

A False Alarm – Worries about my Innoko

Life is so fragile, complex and unpredictable. I believe one should live in constant gratitude and in the moment. One can never be certain of anyone or anything. One can take nothing for granted.

As so many of us, I have sustained many profound losses in my life. Both of my parents are dead. A lovely young man in his early forties who was a soul mate and brother to me suffered and died agonizingly of AIDS. I have lost numerous dear, wonderful beloved friends and relatives. I have known financial loss, loss of health and profession, loss of safety and security, loss of property, loss of trust, and so on. Yet the most profound losses I have experienced are those of my beloved animal companions – those who have offered me their unconditional love, loyalty, beauty, purity-of-heart along with their empathy and companionship. It was the death of my beautiful Alaskan Malamute/Lab mix, Caesar, that transformed my life and led me into the world of animal welfare and rescue and into my work as a grief counselor and author of books and articles about animals.

After Caesar's death, I was grief stricken and inconsolable. I had loved him so deeply and cared for him. He had been horribly abused and was terrified of people. Yet he trusted, loved and protected me and was my devoted "child" until the end of his life. From an emaciated, shivering, suffering creature, with love, respect and care, he had blossomed into a loving, trusting beautiful and beloved family member. I grieve his loss even today – almost fifteen years after his death from bone cancer. I still miss him...

As most of you know, I have rescued and adopted over 40 dogs during the past decades. Most of them were mistreated – all were neglected, abandoned or abused. I have adopted many older dogs – one named Lumberjack who was an eleven year old Alaskan Malamute. Many of my adopted dogs had and currently have special needs. All were in desperate need of love and care until I saved and adopted them.

Innoko is an eleven and a half year old Alaskan Malamute/Siberian Husky mix who may also have a significant amount of wolf in his genetic make-up. He was found by the side of a road in a rural area north of Ft. Worth, TX. He was covered with fleas and ticks and extraordinarily emaciated and virtually feral. He was terrified of any contact with a human being, and to this day, keeps his distance from almost any person, even those he sees on a daily basis. But Innoko trusts me, and I adore him. He is probably the shyest dog I've ever known. He is gentle, mild-mannered and gets along with his siblings. It is clear, however, that he is a "loner" and prefers the safety and security of his "crate. I do not generally like to keep a dog in a crate; however, in Innoko's case, he is most secure and comfortable after a walk or playtime in the backyard to remain in his "den".

Innoko has always been very frail and delicate. Yet his spirit is strong – it seems as though he is always happy and is a great “healer” to almost anyone with whom he comes into contact. He is a gentle angel/impish sprite. He has a sense of humor and loves to play with both humans and other canines. He played a critical role in the emotional “healing” of my dearest friend, Betty Christenson throughout her ordeal of esophageal cancer. He brought her joy and made her laugh even when life was grim and full of pain.

Innoko walks stiffly now – he has slowed down considerably. He has difficulty getting up and walking. His hind legs do not bend easily, and it is obvious that he is getting old quickly. About a week ago, he could hardly get up, and when he stood his entire right side trembled and he stumbled as though drunk. I had just lost my beloved Dony to a series of strokes, and Innoko’s behavior was eerily similar to hers as his movements were involuntary, erratic and shaky. He almost fell several times, but somehow managed to weave his way from the back yard to the porch – slowly, unsteadily. My friends, Lou and Shari were with Innoko and me. As soon as we managed to get him in the house, I called the vet not knowing how to handle the situation. Innoko was old and terrified of the vet. The vet and vet tech volunteered to come over, but I knew that the presence of a strange vet would traumatize Innoko. I asked if there was some medication that we could administer to him, and the vet tech advised us to give him 20 mg of Prednisone (steroid) twice a day for the next five days and then reduce the dosage.

I gave Innoko the prescribed dosage of prednisone immediately. Within fifteen to twenty minutes, Innoko looked and felt better. He was standing up on his own and walking. For however long, Innoko has with us, I know that I will provide as high a quality of life for him as I can, but I will not have him terrorized or terrified by going undergoing draconian measures in order to keep him alive. I have my beautiful boy with me now – he will let me know when it is time for him to leave. In the meantime, I cannot tell you how happy I am to spend precious moments with my angel, Innoko...