

Kaysir-King of Kings

Talk about Déjà vu! Ever since a certain yellow Labrador retriever has appeared on book covers and the big screen, I cannot shake off thoughts of another unforgettable dog named Kaysir. Marley fans will experience a different flavor when a parallel puppy story unfolds below in a Muslim household!

My husband and I were newly married, in a new country, and training as medical residents when we brought Kaysir home. He was an eight week old, yellow Labrador retriever and the first dog for either my self or my husband. The most frequent comment we heard from friends and acquaintances who met him for the first time was, 'look at the size of those feet! He is going to be a big dog!' Oblivious to how that would affect our lives, on hearing it our chests pumped out with pride. Kaysir weighed in at one hundred and fifteen pounds at fully grown.

Like Marley, Kaysir attended obedience school; he was not only a day scholar but rather enrolled in a dog training boarding school for a week. Alas the money might as well have been blown away since the only person he obeyed was the ex-military sergeant turned trainer who scared Kaysir enough to make him shake and pee in front of him. When I pointed this fact out to the man, I and Kaysir were immediately dismissed with instructions never to return!

Another remarkable habit Kaysir learnt was not to lick people. Muslims perform a ritual wash (wadu) before each prayer five times a day. Several things can lead to breaking the wadu, one of them is coming in contact with an animal's saliva. Kaysir greeted us with one hundred and fifteen pounds of sinew and muscle every time we entered the house but never licked us.

Labrador retrievers are meant to be field dogs and most are energetic, high strung and rambunctious animals. Kaysir loved to take off given the opportunity. This brought about an unpleasant encounter in our old neighborhood.

After a foray in the woods one day he returned all sedate and calm. Soon a rude tirade of knocks at the door forced me to take my eight month pregnant frame to answer it. A large Caucasian man stood at the door and yelled, 'I DON'T CARE

WHETHER YOU UNDERSTAND ENGLISH OR NOT! That b----- dog was without a leash. I am going to get you thrown out of here if he gets out again. DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I AM SAYING?' I politely answered that I did.

After I shut the door, I immediately proceeded to call the police and got a restraining order against our unfriendly neighbor. That night this man must have figured out that though very pregnant and non-white, I understood his prejudice and did not appreciate it. Kaysir's escape routes were further barricaded.

We had several family members visit us, including my mother. She and Kaysir had a very unusual relationship. She did not approve of keeping a dog inside the house but Kaysir did not like staying outside and he won this tug of war. The door to my mother's bedroom was kept securely shut and in her absence if it was left ajar, he was smart enough not to enter the room. Though always thoughtful of his needs, my mother discouraged him from any physical contact with her. Kaysir, learnt to walk in an arc at a distance of three feet away from her and anyone else for that matter dressed in a Sari!

Though he loved all the rugs in the house, his favorite one was a very expensive hand knitted silk carpet my mother gifted us at our wedding. The intricate fringes were chewed out and Kaysir's ownership stamp on it could be easily identified by the clumps of blond fur all over it. On the contrary though, if Kaysir saw a prayer rug uncurled on the ground, he never ever walked on it much less sat on it.

Kaysir was the first and last four pawed friend we loved for thirteen years and for us no other dog can fill his big shoes!