

## **Dan Coyle – Man's best friend**

Many years ago as a paperboy in Sheffield in the north of England I delivered to a house in Crosspool where the family had a collie bitch who was expecting pups.

I went home and asked my Dad if I could have one but it was a big ask. Both Mum and Dad were blind so the problem would be looking after the pup when we were at school.

But Christmas Eve 1968, was one I remember so well. When I got home after my delivery round there was a box with holes in it with a note saying, Merry Christmas.

I opened the box and out popped my puppy, who I named Flick. Flick was me and my brother's life and he grew into a loyal friend. He was 11 when he left us but he had the best life. We all mucked in with long walks on our morning and evening paper rounds and at football after school. He loved it.

After Flick left us I couldn't bring myself to have another dog as it hurt too much having to let them go. But eventually I did get another dog. In 1992 I got a Doberman rescued from a garage. Max was absolutely wonderful. I was ill after being stabbed six times while helping someone who was being attacked by four men. I was a mess, almost lost my life and suffering from deep depression and PTSD.

Max seemed to know this and never left my side. I could clear my mind talking to him and he never judged. Later, Rosie a gentle Rottweiler joined Max. Max left us in 2002 and in 2004 we rescued seven weeks' old Freddie who had been abandoned in the garden of a house.

I was gardening nearby and heard whimpering behind a hedge. I forced my way in and found Freddie, lying between three siblings who were all dead. I whisked him home where Rosie took him out of my arms, carried him to her basket, licked him and chewed up food and fed him. I took him to the vet who said there wasn't much he could do, but I said, 'No you don't!'

Seventeen years' later Freddie is still going strong. Sadly we lost Rosie to cancer aged 10 in 2006.

So, that's my pets. I've loved them so much. In fact I'm crying while I write this.