

Ode to Capone King



Prince Among Dogs

*D*eke's brain didn't process what his eyes just witnessed until he was past the – what was that? A ground hog? A baby raccoon? – But it was broad daylight. A puppy? No waaay – where would its owner be with no houses close by and WHY is it staring back at me?! Back it up, he thought, slowly, so I don't hit that damn dog...

“Get in” Deke ordered, judging by the intelligent look in this mutt’s eyes suggested he probably speaks English. But he had been abandoned already, and wasn’t as eager to be disappointed again. So he had to be cajoled slightly, gently by Deke’s inner Doctor Dolittle. Thus Capone, who didn’t even know that was his name yet, wooed his first temporary master. If Cute ever met Capone he would feel ugly by comparison.

“Where am I gonna find some bleeding hearts who will take you in Mister?” He said to the hitchhiker as he instinctively started driving straight for Alveda King’s place and her little pack of Beals. Having no better thought of anyone else soft enough to take this little guy in immediately on the way there, he stayed with plan A and pulled up to Alveda’s.

It took Capone even less time to seduce the Kings than it took to stop Deke. So the bait, hook, and suckers trap was set. Deke was whistling out the door breaking a rotator cuff patting himself on the back for such a good deed before he could say “Not sure if he is house trained yet”.

Meanwhile, Capone stared back at his new family. They stared at each other. “Is he FREE?” John asked. “He needs water said Celeste”. He needs a name said Mama King. He is a little prince of a dog to be certain but he arrived to us as an outcast, an outlaw. I think “Capone” fits his tiny, powder keg like power over us.

“This is going to be much easier than I thought” Capone murmured to himself as he rolled his eyes. “I’ll let the free market decide which one of these underlings feeds me first, I’m STARVING.”

Over the next four years, the length of a Presidential term, Prince Capone ran a tight ship of unfair manipulation in his new kingdom on good looks alone. Sure he had personality. The kind of human like awareness, understanding and literally a sense of humor that lesser, er, uglier dogs needed to survive if anyone was ever going to adopt them. Not Capone. It was like, people be coming into the house chatting it up and interrupt themselves and say “Damn! That’s a fine looking dog! Look like a dog show winner or something.” It would actually be the exception if guests didn’t pay similar homage upon experiencing the great and shockingly handsome Capone.

Josh recalled fondly Capone’s MANnerisms and his PERSONality as hovering above any individual kindness he showed – like when he sensed someone in the family, his family, was down, or any other funny, quirky communication systems for that matter he had worked out in his head to deal with a life that had no instruction manual. What Josh was describing, unwittingly, was Capone’s human side. If he really was just a dog, then how did he completely OWN everyone in the family? He was so good he had everyone believing they were his favorite. But perhaps especially Alveda.

“Victory has 100 fathers and defeat is an orphan.” – JFK, 1961 regarding The Bay of Pigs defeat.

Anyone in the family loves to rewrite history as to who knew Deke, or who was the first to say we keep Capone, or who really named him first. They were all victories shared by the family for not simply the greatest dog ever, but one of the greatest and most loyal friends of their lives. Capone was the lotto, period.

Blame, however, has been silently plaguing the family as well. John could blame Josh for not tying Capone up tight enough on that fateful night. Josh could blame John for drawing undue

attention to the house that night. Capone – he blamed the Cops. “What in the HELL are those two big blue intruders doing on MY property snooping around MY back yard? I sense angst – BIG TIME – in my family. I will take care of this NOW.” He didn’t think twice – Capone broke free and created such a distraction that the curious guests left without further incident. Whew! “Capone comes thru again!” was the brother’s mutual relieved conclusion. Say where is the little guy? Capone...CAPONE...here boy...

That was the start of a long search that night, and the next day, and the asking of neighbors, and the hope slowly giving away to despair, with no closure and no Capone. Weeks past.

The doorbell rang and it may as well have well been the police informing the next of kin there has been a fatal car accident. It was the neighborhood kids – and they had some bad news. By now everyone knew Capone was missing. So when the kids found him lying there peacefully in the woods, they knew what they had to do. Capone would have answered the call of his master that night, tried to. But you see when he broke away that night, his leash was on him - and he got tangled around a tree. He was trapped. John gave his brutally frank medical opinion of death: “Slow, agonizing and lonely.”

There was no funeral. There was still no closure. The denial phase would last into the abyss of dysfunction, and Capone was not spoken of again – not without mama cryin anyway.

John blamed himself. Josh blamed himself. Eddie blamed them both. The women wept over the inconsolable magnitude of the loss of this Prince – the man himself – Capone. No one will ever understand he was real and he was really human. But how could he be? He never held a grudge, always had time for you and was literally positive about everything. To be in his presence was to have your spirits lifted. To lose him so soon, too soon for us our dear, precious Capone, is so very very sad, Rainbow Bridge or not.

Years past. A visit to a friend during a drive to East Lansing prompted the subject of Capone. Upon seeing a readily available picture that Capone’s mom had on her iPhone of him, the friend said “Damn! That’s a fine looking dog! Looks like a Westmister Champion or sumthin.” “We hear that often” was the reply, and then came an eerie silence reflecting their sadness thinking about him.

Well I’ll tell you what he was thinking. Capone’s last thoughts were of all of his family and all the love he experienced in this quality life – all bonus since the day Deke discovered this star. So we went there in that car to that dark place. For the immediate family of Capone– for closure. For Capone – to honor him. And we had his funeral right there in the car ride. And since his legend had him bustin down his stall, callin after those cops as he ran into the woods, and since the family ran callin after Capone, and since they say he died one winter – some ten years ago, we chose our funeral dirge for the great Capone - Prince among dogs. The song that seemed to fit the bill perfectly was “Wildfire”. Many would say this is all cheesy and overkill, or it was dog for crying out loud, let’s focus on more important subjects like people. Yet if they heard Capone’s funeral song in the car that day, you would also hear more than one family member quietly crying while listening to it – even after a decade. Rare the dog that leaves such an indelible mark on a family. Capone was one of those dogs. <https://youtu.be/Pc3OnSQc48s>