

## Another Facet of Sainthood

by Yvonne Alexander

It does take a bit of time to learn and remember the names of other members of an evening study group, all of them women. So, it did create immediate attention when we heard the name St. Thomas Aquinas, and the member with this moniker was a handsome German Shepherd dog. His mistress, Margy, was an Episcopal priest and the group leader. Thomas was perfectly behaved for the entire hour of reading and discussion. He was also courteous if any member acknowledged his presence, but he did not encourage closer relationship. He was devoted to Margy and stayed at her feet for the entire session. When Margy said, "Thomas, we are going to be in prayer," he crossed his front legs and closed his eyes to join us.

As the summer was coming to a close Margy was planning her return to seminary in California. She said that her new apartment was not "pet friendly." She was seeking a new family for Thomas. People sighed and made appropriate noises of concern. She asked me to adopt Thomas and I admitted to a fear of German Shepherds, while, at the same time, assuring her that a fine fellow like Thomas would soon find the right home. The weeks slipped away and Thomas moved to a new position at study group, he spent the hour at my feet resting his chin on my shoe, sometimes yawning widely so that I might appreciate seeing his sharp teeth. I was falling in love with this charming fellow. My husband said that, of course, Thomas would be living with us. He visited our home and we visited his and on a dark rainy night in August, he came home with me after tearful hugs from Margy.

He didn't much impress our beautiful calico cat, keeping his distance in gentlemanly fashion. She gave him a perfunctory hiss and a look of utter disdain. Their bonding was beautiful to see. They had moved together on a gradual basis. We lived in an A-frame house. Thomas didn't like the spiral steps and chose to have a soft bed on the lower level. Arba already had her soft cushions at the base of the stairwell. Before long, Thomas had managed to work his huge body behind her cushions and they slept cozily and close. But, when they were outside, I frequently saw him slip up behind her and give chase, sending her up a tree. Then he would look toward the house to see who might have been watching the Sly Fox!

Unfortunately, a veterinary appointment revealed a hernia which demanded attention and sent us to Angel Memorial Clinic near Boston. As he was so well-behaved, I was sure that there would be an easy remedy. How surprising to learn of the "protective safeguards" for treatment of "dangerous German Shepherds." I must stay at the back of the room with him and "keep a tight leash at all times." They stayed at the other side of the room behind a barricade of tables.

Thomas behaved well, was in hospital three days, only soft foods for a week. We were soon walking the beach again. I don't know if he was really a Boston Celtics fan, but when I watched a game he was there with his chin on my shoe. This might have been because the cat was on my lap, watching every movement of the ball.

Thomas became a cancer victim. Our last days together were precious and he was a grateful patient. But a morning arrived when we knew it was his last. We took him to be euthanized and

the vets said I could hold his head and shoulders unless this upset him and made him try to move. I was talking to him and the vet said, "I'm afraid he is trying to get up, he's moving his legs." "No," I said, "he's saying his prayers." And he crossed his legs in prayer. No "tight leash" now, Thomas. Just a final tight hug.