

# Priceless

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USA

Winner 2007-8 Dog Story

*Valerie is a member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers and currently has three German Shorthaired Pointers (GSPs) and a retired Thoroughbred racehorse (now in his third career as a therapy mount for handicapped children). She has taught Canine Good Citizen classes, is an American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen evaluator, and along with her husband, Tom, is a volunteer for GSP rescue. =*

## DOG WORLDS

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“Don’t worry. He’s really just a big mush.” Jan had been kneeling on the sidewalk, planting flowers and weeding the garden along her fence with Priceless “helping” when she noticed the man approaching. He was watching the brownish dog at her side. Priceless had noticed, too, and all 75 pounds of him seemed to be at the mercy of his furiously wagging, furry tail. “See what I mean?” she laughed

“Pricey is a big, fuzzy love-bug – but I’ll put him in the yard until you pass if that’ll make you feel better.” She turned. “Oh, no! Pricey, leave those flowers alone!” In the second Jan’s back was to him, Priceless had chewed some new flowers she had just finished planting. “You bad dog – you’ve ruined them! Get in the yard now.” Priceless dutifully went into the yard and Jan locked the gate. The big dog stood up on the other side of the 4-foot wooden fence, resting his paws on the top and watching Jan and the stranger. His tail was still wagging. “Oh, Pricey” Jan said, exasperated, “how could I possibly stay mad at you?” She turned to the man, “Excuse me.” She apologized. “I found him as a stray last year and I’m still learning stuff about him – like his love for gardening! Someone told me he was probably some sort of shepherd-cross, but I think he’s a clown-cross!”

“It’s a shame he ate your flowers.” The young man said, smiling. He had a lean, muscular build and close-cropped hair. The way he carried himself reminded Jan of a military man.

“Oh well,” Jan sighed. “It’s just that I wanted to be finished earlier than this, and now there’s really not enough light to begin replanting. I guess it’ll just have to wait until morning.” She looked at the sky, which was quickly turning to a deep twilight. “Boy, when the sun decides to go down this time of year it

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really goes down fast, doesn't it?" She picked up her gardening gloves. "Well, I guess that's it for today. Nice talking to you!"

"Yes, a pleasure. Take care." The man said absently, his mind apparently on something else. The light was fading and he continued slowly down the sidewalk, watching out of the corner of his eye as Jan closed the door behind her.

Jan's house was modestly decorated and, since she lived alone, her personality and tastes were evident everywhere. She loved antiques and was lucky enough to pick up a few pieces here and there at yard sales. Even the food bowl Priceless was licking clean in the kitchen had the appearance of an antique. Jan flicked on the TV but turned it off again quickly when she saw it was a news alert. What a world, she thought. Why can't people learn to live together? Just as Jan was about to turn on a favourite old lamp in the front room, there was a quiet knock at the door. "I wonder who that could be," she mused. "Pricey, come up for air, you silly glutton, and let's see who's at the door."

Not waiting for Priceless to leave his dinner, she turned the lock and cracked the door open to see who the unexpected visitor was. Before she could utter a sound, a tall man shoved the door open, knocking Jan into the lamp and to the floor. The lamp shattered and Jan could feel glass cutting into her hands as she tried to get up. The man loomed over her now, leering at her. She tried to yell, but no sound would come out. In the dim light, she could see him reach inside his jacket for the gun that was hidden there. Frantically, she tried again to scream, but her breath was gone and the man was upon her.

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The last possible hint of flavour had just been slurped from his bowl when Priceless heard the commotion. He trotted into the front room. There, on top of his struggling owner, was a strange man. There was an odd scent around Jan, a smell Priceless had never detected on her before . . . Fear. Without thinking and without warning, Priceless lunged at the intruder, a throaty growl erupting from him. His teeth found their hold on the man's left arm, causing the man to yell out and sending the gun clattering to the floor. His teeth sank deep, through the overcoat, and deeper into flesh as the man flailed and tried to beat him with his free arm. Priceless refused to let go. The man's clenched fist battered the dog's face, but Priceless, his fur standing on end, braced his powerful legs and clung, snarling to the man's bleeding arm. From beneath her attacker, Jan scrambled away and snatched up the loose gun.

The brief wait for the police had seemed like an eternity as Jan gripped the gun in her trembling hands, levelled at the man who sat huddled on the floor holding his badly bitten arm. If the man attempted even the slightest move, a growling Priceless would threaten him again. Jan reached for the phone while Priceless held the assailant at bay, and it surprised her to see how the dog seemed to know exactly what to do to keep the man still. Little could she imagine what other surprises were in store.

Before she could even dial the phone, a voice at the open front door bellowed, "POLICE!" and Jan glanced over to see a young man rushing in, gun drawn. It was the man she had encountered earlier while gardening. He was in fact an undercover police officer who had been combing the area with a team of others on a lead that a dangerous fugitive had been sighted in the neighbourhood. Amazing as this was, what followed was almost more than Jan could comprehend. Within seconds there

were police swarming her living room. “Private, come” the young policeman commanded. Priceless dutifully went to the man’s left side and sat. “Good job, my friend” said the policeman, patting the big dog’s side. Price jumped up on him then, his tail again wagging furiously at the sight of the familiar man.

“Ma’am, this dog you rescued was my partner’s police dog. When my partner was killed two years ago, Private was given to another officer. Shortly after that he got loose from the patrol car and took off, never found – until now. Who knows where he’d been all that time until you found him. I thought it looked like him earlier,” he said, rubbing the dog’s head, “but I couldn’t say anything that might jeopardize apprehending this criminal. I guess there’s no doubt he’s proven his true identity now, is there?”

“But I searched the papers,” Jan exclaimed. “I even put an ad out myself, hoping his owner would claim him! I would have returned him had I known.”

“By the time you found him, he’d already been missing for over a year.” The officer replied. “I don’t think anyone would have put two and two together. Especially if you listed him as a German Shepherd-cross. Private is a Belgian Malinois.”

“I don’t care what he is - You won’t take him from me, will you? You can’t! Not now!”

“No, I think Private has earned his retirement. Of course we’ll have to make the transfer to you official, but there shouldn’t be any problems. Now let’s get both of you seen by doctors.”

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It wasn't until much, much later that the full impact of what had transpired that evening sank in. Priceless, one paw bandaged by the vet after removing bits of glass, lay with his head in Jan's lap in front of the TV, as if nothing in his world had changed. Jan stroked his ears with her own bandaged hands and her eyes welled up with tears of relief and gratitude. A commercial came on that she had always thought of as silly, but this time she mentally substituted her own words:

Buying a new flat of flowers:    \$15.00

Replacing the antique lamp:    \$350.00

Having the favour of a rescue returned by your own "Private"  
guardian: PRICELESS =