

## Senji-belle's story by Jane Simpson

There she was, our new dog, pressed hard up against the wire enclosure at the RSPCA to best present herself. Her delightful tail had a Michael Leunig, 'Mr. Curly' appeal. The vet assessed that she had spent most of her life on concrete; hers ears were half eaten by mites and she was unable to digest unprocessed food.

Senji coming into our lives represented a new beginning for us when we moved to Cairns. As we slowly rebuilt our family again, without a pet we were incomplete. Our most recent dog we sadly had to leave behind, a casualty of family separation and relocation, a reminder of the sometimes forgotten trauma, and unintended consequences, the loss of a pet due to life changes and transitions.

Thankfully, with no conscious strategic planning, we found ourselves in beautiful, dog friendly Stratford providing a gentle welcome for our sudden and scary move to the big city. The neighbourhood has the feel of a country town, where neighbours matter, the shop keepers know everyone by name and, as a pet proud community of walkers, and owners are always stopping to share their dog stories. Senji moved home 3 times with us in Stratford, twice in the same street, until we finally found our permanent Cairns home one whole street away from our original rental.

We have been here 13 years; Senji has been with us for 12. Senji has emotionally supported us through serious schooling, proper jobs, graduations, heart breaks, University and eventually watched two children leave home.

Senji is what I call a Take Anywhere dog with perfect manners. She has found her way into many hearts and homes had many sleep-overs, restaurant and coffee shop sessions and even visits to aged care homes. She is now an old lady, greying, less playful and aging peacefully as my companion.

Mind you, she still demands 'out and about' time. It's all about lifestyle now! Senji has a rainforest retreat for weekends where she has been warned off making friends with the cassowaries and an extended second family in a rambling jungle hippie house where she stays whenever I am away for work.

Senji has never been 'allowed' on the beds in our house and its front legs only the couch. However, for her visits to the above abode there are no rules and she has since graduated to her own cane lounge! And the worst kept Simpson family secret is that she shares the bed with my son when he comes home from University. Without doubt, Senji's excellent quality of life, being welcomed and cared for every where she goes, is directly related to the amount of love she has to give.

Love. The ability to give and share love, to truly listen and understand and to Just Be There... most dog owners get this one. Thank you, Senji-Belle.

