



MAX, THE WONDER DOG

by
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He was a two year old Golden Retriever, with an intelligent reddish-blond face. My first impression of Max involved his eyebrows – they wiggled up and down separately, as he stared sad-eyed at me, tail wagging, waiting to be petted. I had never seen a dog wiggle his eyebrows separately, and it got my attention. After I petted him for several minutes, Max grabbed my leg with his paws and began dancing with it.

“Max, go away!” Harold shouted.

Max hung his head in shame and skulked over to the corner of the room.

Harold was my best friend, and Max was left at Harold's house by his daughter, who raised him from a puppy. She had to give him up when she moved to a new apartment that didn't allow pets.

Max waited the appropriate amount of punishment time in the corner, and slowly ambled back over to the couch where my wife and I were seated. He stared at my wife, and wiggled his eyebrows. She laughed and began to pet him. After several more minutes, he grabbed her leg with his paws and began doing the mambo.

"Max! Stop it!" Harold swore, pulling Max away again.

Max was so ashamed of himself he crawled back to the corner on all fours, whimpering as he crawled.

"I'm very sorry," Harold apologized.

"It's okay," my wife assured him, running her hand over the large run Max caused in her stockings from his untrimmed nails.

"I'll pay for a new pair of stockings," Harold offered.

"No, they were old and ready to be thrown out anyway," my wife assured him.

My wife looked over at me and gave me one of her secret looks. I knew what she wanted. I shook my head no.

"We can't keep him," Harold lamented. "It's just Pearl and me at home now, and we leave him alone most of the time. He needs a young family with children to play with."

Harold looked over at his wife, Pearl, who nodded agreement. Pearl gave Harold one of her secret looks, and he nodded back to her.

My wife looked at me, secretly, again, and I shook my head no, again.

Pearl and Harold looked at me and my wife. My wife looked at

me. I stared off into space, trying to look pre-occupied.

Pearl kicked Harold secretly and gave him a different secret look. "Okay!" he whispered back to her.

"Do you want him?" Harold asked me. "He's a good dog, except for that grabbing your leg stuff."

My wife looked at me again, her eyes even sadder than Max's.

"No thanks, Harold. We have enough to do with three small children," I said.

My wife continued to look at me with those sad eyes. At one point, she wiggled her eyebrows like Max, but I refused to smile and give in. The subject was changed and we left a short time later.

"Honey?" my wife asked as we snuggled in for the night.

"No way," I answered.

"Please?"

"No. Raising a 2 year old, a 4 year old, and a 6 year old is more than enough."

"Please?"

"Let's sleep on it, and see how we feel in the morning," I suggested. Sometimes, a battle delayed is a battle won.

The next morning, my wife made the same face, with the same wiggling eyebrows at the breakfast table.

"Are you sure we can't?" she asked, again, with a pathetic, searching look. I could feel myself weakening.

"Yes, I'm sure!" I said, mustering my resolve.

"Sure of what?" Holly, our six year old asked.

"Never mind," I answered. "It's adult business."

"We're thinking of getting a dog," my wife explained. She said

this so sweetly she thought she was fooling me as to her true intent – issuing a call for volunteers.

“A dog! Great! I always wanted a dog!” Holly exclaimed.

She had her first volunteer.

“Hey David and Amy, we’re getting a dog!” Holly called out.

Two more volunteers were enlisted. It was four against one.

“Wait a minute. Nobody said we were definitely getting a dog,” I said sounding like Scrooge. “In 2 weeks, he’ll be just another old toy, and I’ll be the one who will be feeding him and walking him.”

“I’ll walk him!” David, our four year old assured me.

“Me, too,” Amy, our two year old said, raising her hand.

“Yeah, right. He weighs 20 pounds more than you,” I grumbled.

“Dad, please?!” my three children pleaded, in unison, with my wife’s prodding.

And that’s how we came to own Max.

It took a month to train him to stop dancing with people’s legs. After that, Max was great with the kids. He had the gentle spirit of a holy man. The kids pulled his tail, rode him like a horse, and dressed him like a doll, but Max never complained. He was thankful for the attention. If we forgot to take him out, he would rather let his bladder burst, than have an ‘accident’ in the house.

Of course, there were problems. Serious problems. The first occurred a year after we took him in.

Amy was playing with Max underneath the kitchen table. Amy must have wondered what a dog tasted like, because she decided to bite Max’s leg. Max let out a yelp of pain, and then snapped at Amy instinctively. He caught her on the lip and drew blood. When Max

heard Amy crying, and saw her bloody lip, he ran and hid under the basement stairs while we rushed Amy to the emergency room. Amy received the required stitches, and the surgeon assured us the scar would not show. Upon returning home several hours later, Max was still under the basement stairs, whimpering pitifully.

We had to drag Max out from under the stairs and bring him to the vet's office, where he was given a tetanus shot. Human bites, we learned, can be as dangerous as a dog's. We forgave Max for biting Amy's lip, because after all, she bit him first, and it was self-defense.

The second serious problem happened a year later. Max sat by the back door and began howling. It was a pitiful, sad sound. We checked his coat for fleas and ticks, but there was nothing apparent. We looked at his feet, but there were no painful burrs trapped there. We couldn't find anything wrong with him, but he continued to sit by the back door, howling.

When I opened the back door to take out the garbage, Max sailed past me. He ran to our six foot high stockade fence, and leaped skyward – and like Superdog, he cleared it.

That's when we discovered our neighbor's female Doberman, Missy, was not 'fixed,' and had entered her first cycle of 'heat.' Once Max was inside our neighbor's yard, he and Missy ran around together, initiating the mating ritual.

Our neighbors were outraged, and chased after Max with a stick. Max was scared of people with sticks, and he cowered. Now that doggy passion had been replaced with fear, Max could not scale the same fence and return to our backyard. Instead, he remained in the corner of their yard, howling for help. We ran over to fetch Max while our neighbors eyed us angrily.

The following day, when I looked away for a second after opening the back door, I felt this breeze blow by my leg. I looked down, and

saw nothing. When I looked up again, I caught a glimpse of Max's tail as it floated over the fence, with nary a paw in front of it touching the six foot high barrier.

There was no way we could leave Max alone while Missy was in heat next door.

The last major problem occurred during Max's fifth year as a member of our family. We began to notice he stopped wiggling his eyebrows as often as he used to. In fact, he stopped doing anything he used to other than lie on his blanket in the corner of the kitchen. When we brought him to the vet, the tests revealed the worst – he had canine leukemia.

Max needed an expensive operation on his spleen, costing \$800, and then required two expensive blood transfusions of \$250 apiece. Money was tight in our young family.

“Do you see what your dog is costing us?” I grumbled at my wife.

“It's your dog, too,” she argued, and then looked at me sadly.

“We can buy another dog for this much money!” I grumbled further.

“I don't want another dog,” she said.

I needed for her to say that. My heart felt the same, but it couldn't make itself heard over the grumbling of my wallet.

The medical treatments appeared to work, and Max got better for a while. A few months later, he resumed lying in the corner of the kitchen. The relapse was worse. He got so weak he could barely get up to go out for a walk. When he couldn't stand up long enough to eat, my wife sat with him on the floor. She dipped her fingers in a bowl of milk, and let him lick the milk off her fingers.

After several frantic calls, the vet admitted he had reached the

limit of his treatments. He suggested it might be more humane to put Max to sleep. That was unthinkable.

A week later, Max was crying and whimpering constantly. He began vomiting and losing control of his bladder and bowels. He could no longer walk or even sit-up. The unthinkable was discussed and then ... ratified.

I carried Max into the car with a big towel wrapped around him. The family piled in, and we drove to the vet's office in silence. My wife and children were crying when I carried him into the examining room. Each member of our family said good-bye to Max, and kissed him. The vet invited all of us to remain for the procedure, but I was the only one who stayed.

I sat on the examining table with Max, his head in my lap. The vet administered an injection while I petted Max and held him. Max looked up at me and wiggled his eyebrows one last time before he closed his eyes and stopped breathing. In a short time, he was perfectly still. The event was peaceful, almost religious. I watched Max transform from the passionate wonder dog, into a lifeless, still form.

I cry now, thinking of Max. I cry because I miss him and that gentle, yet lustful spirit.

I think I would like to pass from this world the way Max did – held in the arms of someone who loves me, in spite of the embarrassing faults I cannot change.

THE END