

Dog Pro Talks About “the Countdown” of Pet Ownership

An interview with Will Pflaum, owner of DBA Glencadia Dog Camp, Glencadia Corporation



New York City, New York Aug 2, 2023 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Will Pflaum has been working with dogs since 2005 when he launched [Glencadia Dog Camp in Columbia County, NY](#), providing boarding and overnight care in the country for New York City dogs. After more than 50,000 individual boarding stays at his facility, having hosted over 5000 individual dogs in the years, he has a different perspective on what Louis C.K. called the “countdown to sorrow” of owning a dog.

“Fun fact,” comments Will, the founder of Glencadia, “Louis C.K. boarded his dog at Glencadia. I had no idea he was famous but he has a local family.”

The Best Dog

“All the original dogs I boarded here are gone,” Will said. “I am sure that this has somehow steadied me to the loss of an animal friend, but I’m not sure how much. When I find an old photo of the original cohort, it’s touching. As we get older, dog owners can start to count their lives in dog lives. If you have two dogs at a time, by the time you reach 50, you might have eight or ten best friends come and go. It will never

hurt as much as the first time, but it is never easy. For me, it's more like dozens instead of a handful, but the dynamic is not that different emotionally."

The reason we can honestly say that each dog was "the best" to each owner without any contradiction is that the dog-human relationship is beyond language. A truism or a felt reality - that multiple "bests" make sense - only appears deceptive if you reason with the categories of language. Dogs don't have language, so they have different truths. So, it's true, the best dog.

The essential non-linguistic character of the dog-human relationship is one of the things we like about these relationships. No real sense of past or future, no real categories of language, just being. Since we are so embedded in the timeline and language, we find refuge in this other kind of way of being, as an animal. We know we are, in fact, capable of living in the moment and without the firm categories of language.

This fact is particularly pertinent when a dog dies. "Here at Glencadia, in fact, we just lost an old friend," Will says. Here is Will's statement about his own dog, Gustav, and how to look at the passing of a friend.

Gustav

This month, my dog Gustav, died at 16 years of age. Gustav was about the same age as my daughter, both born in 2008. [Here they are](#) as youngsters at Glencadia. When he was [in his prime](#) he defended the house and the whole dog camp from coyotes. I have since tried to get a new dog to do this job - wake up in the middle of the night and run up and down the driveway raising as much hell as possible to wake up all the visitor dogs. So far, no one has stepped up. Rather, Gustav's replacements have chosen to hide under the bed at the sound of a pack of coyotes far away in the woods. Here is Gustav showing [his excellent reasoning skills to open a latch](#). There are more videos of this clever bit of witchcraft by Gustav but this one does give you the idea that he was pretty smart.

In 2018 (I think), he swam across the Hudson River. He was such a good watchdog: he never wandered away from the house. He knew who was supposed to come by and who was not... he was so smart, that we left him sitting on the porch to keep an eye on the house when we went to a party on July 3. While he was very reliable and stable, he did not like thunder or fireworks. Given that this was only a day before July 4, someone in the village must have let some firecrackers go in the cornfield across from the house.

Gustav, being a sensible dog, ran to my mother's house at the end of the driveway and knocked on the door. Unfortunately, my father-in-law, then 84, had dementia and didn't open the door.

What happened between about 8 PM when Gustav knocked on the door on July 3 and when we got home at 11 PM we can never know. Somehow, and this must involve Gustav climbing into someone's car, Gustav traveled at least four miles to the Hudson River, then swam across the river and was found in the park in Coxsackie on the morning of July 4. The family that found Gustav took him home and posted on Facebook. My wife saw the announcement and picked him up from their house where we were relaxing on the sofa.

Here is Gustav [on his last assignment](#), caring for an orphaned lamb. No longer very mobile, the lamb, saw with him every day on the porch.

Gustav didn't like to join the city dogs on the "romp" - the big group play time in the field. He stayed

away from the barn as much as possible. He liked other dogs, he just somehow thought he had work to do elsewhere.

The end came on a fine day in May, as Gustav died just a few weeks after I write this here at Glencadia Dog Camp. Gustav ate, walked around, and took care of his lamb. Although he sometimes could not stand up, that day he managed to walk quite a bit. Finally, he dropped down and simply expired.

A Month Every Day

Working here at Glencadia with dogs staying overnight, I have honestly wondered about people working in hotels. Does the staff at a hotel ever wonder why the guest in 204 didn't check out, knock on the door, then find that the guest is dead in the bed? It must happen from time to time. Does anyone ever conclude that the hotel was at fault? I think intuitively we understand that the end can come at any place or any time, as much as we might not like to dwell on this fact of life.

Humans can live to 100. The average age at death for a dog is 12. If we here at Glencadia average about 60 dogs, that is two months of dog life every day. Every six days is a year and every 72 days, or about two and a half months, is a lifetime of dog life. You could posit that we would find a dog dying here 5 or 6 times a year. However, dying at camp is vastly less likely than simple counting might suggest. Statistically, the life expectancy of a dog is vastly longer here than away from the dog camp, probably because people do not send sick or dying dogs to a kennel.

In fact, a dog guest dying here is extremely rare, but it has happened. It's terrible. Dog death is something that everyone who has a dog deals with. Working here at Glencadia, we obviously would see this more often.

All the original dogs from my first years at Glencadia are now dead. Many of the dog families are on their second or third dog, still coming to camp. Since Glencadia has been up and running since 2005, there could be no other way.

It is truly touching to read the [lovely stories people post](#) about the loss of their dogs. [It can be very hard of course](#) when a dog dies.

And everyone one of them was the best.



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