

## April Kutger and MAX, the Paper Delivery Dog

*One summer day in 1982, Berkeley resident April Kutger took her 11-year-old son, Joe, to pick out a pound hound. She knew that Joe had a special affinity with animals and, despite his youth, he would help her find the perfect dog, which he did. And then some.*

There weren't always good pickings at the pound, but on this day a litter of five mixed-breed puppies had just arrived. When the pups were free to roam the linoleum floor, most took the opportunity to piddle except for one; a charming brindle-colored male who looked part Lab and part hound. He jumped up on our knees as we sat on our haunches, sniffed our shoes and licked our hands and faces, making little growling-mewling noises. Although we played with all of them, this little brindle baby wouldn't leave us alone.

Seeing Joe holding the puppy like an infant and rubbing his face against the dog's soft coat, I said, "I think this is the one. What do you think?"

"Yeah, this is the one, Mom," he said with a blissful expression.

Max first displayed his devotion when he was only three months old and I took him to the park so he could play in the grass. When a strange man walked near us, Max started barking with all his puppy might and I knew I had adopted a winner.

There are many wonderful stories about Max, but his performance as a paper delivery dog" is definitely the best.

When Max was about a year old, Joe and his brother Ben got jobs with the Oakland Tribune, but not the on a "Leave it to Beaver" kind of route. Every morning at 4:00 a.m., a truck came to transport them and their friends to deliver papers in distant neighborhoods, some pretty menacing. Thee boys asked if they could take Max with them. It was okay with the driver, and the other boys were comforted to have Max come along – they were anxious about their safety, too.

Max knew the sound of the truck and every morning when the world was sleeping, he was waiting at the front door. He would trot back and forth from the front door to the boys' room where they resisted all attempts to rouse them. Max paced from Joe's bed to Ben's and back again, nudging them and licking their faces until they finally got up and pulled their jeans up over their long-johns.

Max may have been at his happiest when he rode that truck and walked that route with his boys. *Ahma middleweight contendah; Ahma beast*, I imagined him thinking as he swaggered by their side. *Ah won't let nothin' hurt 'em. No one'll get near 'em. Not a man. Not another dog. Ahm too fast for da bums; Ahm terrifyin'.* (I always imagined Max sounding like Joe Pesci in "Good Fellas".)

After six months of getting up at 4:00 a.m. Joe and Ben decided it was time to find jobs closer to home. But Max didn't need another job. When my sons' friends heard they were quitting, they pleaded, "Can Max still come with us?"

And so, every morning before dawn, the truck continued to come and Max waited at the front door until he heard it rumbling around the corner. The driver always left the door on the sidewalk side of the truck opened as he slowed to a crawl in front of the house. Max would run along side the truck until he could make a clean leap inside, and, day after day, he joined the neighbor boys on their route.

*Ah won't let nobody threaten these young punks. Not a man. Not a dog. Nothin' can get 'em when Ahm here.*