

ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN?

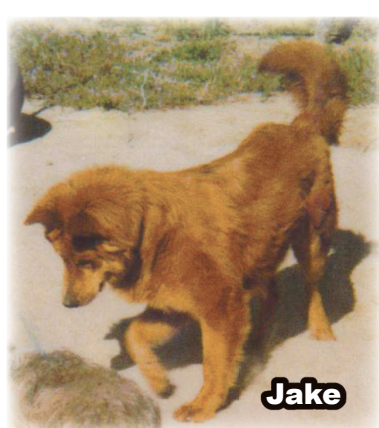
I've heard that phrase several times in the last few days. I sure hope it's true.

On a recent Wednesday, I had to bring a vet to our house to do the dreaded procedure: a lethal IV to end our beloved dog's life. At some point, no matter how hard a dog tries to please its humans in spite of its personal pain, the dog's beloved human must make that hard choice to end the dog's pain and misery.

First it was Ebbo, an ugly cocka-poo-bass, who was brought to us to replace Buster-Killer-Snoopy-Ruff-Rags. "Buster" for short, thank goodness, was given that aggregated name by Carl, the UPS man, a local icon who could walk into people's houses unannounced, and who knew where everyone lived better than any of us locals.

But back to Ebbo: he was a Bassett mixed with cockapoo, with a long body, short, heavy legs, and big feet. As he aged, he became blind and snappish in his personality, so we decided it was time to take him for his final trip to the vet. I made my mother do that. I was chicken, aka chicken-ess.

Then there was Jake, our first super duper wonder dog, a giant, deep red chow mixed with Huge. His paws were the size of the palm of my hand. We got him out of Ed Dickman's trunk, that was backed up to the front of the store as he gave away a litter of puppies. Ed ran the local laundromat that was located in



the building where the Sheriff's Office is now located. A few months later he insisted that we take another puppy, a cousin of Jake's, and because she looked like a fat little rat, we temporarily named her Fat Rat. But a permanent never happened, so she stayed Fat Rat all of her life. As female dogs so often can be, Fat Rat was mean and bitchy to Jake, so now we know where that B-word came from!

Jake loved to play tug of war with my dad's old socks, and I still find some of them in the yard now and then. His huge paws slipped on the bare floor of the dining room, so he walked backwards very slowly when he was on that floor! As a puppy, Jake almost died of parvo, as I had never heard of it and did get one shot but no boosters, not realizing that the boosters were critical.

Jake seemed to get a stomach cancer of some sort, so finally, when he had stopped eating and moving around, I made the difficult call to a mobile vet out of Hesperia. He came right away, mercifully ending Jake's misery. Fat Rat didn't survive the loss of Jake very long. We found her in her little hole a few weeks later, having died of a broken heart, we presumed.

Next was Pete, a long-legged Doberman Shepherd mix, whom we adopted at a PetSmart, along with his buddy Luke. We loved Pete for his razor sharp intelligence, calling him

Professor Pete. I had to take him to a vet due to some sort of mass in his lungs so that breathing was difficult for him. Talk about agony, for both of us!

Lukey was the next extra special dog, my close companion and love. Lukey was a black lab-bull terrier mix who was mercilessly teased as a balloon without a string due to his round shape. On his chest was a white splash shaped like an arrow that pointed to his big heart. He'd lay at my feet under the table at mealtimes; sleep on my bed at night; and was the perfect loving companion.

I thought I would not survive having to put him down, but God told me that such intense pain naturally springs from intense love, down here in this broken world. He also said that our intense love for innocent doggies was a tiny fraction of His intense love for us lovely humans.

Lukey lasted 14 years, ultimately blind and deaf, but when his hips collapsed and he couldn't walk, I knew that his time had come.



Jan, Debbie and I took Lukey to the emergency vet at 4AM one morning, where they did what had to be done. I still shed tears over Lukey as one of the best dogs ever.

So we come now to the present pair, Maggie and Rocky. Both were adopted at the local rescue on High Road, after Lukey had passed on. Maggie was a 4-year-old Rottweiler mix who was rejected twice for failing the attempted conversion to a mean, nasty type of Rottweiler. She was a sweetie heart through and through. Rocky was a 2-year-old blondish Akita mix who had just arrived at the rescue. He became our next superstar, loving to play and to chase his ball and return with it only to play tug of war with it. Maggie unfortunately had to play second fiddle to Rocky, but she was much loved nonetheless.

It seems like just two or three short months ago that I noticed a large round growth appearing on Maggie's left hip, and much as I wanted to ignore it, I knew it might be very bad news. I took her to the vet, but at her age of 13-14, and having lost a lot of weight, the vet recommended that we put her on "hospice" with pain killers and relaxers until the time when we decided to end her life on this earth. That time was yesterday as I write this, after



she had experienced a severe seizure the night before.

Rocky is now an "only dog", a status he is unsure he likes. He looks for Maggie in her favorite spots and seems sad that she isn't there. Fortunately he and I have each other, but it will take some time for him to adjust to Maggie's absence. I suspect that God sent Rocky to fill the gaping hole left by Lukey. Although Rocky is blonde where Lukey was black, otherwise they are very much alike in personalities and behavior. God sent one loving dog as a replacement for the lost one.

Sir William tells Rocky how much he is like his "Uncle Luke."

I'm sure you must wonder, as I do, why God created our closest animal companions with such short lives compared to ours. Someday, when I get to be with God in His kingdom, I'm going to ask Him that question. I have little doubt that a part of His purpose with dogs is to train us in caring about creatures other than ourselves, and as dogs are so easy to love, they are the perfect way to do that. But we could do without the grief part, don't you think?

So, the question: Do dogs go to heaven? My answer is a resounding YES!! And not dog heaven, either, but people heaven, where we can love them and communicate with them and not worry about short lives compared to longer lives. It's so obvious that dogs, and animals in general, have some sort of awareness, a kind of soul, which we can see in them as they play, and laugh, and argue, get jealous, guard and protect us, understand us, and try to speak to us.

And not just dogs. Cats, too. And bunnies. And horses. And cows. And baby goats. And even sheep. But don't get me started on all the animals and their miraculous wonderfulness.

I know that before we humans broke the world, all of creation existed in harmony, between critters and humans, and nature and humans. One can feel the frustration of a dog trying to say something to us, but Creation has been muted for now. The Apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans,

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:19-23)

Linda Gammel

He is your friend, your partner, your defender, your dog. You are his life, his love, his leader. He will be yours, faithful and true, to the last beat of his heart. You owe it to him to be worthy of such devotion.
~Unknown

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