

# **Max's Story**

**A Dog's Purpose  
Puppy Tale**

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed  
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# 1



The first thing I remember is a place of barking dogs.

That sound never went away. Sometimes loud, sometimes soft. Sometimes angry, sometimes panicky, mostly just a loud call for attention. “I am here!” the barking said, over and over and over. “I am here! Notice me!”

When I could open my eyes, I learned that my mother was a light brown color. My two siblings were the same. All three of us squirmed toward our mother’s fur and her warmth. We found her milk and drank, then we curled together and slept, then we woke to drink again.

Sometimes I heard a sound that was different from the barking. Voices. The voices belonged to women, I realized. I couldn't understand their words, but the sounds were gentle.

"Good dog," they said. "Good dog, Zoey."

I wondered if my mother's name was Zoey. I wondered if I had a name as well.

Even though the voices were soft, my mother trembled when they came near. I could feel her shivering as I cuddled close against her.

One day I blinked my eyes open when I heard one of the voices. I peered up. And up. And up. Then I stared in surprise.

The person saying "Good dog" in such a gentle voice was a giant! She loomed far above us. Her head blocked the light.

"Such cuties," she said.

A hand reached down to stroke my mother from her ears all along her back. I cringed, huddling deeper into my mother's warm fur. That hand was bigger than I was!

I did not want these giants touching me.

As my sisters and I got older, we began to leave our mother's side more often. But there was not far for us to go. In every direction, we were surrounded by walls made of chilly metal wire. I bit the wire a

few times, but it did not taste good and it hurt my teeth. I wandered back to my mother, who licked my head. Then a sister thumped into me and stepped on my face.

When the giants came to the door of our cage, my sisters ran over to them, wagging their tails so hard that their entire bodies wobbled. Sometimes they even fell over! But I hung back behind my mother while the two girls got petted and sometimes even scooped up in those huge hands. They would lick the women's great big faces and yip in happy voices.

Why weren't they afraid?

One day a woman reached her hand all the way into the cage for me and hoisted me up into the air. Her fingers closed around me, holding me firmly, as she lifted me.

I did not like it. I growled at her.

"Hello, Max," she said. "You're pretty brave, huh? You going to be a watchdog?"

Another woman came up to peer at me. I growled at her, too. "I'm thinking father was a Yorkie, maybe?" she said. "Don't you think so, Gail?"

"Sure looks like a Chihuahua-Yorkie mix," the one holding me agreed. "He thinks he's tough. He's got a lot to learn!"

Gail put me back into the cage with my mother, and I backed away in a hurry.

My sisters' names, I learned, were Abby and Annie. Every now and then the three of us were taken to another room and put into a pen with some other dogs. Like the people, they were giants. But they were still young, just puppies, like we were.

I could tell because they ran clumsily, sometimes tripping over their own paws. They barked with excitement all the time. And they didn't know that it isn't polite to race up to another dog and sniff his face and jump up to put your paws on his head before you've even been introduced.

I'm not sure how I knew that this isn't the way to go about it, but somehow I did. I darted sideways as a young dog with black fuzzy fur came lolloping up to me, trying to show him that the proper way to meet a new dog is to sniff under the tail first. *Then* comes the chasing and wrestling.

He shoved his nose beneath my rear legs and lifted me off my feet, dumping me in a heap.

I jumped up and shook myself, ready to growl, but he was already running away. Irritated, I took myself to the edge of the pen. On the outside, a huge white dog lowered his nose to sniff at me. His head was bigger than my mother's whole body!

I backed up, barking, to show him that I wasn't scared.

And that's when I realized an important truth. All of the dogs around me and the women who took care of us—they weren't big. It was the other way around. *I* was small!

In fact, I was tiny!

It was such an astonishing thought that I sat still, stunned, until the same black dog who had shoved me so rudely before came galloping up and knocked me right over.

He put a paw on my chest, pinning me down. I thrashed my legs and shook my head. He was heavy! I wanted him off me!

He panted down at me, and I'd had enough. I growled. I showed him all of my teeth. And I barked as loudly as I could, right into his face.

He leaped back with a startled yelp, and I was free. I scrambled to my feet. But I wasn't done yet.

Maybe I was small, but that didn't mean it was all right for other dogs to pin me down. Right then and there, I decided that *I* was the one who should be in charge. I didn't lie down on my back and tuck my tail under for anybody!

I kept my lips back from my teeth to show the other puppy that I meant business. I walked slowly

toward him. Somehow I knew to make my legs stiff so I'd be as tall as I possibly could. I lowered my head and felt the fur along my spine bristle, even though I hadn't told it to.

The other dog backed up a few more steps. Then he flopped down meekly and lay on his back, showing me his stomach and throat.

I stood over him for a moment so he'd be sure to get the message, and then I let him get up.

Maybe I was small, but it didn't mean I could be pushed around. I'd have to work very hard to let other dogs know that I was the one in charge.

People, too. People with their giant hands and their loud voices—I'd have to show them that they could not simply do whatever they wanted with me. It was important, I realized, as I looked around the pen where the other puppies were running and chasing and wrestling and barking. A few had curled up for quick naps.

I had to show the world that I mattered because there was something I had to do. A job. I had a job. I don't know how I knew, but I did. The knowledge was part of me, deep inside, just like I'd known to drop my head and show that other puppy my teeth to make him back down.

There was somebody I was supposed to take care

of. A girl. A human girl. She was somewhere out there in the world, and she needed me.

I'd find her soon. I wasn't sure how, but I would. And once I found her, I'd protect her.

To do that, I'd need to be the toughest, strongest, fiercest dog I could be. No matter what size I was.

**M**y sisters and I went into the pen with other puppies again and again, and every time I showed them all that I was in charge. They learned pretty quickly. I didn't have to snap very often. I could tell them with the way I walked, my head up, my ears forward, my tail high. I could tell them with my voice, which was becoming louder and louder, and every now and then by showing my sharp little teeth.

"Be nice, Max," Gail would say. Yes. That was me. My name was Max, and I was a dog to be reckoned with.

After a while, my mother's milk was not enough to keep my stomach filled, and the women began to bring bowls of soft food to our cage. Abby and Annie learned to let me eat first. And then came a day when we were picked up and taken out of our cages with leashes clipped to our collars.

The cage door shut, leaving our mother behind.

My sisters looked back and whimpered. I wasn't sure why they did it, but I knew that something did feel different this time.

"Let's go," said the woman. "Time to find you guys a home."

Our mother pressed herself against the cage door and whined gently, once. Then she simply watched as we were led away.

We didn't go to the pen with the other puppies as we usually did. Instead, we were taken outside to a car and put into a large wire cage in the back. When I heard a deep, low hum, it startled me so much that I barked. Then the car started to shake and quiver around us!

My sisters were frightened and huddled against me. I sat bolt upright, alert, watching carefully in case this new sound and vibration turned out to be something I should fight. That's when I understood that we were moving. Through the windows I could see trees and buildings and sky and clouds pass by. We were going somewhere!

The place we were going turned out to be a park.

A park, I learned, was trees and bushes, grass and sky, and people. Lots of people. Gail scooped me up; I growled a little, just to let her know that I wasn't

helpless, that I was allowing her to carry me. She took me to a new pen and set me down inside it.

For the first time I felt grass under my paws. It was odd, soft and prickly at once. And the smells! They rushed over me like a tidal wave. I didn't even bother to raise my hackles or lift my lips over my teeth to make sure the other puppies in the pen understood that I was the boss. I just stood with my nose lifted to the air, drinking it all in.

Warm dirt. A soft green smell with a little sharpness to it, that was the grass I stood on and the leaves all around. Something choking and dirty that came from other cars like the one that had brought us here, rushing past not far away. The cool smell of water, more of it than came in our bowls. And food! Food everywhere! Great gusts of food smells swirling all around me.

And people. This place carried the scent of people, more people than I had ever smelled in my entire life.