

Goodbye to a dear friend, hello to new possibilities

For the first time in my adult life, I am without a dog. And although it feels shocking and a little disloyal to say so, at 61 I'm kind of OK with that.

It was on May 19 that I made the difficult decision to let my sweet girl Lucy go to her rest. She had been my companion for 14 of her 16 years, helped me raise my two sons, endured a succession of disdainful cats, comforted me during my divorce, adapted without complaint to a couple of years of unsettled living and rejoiced when I met and married Douglas, whom she adored.

In fact, Lucy's ship really came in when we moved here to Sandy Point in the spring of 2013. After a year of moping around my little rental houses on Mount Desert Island while I worked all day, she suddenly had 2 big acres of grassy lawn and field to play ball in, a swimming beach just across the road, a house with big windows for monitoring foot traffic and plenty of space in which to get away from the cats. She had time to enjoy these lifestyle improvements, too, thanks to Douglas' self-employment and the flexibility of his schedule.

Most mornings, after I drove off to my job, she would hop in the back of Douglas' old Volvo wagon and head to Belfast, her head poking out the window or resting on his shoulder. She would spend the day at his studio, greeting visitors and sleeping on the cool concrete floor. She accompanied him on his rounds to the Belfast Co-op, the bookstore, the curling club and his fiddle-group sessions, making friends everywhere she went. There's something about a friendly old Labrador mix that just invites love, and Lucy gave it back in spades — you could see it in her warm, brown eyes.

But Lucy got off to a rough start in life, one characterized by neglect, abuse and abandonment. By the time she came into my family at about the age of 2, when I was married to my first husband and our sons were in their early teens, she was fearful, suspicious, aggressive and untrustworthy. But with time, patience and love, she overcame her harsh beginnings and blossomed into an excellent family dog, an up-for-anything hiking buddy and a congenial, loyal companion.

She filled the empty spot in our home left by her equally terrific predecessor, a cheerful little shepherd mix named Sparkle Plenty. Sparky had come to live with us just before the death of our big-boned, good-natured doberman-Lab-whatever mix, Ida. And Ida overlapped with Sol, a tightly wound purebred yellow Lab that proved so volatile we had to find him another home. I loved each of these dogs dearly and mourned them deeply when they left us.

It was very hard to say goodbye to Lucy. But as any dog owner will tell you, when the time comes, you'll know it. She was in remarkably good health right up to the end. She still loved to chase a ball through the field or swim after a stick in the river. Her red-brown coat was soft and shiny.

She had slowed down some over the past six months and was sleeping more. We noticed she got winded more easily and took longer to recover from exercise. The vet said whatever was happening was normal old age and congratulated us on having kept her so healthy for so long.

The Sunday before she died, Douglas and I took her for a 3-mile walk in the woods near our house. She frisked down the path like a puppy and never flagged. When we got back to the car, though, she was panting heavily and needed a boost into the back. Tuesday, she was still dragging, so we took her to the vet. Old age, the vet said, offering bloodwork and X-rays. We declined.

Thursday, we took her back in. Her breathing had become labored — we could see her rib muscles working and hear a little grunt at the end of each breath. She wasn't eating or drinking. We loaded her into the Volvo. She made the trip with her head out the window, her ears and lips flapping in the wind.

See Haskell, Page C2



MEG HASKELL



COURTESY OF MAINE RUNNING FOSSILS

Members of the Maine Running Fossils running group, along with their team mascot, competed in the six-hour relay event of the The Great Run on Great Cranberry Island in June. Team captain Leslie Poake is in front.

Running mates

These Maine 'Fossils' lace up for races

BY MEG HASKELL
BDN STAFF

At 7:30 Tuesday morning, Rene Collins was running several relaxed laps around the track behind the Brewer Community School. At 74, the veteran marathoner said she's a little slower and has a little less stamina. Still, she feels strong and steady.

"It's easier to be injured now and takes longer to recover," she said.

The former orthopedic nurse turned psychotherapist has competed in 16 Boston Marathons. Her last one was in 2004, the year she completed chemotherapy treatment for colon cancer. She has endured a number of serious running-related injuries over the 30-plus years of her athletic career, including a fractured hip, broken elbows and other traumas.

But Collins still runs regularly, at least 10 or 12 miles each week, just to stay in shape. These days, she's training for her next race, so she's gradually ramping up her routine, in company with her partner and fellow running enthusiast, 72-year-old Bob MacLaughlin.

On July 22, Collins, MacLaughlin and other members of the Bangor-based Maine Running Fossils relay team will take part in the third annual Down East Sunrise Trail Relay. The 102-mile overnight race begins that evening in Washington Junction, just outside of Ellsworth, and ends the next day in Eastport. Except for the last few miles, which travel along paved public roadways, the route follows the scenic former railroad corridor of the Down East Sunrise Trail.

The Maine Running Fossils, a group of about 30 runners ranging in age from their mid-

40s to well into their 70s, will field a team of 16, according to team captain and self-described "fossil wrangler" Leslie Poake, a 51-year-old CPA and longtime runner from Bangor. The team will consist of "baby fossils," those at the lower end of the age spectrum, the "petrified fossils," the older members.

Each runner will cover between 7 and 17 miles, Poake said, depending on age and ability. "I try to accommodate the older Fossils," she said, including those with poor night vision and other age-related conditions.

"I sat at my desk all day, I was 50 pounds overweight. I was in terrible shape. I thought, 'You know, there's a choice to make here.'"

BOB MACLAUGHLIN

"It can be disorienting to run through the night," she said. "It's pitch dark out there on the trail." Runners are equipped with headlamps and reflective vests, she added.

The goal is for all teams to finish by noon the next day, in time to enjoy a lobster bake and other festivities in Eastport.

Petrified fossil MacLaughlin will cover a 10.7-mile leg of the relay in the early morning. He's looking forward to it.

"I love to run in the woods, just be out there by myself," he said.

MacLaughlin started running in his early 30s, when he was working as a sports writer in southern California. "I sat at my desk all day, smoking sports writer cigarettes. I drank a couple of sports writer beers at lunch," he said. "I was 50 pounds overweight. I was in terrible shape."

He started thinking about "old people" and the lives they lead — nursing homes, dementia, de-



LINDA COAN O'KRESIK | BDN

Bob MacLaughlin, 72, trains with his team, the Maine Running Fossils, for the third annual Down East Sunrise Trail Relay in July, a 102-mile, overnight relay race. MacLaughlin was training at the track at the Brewer Community School recently.

pression. "But on the other side, there was [long-lived celebrity performer] George Burns, my personal hero, and I thought, 'You know, there's a choice to make here.'"

So he quit smoking, converted to a vegetarian diet and started running — slowly.

"It took me two months to work up to a mile," he said. Gradually, he started building distance, and in 1978, after relocating to Maine, he ran his first 10K race at the Common Ground Country Fair in Litchfield. In 1985, he completed the 24-hour Rowdy Ultimate Race at Bowdoin College, covering more than 100 miles. He ran 40 miles on his 40th birthday and 50 on his 50th.

"Since then, I just sleep in on my birthdays," he said. But he still runs about 20 miles every week to stay in shape. As he and Collins prepare for the Down East Sunrise Trail Relay, he's increasing to 30 or 35 miles per week.

In June, two teams from the Maine Running Fossils completed a six-hour relay at The Great Run, a multievent race on Great Cranberry Island. Poake said the teams traveled to the island on a boat piloted by their dinosaur mascot, which accompanies them to most events.

"It makes people laugh," she said. "They're out there running along and they're struggling, and then they see a dinosaur on the trail."

The Maine Running Fossils is always open to new members. For more information, contact Leslie Poake at 207-991-7665 or fridayfishfry@hotmail.com.



LINDA COAN O'KRESIK | BDN

Rene Collins, 74, sports her team jersey while training at the Brewer Community School track with teammates Bob MacLaughlin (left), 72, and team captain Leslie Poake (center) for the third annual Down East Sunrise Trail Relay in July. The race is a 102-mile, overnight relay.

Inside Things to Do C3

At home, reclaiming a place of peace

It's been a while since I've really wanted to sit on my back deck. But on a recent Sunday morning, I found myself sitting there in my pajamas and robe, drinking a hot beverage and listening to the sounds of birds and dogs and feeling the gentle breezes of a new day softly brushing against my face.

The deck is shaded in the morning, but I could see the sun gently nudging God's world into wakefulness. The industry of flies and bees and birds, the scurrying of a squirrel in the leaves of the nearby apple tree and the smell of dew-covered grass all added to my sense of well-being. I felt total contentment in my little world.

It had been difficult for me to sit on the deck until recently. My husband, Jim, who died of pancreatic cancer in 2010, and I had spent many, many hours on that deck, discussing anything and everything or just sitting in companionable silence.

It was a place for us to reconnect and to enjoy being outdoors together without having to work on anything. It also was a place for us to connect with neighbors and to observe the neighborhood to make sure nothing was amiss in our microcosm.

As we enjoyed a drink and a snack, we would talk about projects in progress and the ones we'd tackle next. We evaluated what we already had done and dreamed up entirely new schemes that would never see fruition. We had very active and elaborate imaginations for two people who were on a blue-collar budget.

Dream big, right?

The deck was a place for a little nap in the shaded patio swing with one of the dogs or to have a cool drink on a warm evening.

Our neighbors would walk across the lawn between our houses and talk at the deck's railings. Many evenings, I would make dinner to the background buzz of Jim talking with one or two of our friends.

We spent hours out on the deck after dark — after the mosquitoes would give up their blood-feast — and star-gazed. Jim would distinguish stars from planets for me and we would watch for the International Space Station to suddenly appear into view.

Jim would print out NASA's viewing schedule for the space station every week. I still have a looseleaf notebook where he kept some of those printouts to try to track the space station's specific patterns from month to month.

Jim also enjoyed his telescope, but he used binoculars to see the space station, explaining the station was moving too fast to focus it in the telescope lens.

I loved to watch him tell me about the planets and the stars and the space station and see his boyish animation as he warmed to one of his favorite subjects. I can still hear his voice, clear and authoritative, as he would tell me the latest space station news, what planets would be where in relationship to the moon and for how long and what we might expect to see in the sky soon.

I came to depend on Jim for that sort of specific information. Now when I tilt my gaze toward God's celestial display, I wish I'd actually learned what Jim was trying to teach me.

These days, I have to research to find out what planets should be visible where, though my when stepdaughter's other half uses the phone app "Google Sky" it helps. You simply turn on the app, point it at the stars and it identifies what you're seeing.

It just lacks that personal touch Jim was able to give the experience.

The deck also was a place of refuge for us. I remember one night when we were awakened by the sickening smell of oil fumes. It was early fall, so the nights were becoming nippy.

We were in the process of replacing our heating oil tank and had removed the remaining oil from the old tank into 5-gallon buckets we had put in the garage

See Curves, Page C2



JULIE HARRIS