

ISSUES OF OUR TIME

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My Dog

Katy Scully

George Graham Vest, a US Senator and lawyer, once said as a closing argument against the murderer of a dog, “The one absolutely unselfish friend that a man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him, the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous is his dog”. My dog is almost the exact opposite of this — he is not exactly what you would consider “man’s best friend”. My dog growls when you try to cuddle him, sulks if you don’t walk him and barks if you eat in front of him. My dog howls in the middle of the night and tracks dirt through the entire house after bringing in a bone. My dog is grumpy, mean and a shameless suck-up; and I still manage to love him more than anything else in the world.

I had wanted a dog my entire life. Excuses always stood in the way — “We don’t have a fence”, “You won’t look after it” and “You already have a budgie” were common arguments thrown at my constant pleas for a pet. When I was 11, my parents finally caved when they moved my family away from our home in Canberra to start a new life in Melbourne. I was too young to care about our move; my brothers were not. My parents provided us with an incentive to move cities — in Melbourne; we would be able to get a dog! History had taught me a lot — never ones to stay true to their promises, I highly doubted my parents would keep this one and simply disregarded it. In retrospect, I should have had more faith in my parents. Two months after the move, my mother called every animal shelter in Melbourne searching for a small dog for us to call our own. She hit the jackpot — there

was a black miniature poodle, “Rex”, at the Lort Smith Animal Hospital. Rex had a tragic story — his owner was suffering from a mental illness and was admitted into a psychiatric hospital, leaving nobody to care for him. We instantly fell in love with Rex. When we arrived the next morning, my mother went in while I eagerly waited in the car. She came back earlier than expected and without Rex. I burst into tears as she explained that somebody had called to put Rex on hold after she had gotten off the phone — I was convinced that we were never going to get a dog. Our family sat in silence for a long time, until Mum said, “There’s a Maltese cross-Shih Tzu with grey ears at the Lost Dogs Home”. My father drove there in record timing (and possibly running a few red lights in the process). We ran inside and searched every aisle for the dog. Finally, at the very end of a row, we saw a little white dog with grey ears. He was barking at the other dogs and wagged his tail when we saw him. As my mum was filling out the paperwork, I decided on a name — “Snowy”.

We now laugh thinking about how Snowy behaved the day we got him. When we got home that night, he lay on a blanket quietly while we ate dinner at the table, and then took himself off to bed in his basket in the laundry. We all agreed he was an “angel” and so well trained. How wrong we were! After a few weeks, Snowy’s true colours emerged and we discovered he wasn’t all that angelic after all. Every night, he started jumping on the laundry door to be let out. We would come home after school to find that although he knew how to use his dog-door and was perfectly toilet trained, he didn’t choose to practice this. One day, I went into the laundry to find our dirty clothes basket on its side and clothes everywhere. I tracked down the source: Snowy was lying in the living room, gnawing on a tea-towel used to cover the lamb roast from the night before. Our family watched in amazement as seemingly overnight Snowy transformed from angel to demon. My brother Owen handled Snowy’s behaviour particularly badly — while the rest of us considered it cute, he considered it annoying. His anger reached boiling point when one morning Owen woke up to make himself bacon and eggs for breakfast. He

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spent half an hour making the perfect breakfast, and set his tray on the coffee table in front of the TV ready to enjoy a morning TV show. He went back into the kitchen to get a glass of juice, and returned to find Snowy standing on the coffee table eating his meticulously crafted banquet. I recently asked Owen if he has ever forgiven Snowy for what we now refer to as the “bacon and eggs incident”. His answer? “No!”

The love story of me and Snowy is a tragic one. It’s comparable to Romeo and Juliet; Gable and Lombard; Rachel and Ross. It is a tale of unrequited love. I don’t remember a time in which Snowy ever loved me. All my memories include him growling at me when I try to cuddle him and running away when I try to pick him up — not exactly a match made in heaven. I have tried everything to fix our somewhat strained relationship. I give him non-stop cuddles; I buy him costumes (he has ladybird, pumpkin and “super dog” costumes to fashion); and I shower him with love and affection. I have even tried the “treat them mean, keep them keen” approach, but to no avail. Snowy seemed to enjoy the time alone, while I had to contain myself from hugging him whenever I walked past. Willpower is not one of my strong points — I cracked within the hour. I have tried everything in my power to rectify the situation. I have finally given up with the hope that one day he will love me — I’m not optimistic.

In George Graham Vest’s famous eulogy to the dog, he states that, “He will sleep on the cold ground ... if only he may be near his master’s side. He will kiss the hand that has no food to offer”. This is not true of my dog. My dog is much too high maintenance to sleep on the cold ground, and would sooner bite than kiss the hand that has no food to offer. And I wouldn’t have it any other way.



Katie Scully wrote this essay in 2007 when she was in Year 12 at Warrandyte High School, Warrandyte, Victoria.