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FEATURED ARTICLE

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S E N I O R  
**DOGS**

In this article, Ari pays tribute to Honeybee and Maximus, two senior dogs who impacted her life, and shares her experience, advice, and tips for anyone wondering if adopting a senior dog is for them!

A TRIBUTE TO HONEYBEE AND MAXIMUS BY

**ARI FRIEDMAN**

*The Powerful Impact of Senior Dogs*



# THE POWERFUL IMPACT OF SENIOR DOGS

## A TRIBUTE TO HONEYBEE AND MAXIMUS

By Ari Friedman

When you hear the word "senior," what comes to mind? Perhaps words like "old," "short-lived," or "high-maintenance," suggesting big medical expenses and substantial owner commitment. However, as someone who has owned and cherished two senior dogs, I associate this term with joy, reward, blessings, and an amazing opportunity. It's true that senior dogs may bring more medical costs due to their age, but the benefits far outweigh the costs in my opinion.

Initially, I harbored similar reservations, believing that a younger dog would provide more fun and fewer challenges. But the decision to adopt a senior dog revealed an unexpected depth of love and fulfillment, transforming my perspective on what it means to bring an older dog into your life.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

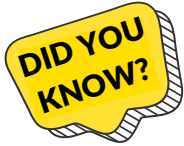
### Personality on Display

With a senior dog, their personality is already developed and on full display. You'll know if they're a gentle giant, a lazy loungeur, or a dignified dignitary, making it easier to find a dog that fits your lifestyle and preferences.



# My Personal Journey with Senior Dogs

My partner, Andy Cohen, and I adopted Honey Bee, a red, smooth-coated dachshund, at age twelve from a local rescue here in New Jersey in 2016. Then, in 2021, Maximus, a black and tan smooth-coated dachshund, joined our family at the ripe old age of fifteen from a rescue in Ohio.



**Aging Process Varies by Breed:** Larger dog breeds tend to age more quickly than smaller breeds. A Great Dane might be considered senior by 5-6 years old, while a Chihuahua might not enter its senior years until 10-11 years.

## Honey Bee Ups and Downs

We are experienced in getting dogs to lose weight, and both these dachshunds had up to ten pounds to shed.

Honey Bee, a once severely obese dog from a foster home in Somerville, New Jersey, was tipping the scales at an alarming 26 pounds - nearly 10 pounds over her ideal weight of 15 or 16 pounds. However, after coming to us, we were able to help her slim down to a healthy weight, enhancing her mobility. Losing the extra weight made it easier for her to go up and down the porch stairs on her own and move around more comfortably.

We also discovered that she didn't like being confined in a crate, which led to some back issues (common for dachshunds) whenever she was inside with the door closed. We sought holistic treatments for her back issues, including supplements, injections, and acupuncture, which cost us over \$700. Thankfully, after a few months, her back improved and the issue didn't reoccur.

About four years later, we noticed that Honey Bee was urinating and drinking more frequently, which is often a sign of a urinary



tract infection according to vets.

However, it turned out to be Cushing's disease. One of the most noticeable symptoms was her pot belly appearance. Cushing's disease is considered an "annoying disease" and requires managing symptoms. It took several tests and medication monitoring to diagnose the disease and ensure the medication was effective. The expenses for diagnostics, ultrasounds, and the ACTH test totaled over \$2000. The monthly medication cost us approximately \$100 every five or six weeks. Once the medication dosage was determined and working well, annual follow-ups could be done if no symptoms occurred.

Honey Bee, our beloved dog, was affectionate and playful. Sometimes she would curl her lip when she wanted to be left alone, which we called "wicked witch." She was generally calm and enjoyed sitting on our lap and giving us gentle kisses. On July 4, 2023, after six and a half years, we had to say goodbye to her due to her loss of appetite and the results of an ultrasound indicating possible cancer in her spleen and kidney.

## Maximus Ups and Downs

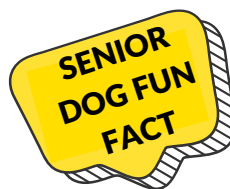
Regarding Maximus, many asked, "Why would you take in a fifteen-year-old dog? You won't have much time with him." Max lived in a home where he was fed table scraps, was severely overweight, and received no medical care whatsoever. It was a perfect opportunity to take him under our wing. He weighed a solid 26 lbs upon arrival, and with our dedication, in less than two months, he reached his ideal weight of 18 lbs. As he shed pounds, he playfully ran in the grass, attended weekly community dog walks, and danced on his back while making noises that seemed to come from a prehistoric era. This dog could make you laugh, and when he arrived at our New Jersey home, he acted as if he had lived here his entire life, marching around the house perimeter and yard as if he already knew it.

The medical care he needed turned out to be extensive and expensive, but we were devoted and determined to help this little guy and give it everything we had. He arrived with poor skin health and balding in many areas where the fur was unlikely to grow back due to long untreated thyroid disease or Cushing's disease. After regular vet checks and a visit to a dermatologist, shampooing three times a week with medicated shampoo was the best solution, combined with an allergy shot.

As for other health issues that occurred during the just over two years he spent with us: First, his thyroid levels were off, so he was put on medication for that. After a year and a half, he started drinking and urinating frequently and showed signs of aggression around food. Due to these symptoms, he was tested for Cushing's disease and then put on medication. In addition to being treated for both diseases, Maximus also had severe breath issues that seemed to be more deep-rooted. After a dental appointment with the local vet, it was determined that he had a tooth that had decayed and rotted into the root of his mouth and was severely infected.



It was also the tooth holding his jaw together. The tooth was removed to address the infection, but this resulted in a broken jaw that our vet took care of; he stitched him up okay afterward with no more infection in his mouth. After his dental work, since his bottom tooth was missing, his tongue hung out of the side of his mouth, making him an absolute character in appearance.



**They Can Learn New Tricks:** Contrary to the old adage, senior dogs can't learn new things. While they might be slower learners compared to younger dogs, they can still enjoy and benefit from mental stimulation and learning new commands or tricks.

His last four and a half months with us were spent working with a cardiologist to treat his congestive heart failure when he started coughing out of the blue. Sadly, after many medications and monitoring, the disease took him from us. The expenses exceeded \$4,000 for X-rays, echocardiograms, heart medication, and check-ups. Congestive heart failure does not always take a dog this quickly, but we were not fortunate enough to get another year or two with him. He was also seventeen at the time.


Not everyone will choose all the paths we took, but this guy deserved all of it. I would not change any of the decisions made for him.

No matter all the health issues and expenses, the joy these two brought to our family is indescribable. The heartache is real, and the loss hurts immensely. It is the same for every pet we lose. We always want more time with them. I describe loss as something that will never get easier, but I know that healing does.

The reward I have received for providing an amazing life for these two dogs is one you will know if you experience it and choose to give a senior dog a chance. May your heart be open, kind, and loving. Thank you for allowing me to share this with you. In loving memory of my beloved Honey Bee and Maximus, aka Maxisaurus!

Adopting a senior dog is a noble and rewarding decision that comes with specific responsibilities that require an adopter's full dedication, a well-thought-out plan, and a strong commitment to ensure the well-being of the dog in its later years.

**If you are considering adopting a senior dog, read this checklist to help you think through some of the things you want to consider before taking the leap.**



## Senior Dogs Need **Dedication, a Plan, and Commitment!**

### Dedication

- **Health Care Needs:** Older dogs may have more health issues and require frequent veterinary care, which necessitates a dedicated caregiver.
- **Routine:** Senior dogs benefit from a stable and consistent routine, which requires an owner's steadfast attention.
- **Special Accommodations:** As dogs age, they may need special accommodations, like orthopedic beds or assistance with mobility, which a dedicated owner must provide.

### A Plan

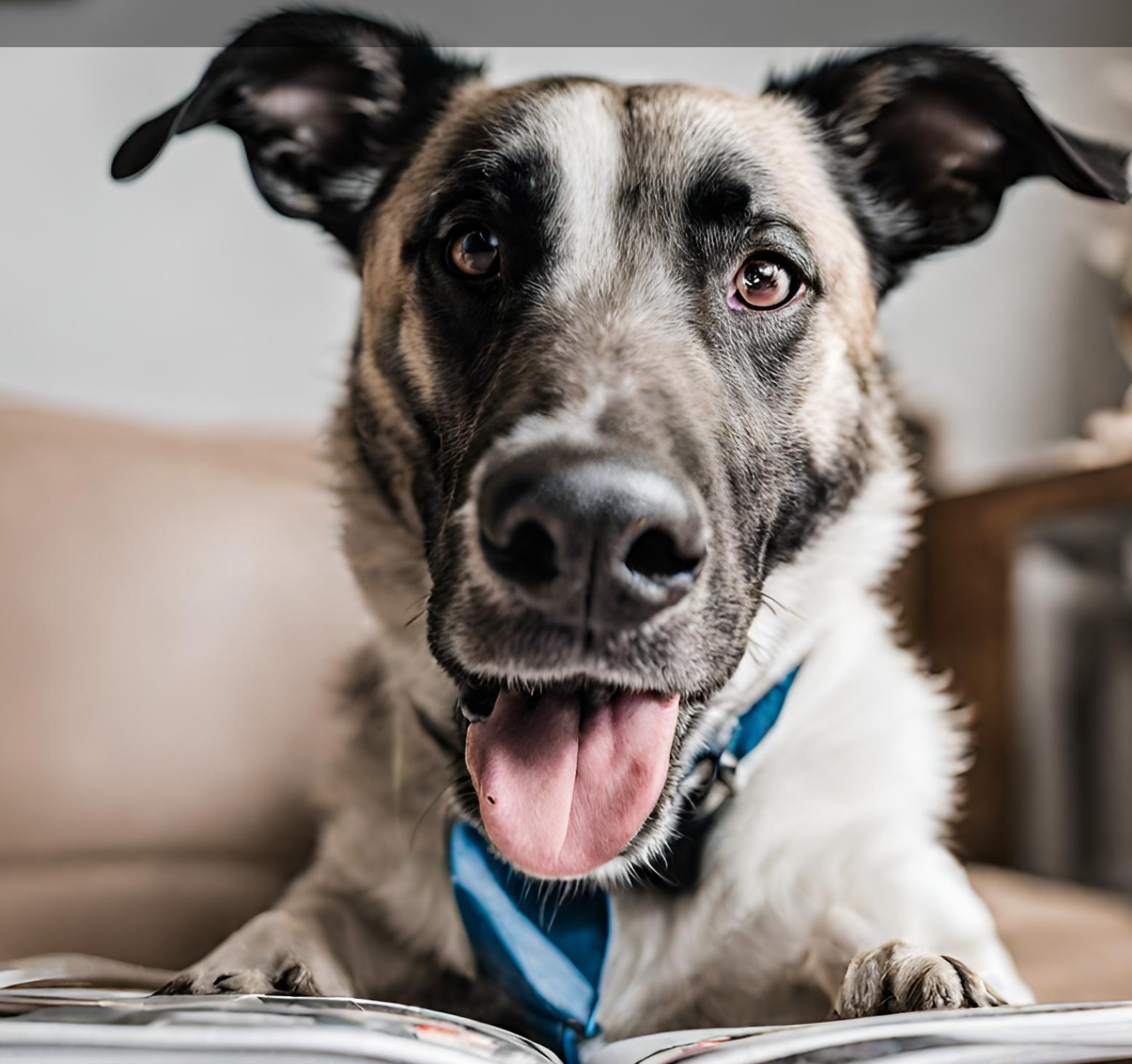
- **Financial Preparedness:** A plan should include financial considerations for potential medical treatments and special diets.
- **Emergency Situations:** Having a plan for emergencies ensures that the dog receives immediate care when needed.
- **End-of-Life Care:** It's important to plan for the dog's end-of-life care, making decisions about palliative care and humane euthanasia when the time comes.

### Commitment

- **Time Investment:** Senior dogs can require more time for care, companionship, and comfort, especially as they adjust to a new home.
- **Emotional Attachment:** Committing to an older dog means forming an emotional bond during their golden years, providing them with love and comfort.
- **Quality of Life:** Owners must be committed to maintaining the dog's quality of life, even as their needs change with age.



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