**Poetry from Daily Life: Jo Van Arkel describes a dog-shaped absence**

By Jo Van Arkel

*My guest this week on Poetry from Daily Life is Jo Van Arkel, who lives in Springfield, Missouri. Professor Van Arkel is a Teaching Fellow in Writing, Department of Languages and Literature, at Drury University. She started writing poems and stories when she was a child, inspired by the many books she checked out from her local library. She likes to write both poetry and fiction and is currently at work on a novella in flash about life in the Ozark Mountains. She has a letterpress studio where she makes prints and etchings that sometimes illustrate her words. ~ David L. Harrison*

**Elegy for a dog**

I am sharing with you an elegy for my dog Scruffers, who was a small black and tan Jack Russell mix my family rescued from a shelter. Scruffers was a handsome fellow with a jaunty stride. He and I kept company together for more than ten seasons.

An elegy is very old poetic form that serves as both a lament and a celebration. It might seem strange to write an elegy for a dog, but as many writers and poets have found, pets in general and dogs in particular, make wonderful muses. Scruffers, for instance, taught me the art of taking a slow walk around the block, pausing to sniff every scent and study even the most subtle shift in the grass for signs that a mole might be hidden just beneath the next soft mound of dirt.

Dogs have a way of weaving themselves into our everyday rhythms and rituals, and when they die, we feel death most acutely through their absence — they no longer run to the door to greet us or do a happy dance in the morning when we rise or follow us around to lick up any crumbs we might drop from an afternoon snack.

I now have a new dog at my feet. Her name is Story, and she has her own unique proclivities including a habit of running wide circles in the yard to express her joy anytime someone comes to visit. She keeps me in a constant state of wonder at the pleasures and challenges of sharing life with an animal. But I have not forgotten the lessons Scruffers taught me, and I miss him still.

**Elegy**

  Dogs lives are too short.

    Their only fault really.

      Agnes Sligh Turnbull

This is before we

put the dog down,

so there is still time

to drive to the

park, top peeled back,

sky for a rooftop.

It’s not pleasure

exactly, more like

vanity to say *stay*

with me forever—or

at least through one more

cycle of seasons.

We believe, the dog

and I, we can track

down scent of those

who have come before,

sniffing at the roots

of whatever is lost.

❖❖❖

*Learn more about Jo Van Arkel’s writing and art at her website:* [*jobethvanarkel.com*](http://jobethvanarkel.com/).