to find a refuge, which turned out to be writing. I flung myself into poetry, and thanks to a wonderful high school mentor who let me charge into the forbidden realm of the teacher's lounge each lunch period to show her my latest poem, I kept on crossing that threshold. I didn't know much about my future, but it was clear from the get-go that I needed to live in poetry.

Along the way, and threaded through my love of writing and reading, there were other callings – lifelong conversations with work I couldn't escape and didn't want to either. I devoted myself to grassroots organizing, particularly in the labor movement because I had a hunch that where we spend

most of our waking time colors our lives enormously. I tripped into teaching at the college level to support my poetry habit and surprised myself by finding how much I loved helping others find meaning, depth, liberation and their own best words. I started facilitating writing workshops for different communities and fell in love with what people will write and share if they're witnessed well. A lifelong devotee of wind and trees, I found my place in the bioregional movement – based on how where we live shows us how to live, and learning from my ecosystem who I am, how to make community and meaning. As someone who always felt that the life force, my definition of the sacred, was and is abundant and wrapping us with gifts of beauty and sustenance, I followed paths into many spiritual traditions, particularly the one I was born into, Judaism, and later in life, to my great surprise, yoga.

The older you get – if you're lucky, paying attention, and ready to take leaps when life says to jump – the more all you are and all you've lived will coalesce. When I noticed that my community writing workshop and Goddard College students all needed to write the vital stories of their lives to open the gates to their life's work, I followed.....

Three years later, Shay still follows me everywhere.