

The Gifts

I miss KD, my beloved Newfound Lanseer dog. She gave me many large and small gifts. Fur all over the house, wet dog drool on my lap when she wanted to be petted, and the gift of love and unconditional acceptance. But one of the greatest gifts KD gave me came at the end of her life.

On October 15, 2008 KD passed over. It was the culmination of a long, and traumatic, road for me. But I am getting ahead of myself; the story really begins 6 years ago when I brought KD to my home. A chance encounter with a lost Saint Bernard let me know I needed a dog to care for. After much consideration, and with the help of Mary Killian, Dennis and Celia Gebhart, and Les Whitehead; I met KD. I agonize over the decision for 2 months. Finally I was asked why I did not take her home, they knew I loved her. My answer – I was unsure I could handle the “end game”. Finally I decided I did not know how to handle it, but I would work it out when the time came.

Now KD had a very dominant personality. During obedience class, she refused to sit until the second week of class. And swimming. She hated swimming. But we persisted and finally managed to swim without drama, but only if I was next to her. She was just a big insecure teddy bear that needed my caring. When we went to the veterinarian, she would shake and try to hide under the bench in the waiting area. But all the while that little “end game” conversation played in the back of my mind.

Somewhere along the line I decided I must be strong and be with her when the time came. I needed to make sure she was not stressed at the end. I kept hoping she would pass away naturally in her sleep. But KD knew better. There were two last gifts for her to offer me.

The last two days she was losing more ability to stand. Then she stopped eating. But she was moody and sometimes would not eat for a day or two. I would hold the water pail under her muzzle and she would drink but the water was still in the pail – she was not swallowing. I suspected the worst, but was hopeful the vet would tell me it was just an infection that made her feel so bad and this explained her symptoms. But the vet was very certain that there was little we could do for KD. But I persisted and an additional standing examination revealed KD to be as bad off as the vet suspected. As hard as it was, I made the final decision for euthanasia.

It was really very quick, about 5 seconds. Even after it was over KD looked like she was just lying there watching me, waiting for me to scratch her ears or rug her rough. But I knew KD was gone and I never would be able to comfort her again. I was terribly upset. For the next five days I was not even aware of day turning into night. But as time passed, I began to appreciate the final gifts from KD.

By presenting me with the difficult decision of being with her or not being with her at the end, she forced me to own my own needs. I cared for her so much that I wanted to do the right thing for her, even if it meant sacrificing my needs. From this bond I drew the

strength to be there and make sure she felt loved and calm at the end. I was scratching her ears and rough, just like she liked, right thru the end. If I had not been there, I would always agonize over how difficult it was. But I was there and I know it was as easy and loving as I could make it for her. But this was only the first gift.

After the euthanasia I felt like I never would be the same. That I never would recover. But somewhere deep inside, I knew I would be OK. I did not know when or how, but a separate feeling from the deep hurt and loss was telling me 'I would be OK, eventually'. As time passed, I realize I would never have discovered this strength if not for KD. To form such a bond, and then loose the object of my affection; was almost more than words can tell. But when I remember KD, I remember the strength she allowed me to discover. I can accept the pain of what will come and survive it all.

KD was a wonderful companion. In so many little ways she taught me so much about living and loving. She allowed me to become less self-centered. With her passing she taught me self-sacrifice can be my best choice. And she taught me I have a great strength and can survive great misfortune. I do not need to fear what I do not know.

By Woody Smith with inspiration from KD.