

Weekly Insight - Riley the Wonder Dog, a True Christmas Miracle

A little over a week ago a student came into the office to review what he had been doing. He noticed a screen saver on Nancy's monitor. The picture was of our rescue dog that we call "Riley". I told him Riley's story of how Nan saved Riley's life and, in turn, how Riley saved Nan's life. He was profoundly taken by the story and I hope it will have some meaning for you also.

Riley came into our lives after a phone call from a friend of our daughter's who was working at a local veterinarian's clinic. He explained that a puppy had been brought in with a terrible injury and the vet was going to euthanize it if no one would take the puppy immediately. I don't remember if Nan asked me if it was OK, but later that day a nameless puppy with massive trauma to his back came into our lives.

The person who dropped Riley off at the clinic said the puppy had crawled under a chain-link fence and to get it out the former owner pulled the dog back through the fence tearing off the puppy's skin. The result was the skin and flesh on the back of the puppy had been ripped off from the base of his neck to his rump.

I'm not entirely sure how he got the name Riley, but that's what the girls decided on and it seemed to fit. Riley was on the brink of death when my daughter brought him home. Nancy and Tiffany traded back and forth tending to his wounds virtually around the clock and it took weeks for him to start moving.

It was quite some time before he came all the way back to being a lively and happy puppy. He would hide at the sound of loud noises and shutter if he got too close to spoons and forks in dishes apparently having been struck with them by his former owner. We believe that the trauma he suffered was more likely inflicted by someone who poured something scolding or very acidic on his back. Whatever the reason, Riley fought back and has brought us tons of joy and happiness.

Early one morning a year ago in September Riley jumped into bed with us and seemingly with a definite purpose put his paw on Nan's left breast. Nan groaned because she felt a pain and as she touched the spot, she found she had a lump she hadn't previously noticed. This simple touch by a rescue puppy began an odyssey that ultimately saved Nan's life.

Nan had always been the poster child of healthy living. She had never even taken a prescription drug and took only a daily vitamin. A few years ago she had a pain that turned out to be a benign ovarian cyst that was removed; otherwise she never had a health problem. In the heat of the battle your mind plays tricks and it seems that everything you read screams “You shouldn’t eat or drink whatever you have been doing for all your life” and you don’t know what is safe or not.

The lump turned out to be a stage 2 aggressive cancer that we later learned was doubling in size ever 2 ½ months and had bridged to two other tumors. As the diagnosis was given to Nan shock and terror set in immediately, but she quickly slipped into survival mode and started to fight back. What followed were batteries of repeated tests all of which lead to the same conclusion – surgery was the only option and it needed to be done quickly.

Within a few weeks Nan had a double mastectomy and endured months of chemo treatments. She was a shining light, seemingly fearless, but always fearing the unknown. She stayed strong and suffered more from the chemo than the surgeries. Anyone reading this that has been there or had a loved one go through cancer can only imagine the pain and terror she endured.

To add to the uncertainty, you become a pawn for the medical establishment and have to fight their billing system to get treatment. Somehow a \$19,000 charge for one hour of chemo infusion seemed unbelievable, but it was only one in many more to come. Over-billing, double and triple billing, incorrect billing and calls about payments that had to be paid, only added insult to the already unreal fight.

Nan had a mammogram the year before as she always did and when she didn’t hear from the gynecologist she called and got the usual response “If we didn’t call you there wasn’t anything wrong”. What we learned later was the radiologist who read the x-ray had made a note that there was an abnormality and further action had to be taken. A lot of the trauma and suffering could have been avoided if someone had read the note or we had known enough to ask for the x-ray. To this day Nan suffers from side effects of the chemo treatments that just won’t go away.

The greatest blessing is that Nan is still with me for another Christmas. We will celebrate our 46th wedding anniversary in less than two months and are always joking about the next 40 or 50 to come. Life is simpler at our age – if it doesn’t fall off or have to be cut off, it doesn’t matter much. Nan is getting her strength back and is in the office most of the week although she tires after a few hours.

The blessing is that she is back by my side. Who else would suffer through proofing these weekly insights and still come out sane?

A couple of days ago Nan asked me if I had looked closely at Riley. Actually I see him inches from my face every night when I get home as he jumps up on me and gives me kisses. Nan just quietly stated "He is getting white hairs around his muzzle". We looked at each other and didn't have to say anything else. We have out-lived many pets and we know that Riley won't be with us forever.

So Riley the Wonder Dog lived through an ordeal that should have killed him, held on to avoid euthanasia, has given us untold hours of joy, and even saved Nan's life. Giant blessings of all types come in small packages so enjoy them while you can because you won't have them forever.

I can only hope that you find and acknowledge your personal blessings while you still have them and you embrace what you have instead of longing for what you don't have that really doesn't matter.

I wish you and yours the Happiest of Holidays and the Most Joyous New Year possible. I look forward to seeing you in January at BREIA.

Dave Dinkel