

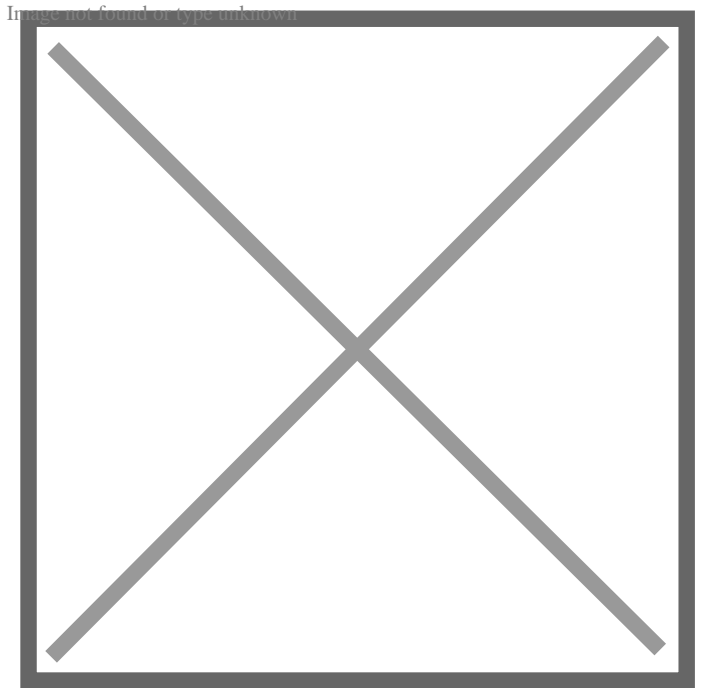
A lesson in unfailing love

sharperFocus

by Lawrence Shiroma, Major –

“Not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without your Heavenly Father knowing it” (Matthew 10:29).

It was sooner than expected. Though I had been anticipating it for some time, the actual event hit me harder than I thought it would. For nearly 15 years, Sammy, our cocker spaniel with large trusting brown eyes and an appealing face, was our family pet through our last four appointments in San Francisco, Alaska and Los Angeles. In all of them, Sammy was a “working dog,” who loved being with people and was seemingly born with a tennis ball in his mouth. He was present to greet our corps youth for band practice with his stubby tail wagging furiously and, if I left him at home, one of the kids would invariably come up to me and ask, “Major Shiroma, where’s Sammy?”



After years of companionship, our dog is no longer with us. He came into our lives when our daughter was ten and left when she was 25. Since moving to Los Angeles, we noticed deterioration in his health. First his hearing faded, and then he developed cataracts in both eyes. Afterward, he started limping and finally, he could no longer climb the stairs to our bedroom without great difficulty. It broke my heart to see him with his hind legs folded under him, unable to lift himself up. In years past, Sammy would run tirelessly alongside me on those clear, crisp mornings when I biked through pristine Alaskan trails.

The day before I took him to the doctor, he hobbled beside me as we walked through the neighborhood. I did not think he could do it, but it seemed like he was determined to walk with me. Tears still well up whenever I realize this was our last walk together—an old man and his dog.

The veterinarian said he had bone tumors and the x-ray revealed the cancer had spread to his chest. It was too costly to maintain him on painkillers, and no surgery was possible. So it was decided to put him to sleep. I held him in my arms as the injection was administered.

“I’m sorry Sammy, I’m sorry Sammy,” I cried as I held him. “I’m sorry Sammy,” I kept saying to him, as tears fell on his fur. I was crushed and felt that I had abandoned my best friend. He became quiet, his eyes closed and looked like he was asleep, but he was gone.

Death is a mystery, and someday we must all pass through its deep waters in order to get to the other side. As a dog ages five to seven times faster than humans; it is a priceless experience to share in this accelerated passage through life, from puppy to senior citizen, all within a span of some 15 years.

Why did God create dogs? Some say for the sake of children, others say for companionship. Among pet owners there is debate about whether a dog or cat is “man’s best friend.” But one thing is certain, my dog demonstrated God’s constant and unfailing love more so than I could ever do. One indelible picture that remains with me is of Sammy waiting patiently to greet us at the front door whenever we would arrive home—his bobbed tail wagging in recognition. Are there dogs in heaven? The Bible is silent regarding an afterlife for animals, but the Scriptures have this wonderfully veiled promise in 1 Corinthians 2:9 for all who will inherit God’s kingdom:

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for entrusting the care of one of your creations to our family and for the timeless lesson in unfailing love you revealed to us through a faithful friend.