

The Other Argus

By John Monahan

Argus of *The Odyssey* was a mythical dog, but, in my story, the namesake of the Argus Institute tenderly died there on August 23, 1994, at age 15.

If he was not part of Western civilization's literary canon, he had achieved journalistic notoriety, because I had written about him in *Newsweek*, *Bark* and *Yankee* magazines.

The *Yankee* essay described how "Argus, the kind-faced Labrador," could no longer stand up because of his physical ailments, which started with lymphoma in 1992.

"At home, I had to carry him outside and down the stairs to the backyard, and as I carried him, he'd sniff the air good and hard, and I could feel his life against my chest," the essay said.

A year later, I felt that life leave his body as I held him during the euthanasia in a still little room inside the CSU vet hospital. The light was muted, as twilight before dark, the very light that illuminates the long journey back into memory and, inevitably, passes away to the present.

The Penelope in my story was Carolyn Butler, a perceptive researcher and writer with a beautifully sympathetic heart. It was she, as one of the directors of Changes, the vet school's client-support program at the time, who helped me accept that it was time to help Argus die.

The mythical Argus, his 20 years of fidelity rewarded with Odysseus' return, gently expired. No life or death decisions to make on the part of his master. Literature easily disposes, but reality is seeing the beloved dog who has been at your side for 15 years helplessly lying on a double-folded blanket on a tile floor.

Nudged and nudged by Carolyn, I at last realized that given Argus' noble struggle against cancer, against joint, spine and skin disease, my reluctance to let go was tantamount to abandoning him when he needed me most.

Euthanasia, I learned, requires the death of one's own selfish fear of emotional pain. To end your companion's suffering demands that you suffer grief and bereavement and, even after much time passes, sudden melancholy when an evening wind stirs the darkening trees.

I was left with Argus' ashes in a polished wooden box, a paw print pressed in clay, a cutting of fur and gratitude for Changes.

Not long after that, Carolyn explained at a meeting attended by me and several other members of the local community that the vet school was planning to expand Changes into the world's best client-support and veterinarian-teaching organization it is today.

Carolyn asked if there might be a name other than Changes that implied the deepness of the human-animal bond. That's when I told the story about why I'd named my Argus after the dog who never gave up hope.

We honor our forever-lost companions by doing the same. Even in black moments when we draw down the blinds.

###