

ZEUS

The Dog Who Talked and Saved a Life

PROLOGUE – THE END

This story begins at the end, which at the time seemed like the end of everything. I had lost my best friend and companion who had been by my side for thirteen years. He had never lied to me. He had never betrayed me. He shared the good times and the bad without complaint. He was loyal to me when I was homeless and living out of my car. He showed me the way of the spirit and I followed him into a brighter horizon. The thought of facing the years ahead without him was unthinkable; knowing that no matter where I went in the world he would not be there waiting for me was unbearable. His name was Zeus; he was a brindled Great Dane, and he had turned my life around. Without him by my side, I would have continued on a path that led over the cliff; he had pulled me away from the edge. And now he was gone forever.

The last months of Zeus' life were torture for both of us. He was very old – 91 in human years – and he was in fragile health. He had cataracts, and his back legs were giving out so that just standing was an effort for him. All my friends urged me to have him put down insisting that it was cruel to keep him alive. But I couldn't find the courage to do it. I kept praying he would die in his sleep, but Zeus didn't want to leave me anymore than I wanted to lose him. Besides, what others couldn't understand was that Zeus was more than just a pet: he was my rock; my noble friend and my spiritual guide; a vibrant soul, more alive and human than most people I knew. Over the years I had forged an identity with Zeus. We went everywhere together. When I got invitations to parties, they were always addressed to me *and* Zeus. We were inseparable. I even bought a VW camper van with a sink, so that Zeus could have water to drink, and louvered windows that opened to let in fresh air when I was taking an acting class or teaching.

In the months leading up to Zeus' death, and in an effort to deal with the looming threat of loss, I had taken an Erhard Seminar Training course (*est*), made possible by my erstwhile close friend, Linda Wiser. Linda was the personal assistant to TV's Bionic Woman, Lindsay Wagner, the

highest paid woman in TV at the time. I met Linda through a friend of a friend of a . . . well; I'll skip the connections, which would start to scroll like the generations of the Bible. Instead I'll whittle it down to the fact that Linda was asked if she knew anyone who could benefit from an *est* scholarship and make a difference in the world, to which she answered, "Oh boy, do I!" Linda was one of a select group of amazing people who came into my life and changed it for the better. I like to think of these people as gifts from a caring and supportive universe; friends who brought with them the answers to the questions, which helped me in my quest.

The scholarship was one such gift and it paid for a two-weekend *est* training, plus the six-day follow-up course, which went over everything we had learned on the weekends in detail. As it turned out, I didn't take the six-day until long after Zeus had gone. Perhaps I should explain that *est* (Latin for "it is") was one of the most successful programs in the human potential movement that defined the "me generation" of the 1970s. I took the course when the self-improvement craze was on the wane, and by which time *est* had gained a controversial reputation. Unfortunately, *est* was not the epiphany I thought it would be; at least, not immediately. I was an *est* graduate, but I had not got "*it*" yet. "Getting it" was the brass ring, and everyone seemed to have grasped it but me. I was frustrated. Was there something wrong with me? And what was "*it*" anyway. The answer to that came 2 weeks later when I was heading home to Highland Park on the 134 freeway in my VW van; Zeus was asleep in the back and as I glanced at him in my rearview mirror it hit me: Zeus was going to die and I would be devastated and there was nothing I could do about that but accept it. "*It*" was now. There was nothing else. I could not live in the past: it was another country. I could not live in the future: it didn't exist yet. All that was real was *now*, riding with Zeus down the 134, and everything was what it should be. I had accepted that life was painful one moment and joyful the next; but to be too overwhelmed by Zeus' dying was to miss the point of his having lived. He was a gift to me. He was my guide and his job was done and it was time for him to go home; my last act of friendship would be to release him from his pain.

Feeling inspired, I got off the 134 and headed straight for Linda's house to tell her of my epiphany, to tell her that I finally got *it*! At that time, Linda was fighting cancer, which had

started in her right breast and, despite a mastectomy, was metastasizing. It said a lot about Linda's generous nature that despite a daily struggle to defeat the disease that was sapping all her energy and life force, she still had time to shepherd me through my troubles. Drunk with revelation, I blurted out my sudden discovery of "it" to Linda, who patiently listened as I bombarded her peaceful day with the sparks and energy of the newly converted. I felt like I had been dunked in the Jordan and had come up, eyes wide open, fully awake and fully alive. I knew I had to have Zeus put to sleep; but I also knew that my dear friend would be travelling well and would never really leave me. Seeing Zeus on his way was a noble and unselfish thing, and I knew that he would understand and be grateful.

A little while later, Zeus and I took our last ride together to the vet. Linda came with me to be with Zeus when he died: I couldn't bear the thought of watching him slip away into a sleep from which he would never wake up. However, I didn't want Zeus to be alone; I wanted someone on the shore to wave goodbye and wish him bon voyage. I hugged him goodbye and watched him through tears as he walked away from me forever; at the door of the surgery, he looked back at me with his soulful eyes as if to say, "It's alright; I'll wait for you." Alone in the reception I was wracked with grief and guilt. I think I relived every moment of my time with Zeus, and it was deeply painful and excruciatingly sad; one of those barren times when God is absent and only tears and memories fill the void.

This book is my love letter to a beloved departed friend, as well as a way of paying homage to a loyal soul who embodied the true meaning of friendship. I have grieved over his death; and now I choose to think about and celebrate his life. Zeus was no ordinary dog. He was the dog who talked and saved a life: mine.