

## **Max – A Miracle in my Life**

It was April 9<sup>th</sup> 2008. Max was lying in my arms with his head slightly tilted towards the floor. His breathing seemed slightly calmer, now that he was in a more comfortable position. He had been quite disturbed for sometime, was struggling for breath and certainly hurting somewhere. Only if he could speak...

I was in deep misery not knowing what to do and the thought of being helpless was extremely frustrating. I held him tight and closed my eyes. He snuggled closer and that seemed to calm him further. I had called the vet already – but it was going to take time. I wished I could do something to make him feel better. That is when I felt his breathing becoming slower and heartbeat getting fainter. My heart sank and tears rolled uncontrollably down my cheeks as I clung to his dear life in a desperate attempt to arrest the hands of time and destiny. But it was not to be, as by then his breathing had stopped; heartbeat still fainter, finally coming to a stop. His soul had departed and his body lay lifeless in my arms... As with all noble souls, he left this world without much suffering and staying cheerful and content almost till the end...

Max doesn't need any introduction to anyone who knows me; in fact, even those who didn't know me or my husband Madhu, knew Max. He was our German Shepherd – an integral part of our lives for the 9 years that he shared our lives. He was 13 years and 2 months when he passed away. He had fallen sick just 10 days before that. But that didn't take the cheer away from his face. His hind legs were rendered immobile though, which definitely caused some consternation – but he never let that hamper his spirits. The vet was hopeful and so were we. Thirteen years is a long time for a dog of this breed – but we certainly hadn't had enough of him. He was more than a family member and with each passing year, our bond had only become stronger. The last year was a bit difficult for him, as age was catching up. He had slowed down considerably and had become more sluggish. We kept him trim and fit and took him for regular walks; but it took longer for him to lift himself up despite the vitamins and supplements of Glucosamine and Omega 3 that we lavished on him. His steps were less sure and it took longer for us to complete our walking rounds. Long gone were the days when we ran and walked 9 miles together around the White Rock Lake and lay exhausted on the grass catching our breaths. He seemed to get anxious and stressed out if at least one of us was not with him. Hence, despite all our busy travel schedules, we had taken care to ensure that one of us was back home by night fall to be with him. He always slept in the same room as us – his occasional sighs breaking the stillness of the night and his place offering the cozy warmth in the early mornings when it was time to rise and shine. He was truly the sunshine of our lives.

I vividly remember the day we brought him to our home in Dallas - a four year old bundle of boundless energy. We had responded to an advertisement for adoption of a German Shepherd dog, posted by Mike - one of the employees at Nortel where I worked. That was our first introduction to Max and it was love at first sight. Madhu and I had no doubts in our minds that this is the guy whom we were waiting for. This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> pet for Madhu – but, for me, having a pet was a long cherished dream finally coming true

and my joy knew no bounds. Max reigned as the undisputed king in our back yard chasing rabbits and squirrels among others and gave the garbage truck driver a run for his life. The gentle giant that he was, his looks and the ferocity of his bark belied the gentleness that really kept trouble makers away. Those who got to know him better, connected well; and the list of his admirers grew in leaps and bounds. He became very popular in the circles that we moved around. We traveled the length and breadth of North America with him whether it was scaling the depths of the Grand Canyon or sauntering amidst the woods of Yosemite.

Five years rolled by bringing so much joy. We were contemplating to move to India for a few years and of course we would never move without Max. He was by then 9 years old and considered a senior dog. Preparing him for the long journey by flight became our priority and we spared no efforts in making the transition as smooth as possible. We stopped over in Frankfurt for couple of days where Ajax Mohammed played host to us. Max endeared himself to everyone – even the customs official at Frankfurt airport dropped the files he was carrying to give a bear hug to Max! He got acclimatized faster than us and enjoyed his stay in India tremendously. He had more interactions with people and other animals here. From his vantage point of the vast expanse of the terrace upstairs, he was able to experience more life than what he was used to, in Dallas. His fan club was exploding that got us sometimes rather overwhelmed with kids coming to shake his hands or play ball with him. He had a fantastic time also with his foster parents – Mohan and Shanthi – our benevolent house owners who stayed upstairs. They took turns to dote on him in our absence.

The slight sound of the gate latch would send him shooting to the window where he would part the curtain to see who was coming. From outside itself, we could see the excitement as he followed the movement of the car inside and once parked, he would shift his position close to the door with his wet nose sticking out through the crack even before the key turned...It was a delight to come home just to see the excitement and sheer joy with which he welcomed us. Signs of age became more pronounced as he turned 12. He started feeling more and more insecure when we were both away from home. We had done everything possible to make him at ease and comfortable. I started working out of home in Coimbatore and my trips became very few and far between. We had wanted to move to our own house soon with Max so that he could enjoy the space outside even more. The construction of our house was just about to begin, when Max was taken ill. As it happened, he moved there ahead of us. His body was laid to rest at the far corner of our plot...

Max had touched our lives in ways words can never express. Truer than the human kind, he wasn't merely a companion, but a soul mate. He brought something that was unique and satisfying. He opened our eyes to the unlimited joy and companionship only a pet can bring to one's life. His unconditional love transcended language barriers. His sniff was worth a thousand words. He taught us important lessons of better living – how to embrace life, how to enjoy the moment and more than anything, how to live life to the fullest without holding back. He had a beginner's curiosity even at the ripe old age of 13. He could demonstrate that listening with compassion is as important as having the right

words. He was open to new perspectives and held tight to life's simple pleasures. Even while establishing boundaries and space, his puppy like innocence remained intact. In the end, he also showed us how to let go when it is time to let go even when it seemed way too soon...He knew that life passes quickly and therefore one needs to enjoy the ride while it lasts.... These powerful lessons learned while sharing life with Max had led us to start an animal welfare organization in Coimbatore ([www.hasindia.org](http://www.hasindia.org)) where among other things, we were able to sensitize humans to the love and joy pets bring to their lives... Max was truly a spiritual messenger and we consider ourselves blessed to have had our lives touched by him!!!

I had a hard time coming to terms with the loss – any amount of justification didn't seem to help. The thought of him not being there to welcome me home devastated me. His absence was so overwhelming that I wandered around the house like a mad woman. It must have been three or four days after the incident that all of a sudden, I had this irresistible urge to speak to Mike from whom we adopted Max. The last time we had spoken to each other was when I told him about our move to India and that we were taking Max along with us. At that time, Mike had told me how happy he was to know that we had bonded so well with Max... I frantically searched my company's internal directory and drew a blank. For some reason, the desire to speak to Mike was so strong that I started to search the White Pages to track him down and was glad when the address finally matched....I picked up the phone and composed myself for making this call. The acknowledgment at the other end was encouraging and after exchanging customary hellos, without further ado, I broke the news. The silence at the other end was a bit longer than usual. Mike's voice cracked as he told me that after all these many years, he had picked up an 8 week old German Shepherd pup from the local shelter just couple of days ago. The pup had reminded him of Max so much that he couldn't name him anything else...My jaw dropped as I clutched the phone tighter and the import of what he had just said slowly sank in. This event of someone picking up a pup from a local shelter, as routine as it could ever be, had happened around the time when Max's soul departed this world. Even stranger was the fact that the pup was born around the same time as Max's birth date. We had huge lumps in our throats that rendered us speechless for a while. I was groping for words when Mike broke the silence again asking me for my e-mail so that he could send me baby Max's pictures...

Life had certainly turned a full circle. What more could I ever ask for? I felt as if the power of belief and hope was put to test only to emerge victorious. Time stood still in quiet realization of the power of the soul having transcended continents, now connected us across the globe. I experienced a sudden surge of peace sweep over me to soothe my weary mind and troubled heart. Mike sent me the pictures of baby Max and I too sent him Max's latest pictures. Mike and I have been in touch since then and I eagerly look forward to seeing baby Max next time I visit Dallas.

Last but not least, I would like to conclude this narration with a silent prayer to our soul mate whose physical presence we miss so dearly... Dear Max, Awake or asleep, we carry a dream of you, and it helps us remember how much better our lives have become, because you are a part of it!