



HOW MY SCHNAUZERS SAVED MY LIFE AND WHY I BECAME A BREEDER

Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that one day I would be a breeder of Miniature Schnauzers. If anyone had told me that my future would be filled with schnauzers, I would have called them insane.

I was born and raised in Germany and Miniature Schnauzers were always part of my life. After marrying my first husband, I had one son and we moved to the United States. I studied nursing and worked for over two decades in the medical profession. For many years I bred and showed Collies because of my childhood love for Lassie.

I married for a second time in 2007. After a mere 15 months, my new husband, Maximilian (MAX), was diagnosed with Pancreatic Cancer, one of the worst and most aggressive cancers. Max left Germany with his two children, ages 11 and 15, to spend his life with me, but had to wait two years to receive medical coverage in the US. His German health insurance would only cover cost in Germany, but he was already too sick to travel back to his native country. His young children begged me to help their Dad fight this awful type of cancer. After doing our research online, we chose Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore for surgery and treatments. Because Max was an International patient, we had to come up with \$180,000 for treatment.

I had precious little time between arranging the surgery at Johns Hopkins and meeting their financial requirement. I trusted a dear friend (BIG MISTAKE) who suggested I give her Power of Attorney to refinance two of my properties with total equity of \$514,000. I thought that this would free me from immediate financial worries and allow me to solely focus on Max's medical needs. During Max's 12 hour Whipple surgery, my cell phone rang non-stop. My "friend" called over and over because she needed to fax urgent documents for me to sign and have notarized right away. She said it was the only way to refinance my homes on that day. I did exactly as she requested. Max was in surgery and my only concern was that he make it through the operation, and that we could cover the costs. Nothing else mattered.

Ten days after surgery, we made the trip back home to Florida only to find out that my girlfriend sold both my properties, all our belongings and pocketed all the money. At the most vulnerable moment of my life, she scammed us out of everything we owned. I called the police, of course, but I had no recourse since I had given her power of attorney. Things were getting desperate and I decided to sell my 18 year old home health care company with 300 workers. I built this company from scratch and it was my baby, my joy and pride. I sold it within 8 days for 1/3 of the appraised market value. Max's medical costs ran \$100,000 per month; \$30,000 was just for prescription drugs.

Max lived 15 months with pancreatic cancer before the Angels took him. After his death, my life was shattered and empty. How could I go on? My German stepchildren had to go back to their biological mom in Germany, my properties were stolen, my business sold and all monies gone, and my financial security destroyed. How could I live without my Max? I no longer wanted to live. I thought about using up the rest of the morphine from Max's IV bag to join him so we could be together again. I planned it all out, when and where I would do it. First I would clean my place, then put my makeup on, dress nicely, drink some vodka for courage and then give myself a morphine infusion on free flow. The pain was just too unbearable for me to continue living.

Out of nowhere, the phone rang. It was Suzan, a former employee calling to see how I was doing. A few hours later she was at my door with a small suitcase. She announced she would stay with me for a while because she was worried about my welfare. It was almost as if she knew I had planned to end my life, though we never spoke about it. I spent the next three months in my bed and popped sleeping pills to escape the pain of grieving. I completely neglected my physical appearance and refused to get up or leave the house. I had died emotionally. Suzan checked on me every few hours to make sure I was still alive.

After three months, Suzan threatened to have me committed if I did not make an effort to get out of bed for just a few hours. Then she had a brilliant idea: knowing how much I loved animals, she demanded I get a dog. "You need a puppy to help you snap out of this, Vera" she yelled. She put her laptop on my bed and showed me pictures of schnauzers from a local breeder. Little did I know that Suzan had already made an appointment at the breeder for a visit. I told her "no" and that I did not want anything but sleep. Finally, as a favor to her, I dragged myself out of bed. It took all my energy to shower, get dressed and put makeup on. I really, really did not want to leave my bedroom, much less the house.

Once we arrived at the Schnauzer breeder, 15 puppies and their mommies welcomed us. I was able to feel again and a smile crossed my lips. It felt like I just woke up from a coma. The puppies' bounciness and cuteness awakened my soul. I hugged and kissed all of them as I tried to choose which one I wanted. I ended up taking three puppies home with me that very day. Wow, I now had three adorable puppies that needed my attention and love. I named them Schnitzel, Strudel and Gretel. They instantly filled my void and brought comfort to my grieving heart.



As if three puppies were not enough, I found myself on the internet checking schnauzer breeders across the US. I thought that if three puppies could bring such comfort to me, maybe more puppies might heal my soul even more. One year later, I was surrounded by 12 Schnauzers in my bed, 8 girls and 4 boys. I found the new love of my life; I found my Schnauzers. With each new puppy that entered my life I became stronger and no longer wanted to die. My spirits were lifted by these little cuties and my soul was resurrected by my new four-legged family.

They brought a new purpose into my life: to love, to care and to pamper them. My life now belonged to them and they belonged to me. This new passion filled my life with a renewed joy.

One year later, I had my first pregnant Schnauzer girl, Moritz, expecting puppies. A friend in Germany had reserved a puppy and I wanted this friend to be able to see the birthing of her puppy so I searched online how to broadcast live streams. On the day of the whelping, I broadcast for the very first time. I only had a laptop and I had to tilt the top of the lid where the built in camera was. I did not have an external camera nor was I able to read the chat or see how many viewers I had because of the awkward laptop position.

Moritz blessed me with four healthy little babies, two girls and two boys. I was ecstatic. As I was ready to shut off the computer, I noticed how many viewers and chatters had been watching. These Ustream viewers all congratulated me and asked me to keep streaming because they wanted to watch the puppies grow. "Do what???" No way." Who would want to watch puppies? More people wanted to watch than I could have ever imagined.

In one year, my heart gave birth to 12 mini schnauzers. In one night, four new babies arrived. Overnight, a new schnauzer fan club was born. Wow, who would have ever believed this? One year earlier I had lost everything, was laying in bed planning my suicide, and now I not only had my schnauzers to love but also many new friends to share my schnauzers with through live broadcasting on Ustream.

I had a website built for my schnauzers and named my kennel after my husband, MAXIMILIAN. In 2010, the first year of broadcasting, the camera generated 2 million views. Since then, we have enjoyed over 15 million views, with visitors from 170 countries. I run anywhere from four to seven live webcams to share my puppies and doggies with the world. I show everything and am as transparent as one can be.

My Schnauzers have become famous in the news and on the internet. The name Maximilian Schnauzers is a worldwide brand name. The countless new friends have become my internet schnauzer family. I have been so blessed to have found a new beginning through the love for my doggies who truly saved my life. I honestly do not believe that I would still be in this world if it were not for Suzan who talked me into getting a puppy, and for the schnauzer family that fills my heart and home. During the most difficult time in my life, I learned that as long as we don't give up, life has a miraculous way of giving us second chances filled with new opportunities.

My schnauzers own me and not the other way around. They have trained me well and are forgiving when I screw up. They employ me as their caretaker, playmate, cook, nurse, cleaning lady, pooper picker upper, entertainer, but most of all as their proud Mommy. The workload is 24/7 and there are not enough hours in the day between meeting their needs, spoiling them, running the many live webcams, cleaning up after them, feeding and water changes, answering emails, taking phone calls, bathing and grooming, three to four loads of laundry, taking photos, editing and maintaining my website. This goes without mentioning the many trips to the vet for checkups and x-rays of pregnant mommies, staying up all night for birthing of new puppies or when a doggy is sick, fighting desperately to save a puppy's life and taking in rescue schnauzers to help find loving homes for them. The list goes on and on. I have always been a workaholic and therefore the workload does not bother me. My schnauzers have become my new passion in life and I love what I do more than anything else I have ever done. I am now the luckiest person to have all their love, but also for being able to share them with viewers from around the world through the internet. They are pure love, filled with innocence and vulnerability, just like I am in my heart.