

A Front Row Seat
By Jill Landry

I was sitting on the ledge at Avila Beach looking at the sand and ocean stretched out before me. My journey here today was a pilgrimage in honor of Faith. It would have been her 13th birthday, February 28th, 2020. The sun was starting to go down in the sky. I wanted to come here today and remember the happy moments we had spent here in the midst of many hard days. It was one of the last places I had been with Faith outside of our home before she made her transition.

I had started to ride my bike back down the path I had come on, but stopped myself and turned around, and came to this ledge. I wanted to connect with the love and joy that Faith was and had brought into my life. I wanted to connect with the happy memory we last had here together just months before. But I was feeling anger and resentment about all the trials and challenges that had led up to her passing. As I just allowed the waves of grief to be as they were and everything they carried with them, I realized I was experiencing this just as I needed to in this moment. Even though my intention was to honor Faith and celebrate her life, it also became about letting go on a level I hadn't yet come to or had even anticipated until I was actually in it.

Over a two-year period, Faith's body had been progressively weakening from degenerative myelopathy. In the months preceding her passing, she needed help with nearly all activities, day and night. Despite the weakness in her physical body, her spirit continued to be so strong and engaged in life. With the addition of a cancer diagnosis, the weakening progressed more quickly and she began to experience complications in other systems of her body.

I had been in touch with several animal communicators to get their assistance with communicating with Faith around what was going on in her body and how to best care for her in this time. One of the communicators had shared Faith's bucket list with me. Faith was showing her images of a beach and ocean. *Faith wants to be there, looking at the ocean and smelling the smells. She wants to see everything and be somewhere where there are people walking near the beach; like a boardwalk area. She wants to people and dog watch; to see and be around life. She wants love and laughter and to enjoy her time. She wants people to know that she is happy.*

On the morning of November 2nd, I checked in with Faith to see if she felt up for taking a ride to the beach. In the days prior to this she wasn't showing much interest in food as she always had and had started to become less interactive. But, I sensed that she was up for going if it was a short car ride. Avila Beach was the closest beach I could think of that would be similar to what Faith was showing the animal communicator. We had been there with Faith several times in the past; sometimes just to sit in the back of the car and enjoy acai bowls and other times going out the beach.

We got her out to the car and I climbed in the back to sit with her for extra comfort and support. It had been a while since we had been in the car. She knew something was different as I didn't normally sit in the back with her and I could tell she was happy from the smile on her face. We made our way to Avila.

It was a beautiful warm day with lots of people out and around the beach. The closest parking spot we could find was across the street from the beach and we contemplated the best way to get Faith to a spot where she could see and watch life around her. Faith was about 75 lbs and needed complete assistance to move so this was not the easiest task. Then I spotted it. A car pulling out of a spot right at the beachfront and next to the sidewalk where everyone was walking. We quickly flipped the car around and backed into the spot so that the trunk would open to the beach.

We set Faith up in the back of the car, sitting next to her and supporting her. It was the perfect view! I said to her, "I got you a front row seat." And there was plenty to watch- people, kids, dogs, wagons; walking right by the car and stretching out all the way to ocean. She seemed to love every moment of it. She was watching, nose in the air smelling, and so interactive. It was the happiest and most expressive I had seen her in quite some time.

We stopped for take-out on the way home. Her head on my lap once again. I was stroking her soft fur and ears. I will never forget the time we sat at the beach together, but this time was just as memorable. I wanted to keep riding like this forever; just holding her and enjoying this time together. At home we all sat together and watched a movie, Faith front and center on her bed, enjoying bites of hot dog and sweet potato fries.

This wasn't our good-bye, but it was moving us towards that. There were several hard days that followed. Faith continued to be with us until November 5th, making her transition on her own that night.

The day after our trip to Avila, I had asked Faith what she thought about being there. I heard – "It made my heart so happy." I could tell and being able to fulfill that desire for her and have that time together made my heart so happy too. It will be a time I will always remember.