

Losing sight of **W**hat matters.

by Maryanne Pope

It's a funny thing about life. If you refuse to settle for anything less than the best, that's what it will give you.

—W. Somerset Maugham

My dog, Sable – a long-haired German Shepherd cross – taught me many valuable life lessons over the years. Developing a strong sense of self-worth, however, was the most important one . . . because so much else hinges upon that.

Sable passed away on February 10th, 2011 at the age of thirteen. She was deaf and blind by that point but up until her final hours, still smiling and chock full of life, despite significant health issues over the past three years. Her passing was graceful and beautiful, just like her, and although my heart ached when the time came to say good-bye, I knew our journey together had come to an end. Understanding all that I had learned from her, however, was just beginning.

Sable first came into my life as a seven week old puppy – a belated wedding gift to us from a friend to my husband, John. When John, a police officer, passed away in the line of duty three years later, Sable became my companion through grief. Six months later, Soda, a matching Shepherd cross, joined us. Slowly but surely my heart began to heal as I learned to live in a world without John.

Eight years later, however, I began to veer off track and got another nasty wake-up call. "Let's see . . ." said the Universe hypothetically. "What shall we do this time around to get Maryanne's attention? Ah yes, let's threaten to take away — again — that which she loves the most."

So there I lay, a week before my fortieth birthday, on the floor of the ICU visiting room at the emergency vet hospital, holding Sable's paw as she slowly bled to death from internal haemorrhaging that had started after minor surgery and was continuing for unknown reasons. She was ten.