



Scout Ramamoorthy (Feb. 14, 2007 – Jun. 6, 2022)

“Babumoshai, zindagi badi honi chahiye, lambi nahin ...” (from the Hindi movie, *Anand*, Rajesh Khanna (R.I.P.) to Amitabh Bachchan).

Translation: “My dear friend, a life should be big, not long ...”

Scout Ramamoorthy had a “big” life, no doubt about it, and a long one to boot. Born in February 2007, he spent some time with his original family and being fostered by volunteers at the Animal Rescue of Carroll. Scout became a part of our family on July 25th, 2008 when his parents got him home in their old green Honda Accord. Adi (dad) was sitting in the back enjoying his doggy breath, holding on to him, to make sure that he didn’t go to the front and Nami (mom) was driving. It was raining like crazy and we made it home completely drenched but happy and full of excitement for our lives together.

First and foremost, Scout would be rather offended if I ever refer to him as a dog or as a pet in any of this. If there is one thing we learned about him rather quickly it was that he was more afraid of and annoyed by dogs (especially the barking kind) than any other human was. He may himself have barked a handful of times in his entire life. Although technically he was a “golden retriever”, after getting a tennis ball back once, he would give us the look that said – *“You threw it, so you get it! Why do you expect me to?”*. We liked to say that he considered himself a *Hu-Go (Human-Golden)*. This made him fundamentally incapable of understanding that some humans may be scared of him and not want to “pet” him. Indeed, many people around us went from not wanting to be near him to giving him lap space in his later years, most famously, his grandmother Dr. Meera Vaswani.

In his own way, Scout taught us to make peace with whatever life threw at us. We used to call him *“the therapist with a wet nose”*, after a favorite pair of T-shirts that his parents bought a long time ago.

His ability to brighten up any day however gloomy was amazing. A cloudy, below zero-degree weekend day where we would be sitting around moping, would be transformed as follows. He would keep nudging our hands and arms whether you were eating or working. I thought I had figured out a solution to this by raising both my arms until he stopped. But Scout had other plans; he would then put his entire face on your lap and give you the most heart-melting look with those eyes ... Decision made, we had to head out for a walk or play with him. Our reward for this was the most vigorous tail wag I’ve ever seen in my life, 270 degrees and so vigorous that it could easily clear cups and mugs; he defined the phrase – *“happy tails”*.

Scout taught us how to take pleasure in and enjoy the “*small*” things in life: rays of sunlight on cloudy days, interesting smells on walks, plotting rabbit/squirrel captures, saying joyful hellos to neighbors, and occasionally wrecking their plants when they weren’t watching. Someone wise once said: “*we keep chasing the big things in life, but forget that life is made of small things*”. Scout embodied this thought. We didn’t realize until much later, how much this changed our own outlook on life.

A hard day at work, all sorts of bad news, coming home and Scout was ready for us, jumping, panting, and placing his head and front paws wherever he felt like and sometimes giving me a good lick-down with his long tongue. Occasionally, though he understood that this wasn’t what I was in the mood for. If I wasn’t feeling well or up for going for a walk, he would just follow me to the bedroom and lie right next to me and go to sleep, ever ready to wake up as soon as I would. If he felt something was really wrong, he would give you the paws-on-chest and licking treatment. In his younger days, his standard method for defusing arguments between mom and dad was to keep jumping on them until they gave up. While it may be a cliché to state this, Scout taught us the importance of everlasting loyalty and in putting family first always (as long as there weren’t any interesting critters around 🐾), but more on that soon).

A famous statement from the Srimad Bhagvad Gita (one of the holy books of the Hindus) says: “*do karma (action) for the sake of karma with no regard to the fruit of the karma*”. I think no one exemplified this better than Scout. Scout showed me the importance of never giving up and keeping a never-say-die attitude towards life and always being in the moment. In his younger years, he chased countless rabbits and squirrels that were significantly faster and I always used to wonder why he keeps trying. Well he was eventually successful in catching two rabbits and bringing them back to me and recorded one squirrel kill, that too when he was seriously sick. His total concentration on the job at hand was something to be experienced; perhaps the only time he would be away from his dad or mom on a walk! In his later years, when his hind legs started to give up, he would fall but was ready to get up with our help and keep trotting. His stoicism in dealing with pain and hardship is something I will never forget. His body was giving up, but never his mind.

I can’t really say that we were ever successful in giving him as much love as he gave to us, but we certainly tried. Scout taught me for the first time the emotional lows and highs in caring for someone who could never verbally communicate his pain and suffering. His occasional close shaves in life made for some rather emotionally draining times in our household. At the same time, he made sure that the high times were multiplied ten-fold; ever ready to dance and prance around when his parents were.

Scout’s nine years with his human sister Subhi were some of the happiest days of our family. Starting from the day when she came to our house as a two-day old baby and Scout promptly waking me up with a paw-beating when I wasn’t quick enough to respond to her crying, to days when he would gladly tolerate her petting and climbing all over him. Nevertheless, he always had this attitude of “*main bhi tumhara beta hoon*” (translation: please remember, I’m also your son) after she was born. If she was lying on my lap, so would he. If we were singing to her, he would come to us as well. They had a bond that can’t really be described in words.

Scout started to have real trouble with breathing and his hind legs in the last month of his life and his vet finally dropped the bombshell that we had been dreading throughout his life. It was time for him to go, since he was in serious pain. He departed as he would have liked, lying in my lap; his expression will remain etched in my mind till the rest of my own life. Finally, he was pain-free and at peace. An

interesting coincidence happened when I was finally collecting his ashes after cremation. I saw a woman running with two dogs, one of whom was a dark Golden retriever who could easily pass for Scout in his younger years. Perhaps this was a signal to us, that he is fine wherever he is ...

For whatever it is worth, in some hard-to-describe way, I feel there was an invisible hand in us being able to have Scout with us for about fourteen years of our life. From a rational point of view, he led a long and mostly healthy and happy life. Fifteen years and four months for a golden retriever (oops Hu-Go!) is well beyond a median age. Nevertheless, he's left a void and an empty space in our lives which will take a while to fill. From early morning excitement for breakfast to spilled coffee cups (because of his nudging), to exciting runs in Ames parks, and everlasting love, things will never be the same again.

If I was to summarize what he left us with, it would be this: **family is everything, be happy, be together and live in the moment.** We will try to lead our lives, being true to this as far as possible.

Ending with a salute and farewell to a piece of this family's heart: Scout Ramamoorthy, wherever he is.
"Tera jaisa yaar kahan, kahaan aisa yaarana ..." (Song from the Hindi movie, *Yaarana*, by Amitabh Bachchan)

Translation: "Where can one find a friend like you, or friendship like ours."

**-- Aditya Ramamoorthy,
June 19, 2022.**