

Blitz

Blitz was my first shepherd—a stunning, big-boned boy with a huge heart and soft, loving eyes. His dramatic silver and black coat glistened when he moved. He might have had a streak of husky in him because his tail curled slightly at the end, and he talked incessantly, howling and yowling his words with a soft friendly hint of a growl. “Woowoowoo,” was his trademark response to everything.

Solidly built, he oozed presence and authority. And while visitors needn’t have feared that he’d bite, newcomers were cautious when they got out of their cars and met him for the first time. I smile thinking back to the number of times he’d greet delivery men, repairmen, and friends as they parked their cars in our driveway, inadvertently trapping them in their vehicles as he peered through the driver’s window.

One warm July afternoon, he lolled on the living room carpet. “Want to go out and play tag?” I asked.

He followed me slowly to the sliding glass door that opened to a brick patio and lush lawn. He slipped quietly through the door, barely brushing my leg. Usually, he would have blown past me, practically knocked me to the ground to reach the lawn first. Usually, the word “tag” would have incited a raucous chorus of howling and yowling as he communicated his excitement. I crouched and play-bowed, pretending to lunge for him. He sauntered unenthusiastically toward the edge of the lawn and lay down. I knit my brow and cocked my head.

“Not in the mood today?” I asked.

It's hot.

“It is hot,” I agreed, feeling the heat of the summer sun beating on my back.

“We’ll play later. Tonight maybe.” I lay next to him for a moment and stroked his fur, then took his face in my hands. “You’re a special boy,” I whispered, surrendering to his kind eyes. I opened my heart and poured love into him and then rose to my feet. “I’ll be back.”

“Bliiiiitz!” I called, scanning the yard. He’d been gone for an hour. Not like him to wander. I searched the front and backyard calling continually, waiting for the soft thunder of his gallop to announce his return. Nothing. “Bliiiiitz!” Nothing. Perplexed, I wandered back into the house and down the hall to my room.

I faced a paned window smudged with dust and grime and gazed through the laced pattern of the eucalyptus leaves in the grove beyond. Then I saw it. His lifeless body splayed out on the lime-green ice plant that covered the sloping bank. It was as though he’d dropped in midstride.

My hand flew to my mouth, and I froze at the window in shock. Then I paced back and forth, hand to my mouth still, looking for my flip-flops or any shoes I could throw on. Like a hamster on a wheel, I kept pacing, unable to break my pattern. My mind blanked. Then my throat knotted, and I doubled over, gripping chunks of hair in clenched fists. I let out a silent scream. Moments later, my head cleared, I found shoes and walked out to where he lay.

I knelt over his dead body, caressing his still warm coat. Tears welled, and my throat tightened. I rocked slightly, back and forth, like someone in a trance, only dimly

aware of tears streaming down my face. Dimly aware of the sound of my sobs and my chest jerking. Dimly aware of the ice plant crushed under my weight, its juices bleeding into the denim knees of my blue jeans. I lowered my head to his side and caressed him with my cheek.

My neighbor, a vet, saw me crouching over him and jogged over.

“What happened?” he asked. He knelt beside me.

“I don’t know. I just found him.” I tensed my jaw to fight the tears, but they continued to fall. “He seemed off this morning, but not that bad. This feels...like the same thing...that happened when Buddy died.” My sobs blocked the words. “Cancer...of the spleen. One day...they’re fine. The next...they’re not.” I continued rocking.

“You could be right.” He put his arm around my shoulder and steadied me. “It’s hard to detect. If it’s any comfort, there isn’t much pain with that form of cancer.” We stood, and he hugged me. “I’m sorry,” he said, “We all loved him. Can I help you? Bury him I mean.”

“No. Thank you,” I said through my tears. “I need to be alone with the kids when I do it.”

We parted ways. His words haunted me. *If it’s any comfort, there isn’t much pain with that form of cancer.* No pain. For the animal that is. My painful journey was just beginning.

Before we found Blitz, we’d spent months looking for an older puppy. We wanted one that was between six and twelve months old. It was a compromise I’d made with my son. He’d wanted a young puppy. But we weren’t home enough. To get a six-week-old puppy would have been akin to leaving an infant home all day to fend for itself.

We'd combed classified ads diligently. But each time we called on what seemed like the perfect dog, we'd be too late.

"Everything happens for a reason," I'd tell Caden. "It wasn't the right dog for us. You'll see. The perfect dog will come in time."

One day I went to see a friend at his ranch. He had eight or so dogs, a happy, eclectic pack of exotic mixes and purebreds. He led me down to the barn and pulled a heavy stall door open, leaning into it to use his body weight as leverage. A darling silver and black German shepherd bounded out like a little deer.

"I wanted him to be a surprise," he said. "I thought maybe he could be Caden's new dog."

"Oh my God! He's adorable. Where did you find him?"

"At the soccer fields yesterday in La Jolla. Someone just abandoned him. I couldn't leave him."

"Who in their right mind would abandon a dog like this? He's gorgeous."

"It happens all the time."

I took Caden to meet Blitz. Blitz jumped into his arms and licked his face. It was love at first sight.

Dogs are pack animals and, like most of the animal kingdom, are prone to travel in groups or herds. Pecking order is key to averting chaos and anarchy. Each animal has its place in the group, established through a deliberate dance of dominance and submission. The leader is called alpha. Blitz was alpha, so we had to work to make him understand that with humans, canine alpha isn't appropriate.

Like many shepherds, Blitz had a prey drive—an instinct to hunt and kill. Some dogs are more focused on wild animals, some on herd animals like sheep. Others will hunt anything that moves. Blitz was the latter, and our home in the country was a dream come true for him. He chased it all—rabbits, squirrels, birds, gophers, bees. And cats. I yelled “No!” every time he lit out after Tigger, our little female tiger cat. But it did no good.

Tigger was a tiny but fierce adversary. She’d charge him, fur bristled, claws ready, and teeth bared. If we were close by, he’d back off. If not, she’d dash up a tree or jump onto a shelf or anything high enough to be safe. It took all of our efforts—me, the kids, and Tigger. Finally, after five years of training, he stopped chasing her.

But he continued chasing everything else. In our neighborhood, most homes came with acres of unfenced land, offering a veritable playground for any dog with a prey drive. Blitz was in heaven, hunting bunnies, squirrels, and birds. I’d even tease him when he brought one home, placing a limp little rodent on his outdoor bed.

“Did you play too hard with you new little friend?” I’d ask.

But when he targeted the neighbor’s livestock, it wasn’t funny. He killed chickens and raced around pastures after sheep and goats. Neighbors weren’t thrilled. I put him in herding training to redirect his prey drive, to teach him to herd rather than attack or kill.

I’ll never forget the look in his eyes the first time he saw a herd of sheep. Blitz sat between me and the trainer. The trainer’s wife ushered the sheep into the enclosure where we stood, herding them from behind. Blitz drew himself up, sat erectly, and pricked his ears. Then he whined and licked his chops in pure wonderment.

For me?

“Not for you, puppy. You have to learn to work with them, not kill them.”

Why?

“Because you’re a domestic dog. Not a wild one. It’s not appropriate for domestic dogs to kill other people’s animals.”

I don’t understand.

“Wild canines kill to survive. They kill for food. You get fed. You don’t need to kill.”

But I like the chase. The thrill. It makes me feel alive.

“You’ll get us into trouble if you kill. No one will like us.”

No response. He focused back on the sheep.

The sheep circled us. The man held Blitz’s collar then turned him loose. Blitz streaked after the sheep nipping at their haunches and racing around in sheer delight. The guy was skillful, and despite Blitz’s speed, he kept him from killing the sheep. It was a beautiful thing to witness.

I took Blitz for several sessions. But the constant structure seemed to be getting to Blitz, and the guy became a bit too heavy-handed for my liking. The wonder and delight I’d seen in his eyes was gone. Play had become work. So I decided that Blitz was getting it and we would continue the obedience side of the training at home. I worked with him for a year and a half, but I never really perfected the art of recall, getting your dog to return to you from a distance when called or signaled.

Overall, the training seemed to have taken effect. Or perhaps it had more to do with the fact that the neighbor with livestock moved. Either way, Blitz never killed a domesticated animal again.

Although I'd gotten him for Caden, Blitz became my dog. Probably because he considered me to be the alpha in the home. He and I bonded over long walks, yard work, and plain old hang time. He was so connected to me that if I was working in the garden and I moved even five feet, he'd get up from his resting spot to be closer to me.

And while he loved many things like being outside, hunting for rabbits, and patrolling our property, the sound of a gunshot (ah, country living) or a clap of thunder sent him into a panic, scrambling to cower in the safety of my arms.

Many months before Blitz died, we lost Tigger. Eventually, we got two new kittens, brothers we named Taz and Baghera. We handled the introductions slowly. After all, Blitz was still a hunter. And these guys were little. My teenage daughter, Hailey, brought him into the family room and had him lie quietly.

"Blitz, you must be good. You cannot bite or chase these guys. They're babies," I said.

Don't worry. I'm afraid to move.

The kittens circled warily around him, sniffing his fur gingerly. He lay frozen in place. The kittens relaxed and began batting at his tail. Blitz looked up at me but remained motionless. Hailey and I glanced at one another and nodded. It was a good sign. Within days, we were all happily integrated. The kittens adored Blitz, and he in turn seemed to love them.

The bond between them seemed so natural and so deep that I wondered if perhaps they weren't strangers. And since I believe in reincarnation, I wondered if possibly these kittens had been with us before.

I'd been practicing animal communication for years with my own animals and often for friends and colleagues in order for them to understand their pets more deeply and address issues and problems.

Since I knew I could communicate with our new kittens, I decided to ask them. And I did what I always do when I'm trying to communicate with animals. I quieted myself, closed my eyes, and connected.

I tuned into Baghera first. "Have you been with us before?"

Yes.

Are you Boots?

No.

Sniffer?

No.

Tigger?

Yes.

"Oh my God," I said picking up the little black bundle of fluff and holding him to my heart, "Oh my God. You've come back to us." I breathed deeply, inhaling the scent of his silken fur to capture his essence. Then I turned to Taz.

"Who are you?"

News. And Sydney.

"Really?" This was puzzling. News had been the first cat I'd had as a married woman. I adored him and was delighted to have him back. Sydney was a dog we'd had when we got Blitz. She'd passed away a few years ago. I had no idea animals crossed

species when they reincarnated. I stroked his tiny back, scratched his chin, and then planted a kiss on the top of his striped head.

No wonder Blitz was being so good. He “recognized” the little guys.

When Blitz died, I didn’t really grieve. I thought it was because he didn’t suffer. Or that I didn’t have to watch him grow old and lose his abilities. He simply went peacefully. And I thought he’d reincarnate and come back to us. While it was a shock and I missed him, I thought I was okay with it all. I was wrong. In reality, I was numb. And because his death had been a shock, I remained blocked for months.

I connected with Blitz while meditating one day. He stood strong and proud in a beautiful, sunny meadow. His coat ruffled slightly in the warm breeze.

“You crossed over safely?”

Yes. Caden helped me.

“And you are okay?”

I’m fine....there’s something I need you to know.

“What?”

I came into this life to accomplish something specific. You helped me achieve a new level of consciousness in the animal kingdom.

“What does that mean?”

That I’ve graduated. Spiritually.

“Does that mean you’ll be a different species when you come back?”

I’m not coming back.

“What!” Tears sprung to my eyes.

I don’t need to. I’m done. Thank you.

He faded out, leaving me confused and saddened, his final words echoing in my ears.

I couldn't believe this. I thought he would come back. I thought he would return to our family. Now I had to face the fact that I would *never* see him again in this lifetime.

That was the first of many “nevers” that I had to come to terms with. I would never again feel his steadfast presence. Never play tag with him. Never walk with him. Never put my arm around his shoulder or hold him—ever again. It was overwhelming in the worst way. Grief welled in my chest like a tidal wave sweeping in from the sea, and I wept in the stark silence of my room.

The yard, his bed, the house, life in general—all seemed empty without him. I went through the motions of my life in a grey fog. Until Gavin came into my life. But that is another story.

I knew that Blitz had gone because he was simply ready. He'd accomplished what he'd planned to in this lifetime. It's interesting looking back that I didn't “communicate” much with Blitz. Maybe I didn't need to. Maybe we understood each other on a level that transcended even telepathy.

Animals come into our lives to serve a purpose. Sometimes they teach us lessons. Sometimes they help us process the many emotions and experiences we collect. Sometimes they help us shed the energy we take on as we help others. Blitz was all of these things. He'd been through so much with me: a divorce, several relationships since, my children growing and starting college, so many things. He was a shepherd in the true sense, and he led me through an important phase in my life.

Finding Forever - Houson

I didn't realize when we got Taz and Baghera that it would be a catalyst for Blitz. That he would somehow know his "watch" was over and that the kittens could now take on the task of helping us. It's strange the way everything in life falls into place. There truly is a grand scheme to it all. Even if the grand scheme is painful.

It was months before I began to look for another German shepherd. My search led me to Coastal German Shepherd Rescue, and it changed my life.

Forever.