

Eulogy by Toni Duchi, President, Nittany Greyhounds

HOW TO GO ON

Without Jo, Rooo Valley wouldn't exist.

But it's not about the mortgage she helped us acquire. It wasn't about the renovations for which she wrote checks or the investments she made on our behalf. It wasn't about the volunteer management issues she helped to guide me through.

It was about the dream -- the dream that Nittany Greyhounds could be the premier greyhound adoption agency in the northeast. And then the dream got even bigger.

The vision is that Rooo Valley can be a true dog destination... a place where people can come together with their dogs and learn to be better best friends -- not just greyhound people, but all dog lovers. An education center, a private member dog park, walking trails in the woods, all-breed boarding, a wind-chime memorial garden -- all of these things are in the vision Jo and I create as we walked this twenty acres sowing the seeds of ideas and watching them grow quietly, slowly, but surely.

Jo believed in the dream. She believed that Nittany volunteers are the best on earth and most of all, she believed that I had the capability to manage it all. She held my feet to the fire every day and kept me down to earth when I tried sailing off with some hair-brained idea. We would talk for hours about how best to do something and her healthy skepticism, wisdom, and leadership were great assets to me in dealing with day-to-day issues. She was diplomatic but tough and she made me stronger and better for it.

Jo was my mentor and my friend; she was an advocate for greyhounds, a benefactor for Nittany, and sometimes a volunteer as well. I would show up here and she'd be riding the tractor or unloading 50 bags of Weed 'n Feed that she had made a deal for at Ollie's. I never knew what would happen next, but I always knew it would be in the best interest of Nittany Greyhounds and that she was tending the garden with which our dreams were sewn.

I remember the day we saw this place for the first time. She and I just looked at each other and said, "Nittany needs this place -- how can we do it?" We had been raising money for five years and had some in the bank, but certainly not enough to buy. There wasn't time for grant writing or even any more fund raising. The moment had come and we had to do it or walk away.

We tried to walk away, but we couldn't, and she and I talked and talked about how to make it happen -- we had lunch; we drank wine; we had dinner; we drank some more. I believe we attracted the perfect storm. The previous owner of this place stopped the bidding war, several other benefactors chipped in, Jo so generously contributed the balance of the down payment, and we walked away with the prize -- Rooo Valley. All things happen for a reason and so we knew then that we had done the right thing.

I talked with Jo almost every day for the past two years since we started down this path together, and I will continue to do that. She told me many times that she would never let Nittany fail. I believed her then and I believe it now. Even though she no longer has a physical countenance, her spirit will be here. I am trusting in her to help me attract more miracles and successes for Nittany and Rooo Valley from her new place of bright, white light.

Her greyhound, Devan, will now be my greyhound, and I'll love her as my own for the rest of her life. This place will go on to fulfill the dream we created, both as her legacy and as a tribute to her. She believed in the dream and we will fulfill it... for Jo.