

# Oscar

## *Dog Talk® Dog of the Month – July 2009*

My husband and I have been together for over 30 years, and we have shared our lives with four German Shepherds during this time:

Jenny, our first and fiercest, whose life ended tragically at three when a teenager pressed pedal to the metal on a dead end street; Buddy, a 135 lb. guy with a personality to match his majestic size, and who lived to be 13; Emme, who filled up our house with more love than we could ever have imagined, was Oscar's adopted mom, and was with us for 14 years; and Oscar who, at 9, is still a puppy to us. It is Oscar who we introduce to you today.

Emme was lost when Buddy passed on, and she was so mournful that we decided to get her a friend; and so we found Oscar. Oscar picked us for his family. When we went to look at the litter into which he was born, he jumped and howled and pushed his sisters completely out of the way; he was coming home with us no matter what! Emme took one look at him and it was love at first sight (or at first bite!) for both of them.

They were the best of friends for the next 7 years until Emme had to leave us. In the same year that she passed on, Oscar began what has become a long and convoluted medical journey. First, a tummy full of lake water, followed by a big jump up, and Oscar's stomach twisted; he had bloat. Only immediate attention/surgery saved his life; he nearly died during the operation. He came home from the vets with stitches and a urinary infection and soon after was diagnosed with erlichia (despite being on Lyme disease prevention medication). The following winter Oscar tore a cruciate ligament. Our vet recommended the travelling surgeon to perform the procedure. He came back to us with a bladder infection, and soon thereafter was diagnosed with a staph infection after a shunt was put into his leg to reduce the swelling.



The staph infection was never supervised properly and by the time we located a reputable surgical center, another procedure was needed to remove the original hardware, probably where the infection was hiding, and to clean out some of the arthritis. Still another procedure followed, more blood work, x-rays, followed by a consult at Tufts in Massachusetts. In the end, after some \$12,000 or more in medical expenses, we were told that Oscar would have to live with his limp and with the possibility of the infection returning to compromise his leg and maybe his life. None of the vets left us feeling that Oscar would ever have a normal life again. In retrospect, mistakes were made, and Oscar has had to pay the price for incompetency.

Nevertheless, we continue to share our life with a really special creature, smart, handsome, very balanced, wonderfully kind and loving towards all people and animals (except squirrels....he figures it's his job to bark at them and occasionally to chase one into a nearby tree), and exceptionally devoted to his family. Despite what he has been through in the last two years, he still maintains a happy disposition and a keen expectation for discovering all things that start with a ride in the car or a walk in the woods. And boy, did I tell you that Oscar is quite the singer?

Oh my! We thought Buddy and Emme could belt out a howl, but nothing like Oscar's performances. Like many dogs, he howls to fire and police sirens, but he also likes to sing "Happy Birthday". When we tell him that we are calling a friend to wish them a happy day, he immediately begins to warm up. By the time the birthday person answers, he is in full voice. He has a commanding voice and sings in a range of sounds, although he prefers to take the tenor part. Now our friends and family look forward to their yearly celebratory serenade from Oscar. He also accompanies cards that have songs in them, harmonicas, kazoos, and sometimes, out of nowhere, songs on the radio.

Another aspect of Oscar is his love of water. The first time we took him to a local pond, he dove in and frolicked like a kid in a bathtub. You wish you could bottle the joy and exuberance he expressed. His favorite pond is in the middle of a large woodland park. We have to drive 2 miles in on a rutted, dirt road to get there, and as soon as we reach the beginning of the road, Oscar starts to sing. He sings the entire 10 minutes that it takes for us to navigate the road. It's quite a noisy ride, but the joy from his excitement is worth the listen. And once he sees the pond, there is no holding him back. No smells on the way can deter him from his appointed task...splash and he's gone into his own happy world. Yippee.

Third, Oscar is a great representative of the German Shepherd breed. He has a beautiful velvet-like coat, a large and stately head and chest, excellent hip conformation, and big brown eyes that melt your heart. He comes when he's called, wags his tail when

you approach him, and very occasionally gives you a little affectionate kiss. He asks for little, his treats at night, walks in the woods, rides in the car, a scrap or two from the table and he's good to go. Despite the fact that he lives with fairly consistent pain, he never takes it out on anyone.

Oh, and Oscar has a special friend, a donkey named Maggie who lives up the street. Whenever I say, "Let's go see the donkey", he starts to bark and gets really animated. When we get out of the car, he barks until Maggie comes across the pasture to visit. I give her a treat, and he nibbles on her leg or belly, and she seems to like it! Then they will sometimes run back and forth along the fence, side by side. It's very charming and seems meaningful to both of them.

Dogs are rare and wonderful creatures in the universe, and Thomas and I feel so blessed to have had the opportunity to know and share our lives with German Shepherds.

We thank Tracie who has been so supportive in helping us to identify a food regime and supplement support program that will help Oscar lead a healthier life. We also appreciate all of her professional savvy and for extending herself so much to us when we didn't know where to turn. Never did I anticipate when I called Dog Talk that Saturday morning that I would have the rare and wonderful opportunity of getting to know someone as special and helpful as she is.

Judith L.