

The real slum dog millionaire

ROCHELLE LUCAS



While living and working in India, my partner and I fell in love with an Indian Street Dog. 40,000km and three continents later, we have finally been reunited with our own 'slum dog millionaire'.



It all started on the streets of Bangalore. We noticed an underfed street dog living outside the office. Feeling sorry for her, we started to feed her and soon we had a new friend. Seeing her became the highlight of our day, and so, when she fell

pregnant and faced collection by the pound and being euthanased, we decided to adopt her.

Not having a car, we hailed a rickshaw and headed to the office to collect her. We placed her hour-old puppies into a cardboard moving box and carried her into the rickshaw. We then travelled 45 minutes with five puppies and their mother to an animal shelter that could take care of her until her puppies were old enough to survive by themselves. We named her Kala (which means black in Hindi), and visited her every weekend for the next four weeks. After an agonising month, it was time for us to take her home. We gave the shelter money to find homes for the puppies and bundled her into another rickshaw for the ride back to our house.

Sadly, while she was in the shelter she contracted parvovirus. This is a deadly virus that affects dogs. As she was a street dog, we had not been able to vaccinate her before admitting her to the shelter. So we took her straight to the vet to see what we could do. In India a lot of vets can't hold dogs overnight, and so we took her to the vet twice a day for two days to be on the drip. At that stage the vet did not know what was wrong, and after two days he told us she would need to be admitted to the vet hospital in Hebbal. So off we went on another rickshaw ride. Five days later she had improved but had lost 30% of her body weight. Nevertheless, we were finally able to take her home. We gave her a comfy box and slept on the couch by her side to watch over her during the night. Slowly she

gained weight, her ribs began to disappear and her coat started to shine.

By then, everyone in our neighbourhood knew her story. People commented that her "health was fully implemented" and "she looked good". People would marvel at the fact that a foreign couple had adopted a street dog and planned on taking her with them when they left India.

After six months my role changed and we were relocated to Sydney. For quarantine reasons, dogs from India are not allowed to travel directly to Australia, and she would need to live for six months in an "approved" country to qualify for import. Luckily, my brother and sister-in-law live in America, are veterinarians, and kindly offered to take care of her for the six months. So the next hurdle was to take her from living in inner city Bangalore to the gorgeous countryside of Portland in Maine, USA. We arranged transport (a car this time), to take us to the airport and walked her into the airport terminal. I imagine she is one of the only street dogs who have been able to sit in the waiting area of an international



airport! After 30 hours, we finally touched down in Boston and had a 2.5 hour drive to Portland.

The next six months were an adventure for Kala – filled with outings to the ocean, lakes, walks with my nieces, deer, black bear sightings in the garden and snow.



As the winter set in, the temperatures in Maine dropped to -20C. It was now January, 2012 and time for Kala to move to Sydney. So, after another 2.5 hour drive to Boston airport, flight to Los Angeles, overnight stop, final vet checks and a 15 hour flight to Sydney, she finally made it to Charles Kingsford Smith airport.

Next step was 30 days in quarantine and then a very happy reunion with John and me.

After seven months, our family was back together again. Kala now lives in Gladesville (Sydney), and enjoys exploring the local parks, off-leash areas and the odd trip on the Parramatta River ferry. It is amazing to think that only 18 months ago she was a street dog in India. Three continents later, she is a much loved pet who demonstrates how wonderful a “mongrel” can be.

We could not save every street dog in India, but we did save one.

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