



Cricket in her winter coat shortly before she passed.

She's the littlest lady of all.

She's little because she is small.

She loves to chase the ball.

She's the littlest lady of all.

The Littlest Lady of All

In 1996, Margene and I bought a female puppy from a local breeder of Jack Russell terriers. I intended to name it Roach, but Margene would have no part of it: *You are NOT going to name this cute little puppy after a roach!* Having firmly rejected my choice, Margene unwittingly named our new dog after another crawly insect with antenna and scratchy legs. Cricket was the runt of her litter, hence the nickname "littlest lady of all", which inspired Margene to compose the short jingle above. No dog ever chased tennis balls with more unbridled enthusiasm. Margene dearly loved her eleven-pound Jack Russell, as she did all of God's creatures, roaches being the lone exception. Just minutes before Margene passed, Cricket was the last living thing she would speak to. After whispering a final goodbye to her beloved little dog at the front door, the best thing that ever happened to me slipped out of the house and into the backyard, where her life on this earth would end. The next year, Cricket joined her human mommy in Heaven when she died in my arms on Feb 3, 2011. The previous summer, her back legs began to weaken, and the initial stages of kidney failure appeared. By Christmas, she needed to be taken out 20 or more times a day to urinate. With her unable to stay upright when squatting, I'd support her backside until she was through. In the months after Margene died, I walked the littlest lady of all around the Chimney Springs lake most every day. As the atrophy in her legs worsened, she'd give out after a few minutes, so I'd carry her the rest of the way. Two days before she passed, she was only able to make it a few feet. I tried to get her to go a bit further, but she fell back on her haunches, her pleading eyes looking at mine and saying *no more*. Having Cricket with me for nearly a year after Margene died was a major source of comfort, and caring for her during her decline was one of the great honors of my life. Her remains sit beside her mommy's in the living room of the home where they both brought so much joy and happiness.