

The Saviour

Sad eyes stared through the kennel wire, I looked at Ben, 'love at first sight'. A big brown ball of fluff, greying around the snout.

We were both middle-aged and overweight. My GP said if I didn't lose weight I'd be dead within a year. High blood-pressure, type 2 diabetes... the list went on. Ben had been abandoned, he was 8 years old, rolls of fat pooled onto his legs.

"I'll take him."

"Will you manage to walk him ok?" said the helper at the animal rescue centre, "Would you be better with a smaller dog?"

I just knew Ben was the one, puffing, I bent down to put the lead on him. I wanted to save him and he had to save me, the rescue dog that would rescue me.

We went out every day, slowly walking to begin with, just through the streets near my home. Resisting giving Ben snacks, I also cut down on calories. My GP was delighted, four stone off, blood pressure down and the diabetes gone. I was ecstatic.

I received regular newsletters from the kennels. They were organising a fundraiser, a half marathon running with your dog. I looked at Ben,

"We can do it old chum. What do you think?" tipping his head to one side, Ben's ear pricked up, he'd started running in the park since losing weight.

We began training, up to five miles a day.

Then I noticed Ben was slowing and panting.

The vet lowered his voice, "Sorry, there's nothing we can do, it's a tumour."

Crying, I pulled Ben to me and ruffled his coat,

"Thank you for saving me old fella."

The house was empty. I started nibbling snacks, comfort-eating. I missed the excited woofing, the wagging tail, the unconditional love. But how could I love another as much as I loved Ben?

I had to – no choice, if I was to live.

I waited three months, a decent interval and went back to the kennels.

"I want a young, fit dog, one I can run with."

Max leapt up and licked my face, all shiny black coat and slobbery kisses,

"Yep, Max is the one, we'll run the marathon in memory of Ben."