



# The Dog Who Went Off to Die

By Ellen Kohn

The park was empty, except for one dog, wandering about alone. I met adorable, sweet Max that day. When I called the phone number on his tag, it was the beginning of a long relationship with his owners, Sheila and Don, and their rescued clan of American Eskimo dogs.

Max had some severe health conditions, including Cushing's disease. His coat was thin and rough, but his spirit was bright. His skin was covered in scabs; yet he was full of joy and enthusiasm. He did not really seem concerned that he was lost. On the contrary, he was eager to meet and greet my three dogs, happy to be in our company.

Over the next few years, Max's health improved, and his personality grew more confident and bold among his canine family. As he grew older, however, he became increasingly protective of his personal space, growling at his mates when they ventured too close. Sometimes this provoked fighting, and Sheila had to separate the dogs to prevent any type of altercation in keep harmony in the group.

Sheila phoned me last fall to check in with Max, and see what he was thinking about his time left in a very aged body. She wondered about his physical ailments, which included arthritis and blindness. He did not seem to enjoy his outings to the park any more, and was often disoriented and grumpy throughout the day.

When I communicated with Max, he told me he was older than his owners thought. He said he was at least 12 years old and that his body was getting tired. He hinted that he might have a few good months left, but after that it might not be too much fun anymore. He wanted Sheila to know how grateful he was for his long life with them, and was quite open about his remaining time.

Several weeks later, Sheila called me. Max had let himself out of his pen. She had been frantically searching the neighborhood for him, disbelieving that her old boy might have actually left the area on foot.



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At that very moment, Max sent me a picture of Moon Gulch, an area located a couple of miles outside of their neighborhood. It was hilly and natural, with lots of creeks and valleys. Sheila was incredulous that he would walk so far and did not think it was possible for him to journey that distance.

A search team was gathered, and off they went to Moon Gulch. When Sheila called me the next day, I immediately heard the word "culvert." I told her, and she replied, "I see a culvert right in front of me."

The next part of this story was truly extraordinary. Sheila approached the culvert, and saw Max lying in the water. He had already died.

Sheila was completely shocked by this discovery. Understandably, her reaction was one of guilt and regret that they did not find him sooner. She felt that if he had stayed close to home, or if the pen had been more secure, Max would still be alive.

As tragic as this was for his owners, the escape was Max's choice. He chose to leave the neighborhood, have a grand walkabout in nature, and pick his spot to die. This type of natural transition is how dogs would choose to die out in the wild: in their element, close to the earth.

Max was a very independent dog, one who was not afraid to live life to its fullest. He was such a funny character, with a very definite personality and disposition. But at the end of his life, he made it clear that he wanted to die in his time, his way. Max embraced his final journey with grace and dignity.

From a spirit-to-spirit perspective, this story demonstrates the power of intuitive messages, regardless of how many words or pictures are shared between us. One picture and one word lead Sheila right to Max, who helped me guide Sheila to give her closure. As hard as it was for them, had they not found Max, it would have been much, much worse. Now they could start to heal and move forward, knowing Max was not in pain or suffering.

Our animals are not afraid to die. Death to them is like taking off their coats. I believe death is not the end either. It is one of many incarnations in physical form that each and every soul experiences lifetime after lifetime. Max will be back, feistier than ever. And because his soul left his body in a natural way, it will return much stronger the next time. **DNM**

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