

# Leland Perry: My Life, My Story

10/02/1953 – 01/03/2023

December, 2022, from BWH (Brigham and Women's Hospital), Boston, Massachusetts

I was raised in Virginia with my mother, father, three brothers, and three sisters. We were all remarkably close and I remember my childhood fondly. Growing up, I was shy, introspective, and enjoyed being out in nature. I had that type of curiosity you can see in kids – I was always outside, digging up things in the yard, exploring the outdoors.

As I grew older, my love for nature gave rise to a passion for biological research. My first full-time job was in research at a biotechnology company in Virginia. After some time, I moved on to the NIH (National Institutes of Health) in Washington, DC. At the NIH, I worked as a molecular biologist for the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. My position was as a technologist in the lab of Roscoe Brady. Through this role, I managed the technical side of the laboratory. It was an extremely rewarding experience, and I ended up being a co-author on the first technical paper on how to do gene therapy in humans.

While I was working in Washington, DC, I met my husband, Charlie, at a work conference. We were so comfortable with each other from the start – we knew we were right for each other immediately. However, at the time, Charlie was working as a psychiatrist at McLean Hospital in Boston and he was only supposed to be in town for a few days. We did not let the distance stop us – once he moved back to Boston, I flew up every weekend to see him for three years.

After three years of long distance, I moved to Boston to join Charlie. We built a beautiful life in Boston together. We would go to Boston Symphony quite often and were always going out to eat with friends. We have had so much fun together.

Shortly after I moved to Boston, Charlie and I welcomed a dog into our family, and I began to research activities that we could do together. Through this, I discovered a passion for dog agility, which I like to describe as a combination of horse race and miniature golf. The dogs will race through obstacles while a handler guides them. I trained to become a handler and became very involved in the sport.

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Charlie and I ended up getting five dogs in total (either Shiba Inu or Australian Shepherds) and they all competed in dog agility. We also branched out to other areas, including herding, obedience, and tracking. We traveled all over the United States to go to competitions, which were all very unique and incredibly fun. One of our dogs (Matilda) competed at the national level for years. She won first place two times and fourth place once. There even was a clip of us finishing a course that was shown on national television for several years.

Something that I loved about dog agility is that all the competitors are very friendly. It is a very positive and nice community, and the competitive edge is absent. People at the top level will coach and help each other even as they are competing in the same category.

In addition to the dogs, Charlie and I have two parrots – a Senegal named Kasimu (which means Keeper of the Forest) and an African Grey named Wozzo (a transliteration for the bird in French). They are both so funny. They both have decent vocabulary, and they use it to tell the dogs what to do. They will also toss their food pellets out of their cages to feed the dogs, just because they want to watch them – it entertains them.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we left our life in Boston behind and moved out to the Berkshires. Here, we could just be together, with our dogs and parrots, in an entirely new way. It was an incredibly special time in our relationship. We spent a lot of time outside, which was wonderful. We had vegetable garden that I would tend to. Because we could no longer go to restaurants, I developed a passion for cooking, which I really enjoyed.

After 35 years of building a life together, Charlie and I got married on Thursday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022, at DFCI. It was completely spontaneous. Our care team was amazing and threw us a party on short notice. In general, the staff here have been incredible, beyond our best expectation. Difficult as all of this has been, the entire treatment team has been wonderful. If you imagine what excellent and loving care would look like, this is far above it.