



Beagle Happy

Gul Panag, the actor with a social conscience hails from a dog-friendly family. With two beagles, her own newly married life is pretty complete. **Farzana Behram Contractor** walks along with the trio on a Mumbai beach and gets to know them better

PHOTOGRAPHS: FARZANA BEHRAM CONTRACTOR

Gul Panag is one hell of a lucky girl. She gets her dog to accompany her on all her adventurous sojourns all over India! Anyone who knows Gul knows about her sporty streak and the fact that she travels quite a bit. So imagine having a dog who happily gets into an aircraft hold, even wagging his tail, no signs of any stress, except that he is hoping the flight will be a good one. What a dream come true that is.

Milo is eight, Beagle, a male. He came into Gul's life as a gift, on her 25th birthday at a party in her parents house in Delhi. Presented to her by Rishi Attari, her friend then, now husband. Yes, Gul got married six months ago and if I recall rightly, the *baratis* went on motor bikes for the *shaadi*, 'coz Gul loves bikes, especially the Royal Enfield. This was in Chandigarh from where she hails.

Going down memory lane, Gul recalls, "I wasn't at all prepared for a pup in my life. I was quite aghast, even annoyed at the prospect of acquiring one. Here I was, living in a studio apartment in Mumbai, keeping odd hours, with a demanding lifestyle and NO MAID! Where on earth would he stay when I travelled, which was (and is) most frequently!"



“ The first plane ride was responsible for the change of heart on both sides. Gul started to love Milo and Milo in turn became crazy about Gul.

Beautiful brown eyes wide open, Gul continues, “And who would walk him, feed him, look after him, take him to the vet. Would I ever be able to adjust to him!” And then she goes on to give the most charming, deep-dimpled smile and adds, “But as things turned out, I did not have to adapt to him, he adapted to me and I simply adore him today!”

But that’s not how it was in the beginning. Milo had sensed he was not very welcome and was rather hostile towards Gul, even biting her when she went to inspect his teeth to gauge how old he was. This was something she was adept at doing because her mom breeds Labradors in Delhi and Gul had learnt the tricks of the trade early on.

Gul decided to bring Milo back to Mumbai with her, for he was proving to be a challenge. But on the ride to the airport, he was already seeming meek. Perhaps it was being alone with her, after having shared a house with a whole lot of people including five other canines (Gul’s father, an ex-army officer, is a complete dog lover), with such varied names as Boon, Teela, Star, Paro and Nazia. Milo, says Gul, was suddenly seeming as quiet as a church mouse. “It was so funny, but at the Delhi airport Milo was literally stuck to my legs and when it was time for him to be taken away to the aircraft hold, I was in tears. However, when I heard his bark from somewhere below, I felt assured he was alright. And I heard him bark for half an hour, before take off.”

“Once we were at my apartment in Mumbai, Mr Milo was a changed soul, forever,” sighs Gul.

The first plane ride was responsible for the change of heart on both sides. Gul started to love Milo and Milo in turn became crazy about Gul. He never messed in the house, slept when Gul slept and awoke when she did, even if it was at noon. He went everywhere with her; to the ATM, coffee shops, the supermarket, even to work. And if she couldn’t take him in somewhere, she would leave him in the car, the glasses lowered six inches. And he’d be on his best behaviour. What a dog!

Gul and he were sharing life beautifully. He would even follow her into the bathroom and sit there while she showered or watch while she cooked.

Trips to Delhi were every two months, sometimes every month. When her parents moved to Bhopal, they would go there. And when Gul’s father, who was Lt. General at the time moved base to Srinagar, Milo happily enjoyed life in Kashmir.

In Goa, Milo learned to swim, or at least if that is an innate quality, he became a beach bum, enjoying the experience of swimming in the ocean. And if that isn’t enough, he went on a motoring trip to Ladakh, driving from Mumbai to Leh and on another occasion, trekking with Gul to Valley of the Flowers and even further up on the same route to Hemkund Saheb!

These trips had their moments though. At Auli, where they were staying in a camp, Milo went missing...“That was a scare. As you know Beagles are known to wander away once they follow a smell and Milo did just that high up in those mountains. We realised he was missing when we heard his distressed bark. We instantly ran searching for him, following his barking and...we found him! On his back, surrounded by a group of monkeys, slapping him!” Gul couldn’t stop laughing at the memory.

If Milo is daring, Gul isn’t any less. To take a dog along on a trekking trip calls for a certain amount of conviction. And



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when you spend quite a few nights in a tent with a dog, it's inviting trouble; the attention of a fair species of wild animals, like bears and leopards. If you have been to any of the Himalayan spots in the same region, even on a pilgrim's trail, to places like Badrinath or Kedarnath, you will have seen that all the local dogs are fitted with a safety collar guard which has sharp spikes on it. This is because wild animals merely nip them away by the scuff of their necks and disappear

into the forest and feast on them. The collar protects the dogs by preventing or at least making it difficult for wild beasts to just lift one away.

And did Milo have one such collar? No, of course not. He had Gul.

But now dear Gul, sensitive and caring as she is, has gone ahead and complicated his life, inadvertently, of course. Thinking Milo needed some canine company, she

has brought home a new Beagle. A girl dog. Vegas is cute, but Milo doesn't think so. He is sulking and his personality is changing. And Gul has a situation at hand.

But I guess she knows about these things. And if she can't cope she has both her mom and dad to lean on, plus her husband who got her Milo in the first place! Didn't I say, Gul is a lucky girl? 



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