

Once-in-a-lifetime DOG

BY ELIZABETH A. MAGINNIS



Barney was our once-in-a-lifetime dog. My husband and I met him one April afternoon at a city pound adoption event. We were charmed by the Shiba Inu mix's quizzical expression and calm and stoic demeanor amidst the chaos of barking dogs. He gave us that "what's the big deal" look we came to know so well, and that was all it took. We loved him right from the start.

For those familiar with the Shiba Inu breed, you know how intelligent and strong-willed these dogs can be. Even though Barney wasn't a purebred, his Shiba tendencies ruled his appearance and his personality. We grew to appreciate his amazingly quick mind and stubborn independent streak more and more with each passing year.

We also grew to appreciate his self-appointed position as family watchdog, especially when he stubbornly, determinedly and single-handedly delayed the actions of a would-be burglar long enough to discourage the thief from leisurely ransacking our valuables. What a fierce devotion to family!

When I was laid off in February of 2009, Barney and I bonded deeply while I found a way to restart my professional life. We took daily walks in a nearby park and I'd let his nose guide us as we circled the pond and wandered among the trees. If only I knew just what his nose found so fascinating! But what mattered was the stimulation Barney got from our daily wanderings.

Sudden illness

One day, Barney was fit enough for our usual walk... the next he was inexplicably bleeding from his anal region. Our veterinarian ran blood tests that discovered

Barney's body was destroying his blood platelets at an alarming rate. He was diagnosed as having idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP). He was only seven-and-a-half.

The blood of a dog with ITP loses its ability to clot due to an inadequate number of platelets. Some of the first signs include skin and mucus membrane hemorrhaging, bloody urine and severe anemia. Like Barney, however, an affected animal may exhibit no signs of illness before onset. Viral infections are the suspected cause, and there is speculation that modified live virus vaccinations like canine distemper and infectious canine hepatitis can also trigger the development of ITP. Other suspected causes are the ingestion of sweet clover grass and grasses treated with fertilizer, the leaves and bark of certain trees, and contaminated water or antifreeze.

Without warning, Barney's life spiraled downward and out of control. A high dose of prednisone did nothing to stop the bleeding and stimulate his body to begin producing platelets. A day and a half later, Barney's hemorrhaging became worse, and we rushed him to the emergency veterinary hospital. Three blood transfusions didn't jump start platelet regeneration, and we were suddenly confronted with the cold reality that our beloved friend was rapidly dying. There was nothing anyone could do to save him.

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but Simon and Peabody's antics have brought
renewed joy to our home.

All I could do was hug Barney and sob. He barely had the strength to lick my face. Suddenly, he looked at me with an intensity I had never seen before. It was as though his truest nature was reaching out to me through his eyes. I will never forget it. Within seconds, he began bleeding uncontrollably, and we called the doctor in to administer euthanasia. We couldn't let our friend suffer any longer. The power and the intensity of his love ran over me like a wave as he passed.


We grieved deeply for our friend. I saw his spirit everywhere, felt his presence all around me. How could I live without ever seeing him again? Burying his ashes in our garden brought closure and a small measure of comfort, but it was not enough to totally ease the sting in our hearts. But Barney was still looking out for us, even from the other side.

Barney's gift

My husband and I agreed we would not get another dog for awhile, but we scanned animal rescue websites for possible candidates. He found a pair of seven-year-old brothers, Chihuahua and Jack Russell terrier mixes, on the city pound website, but the little guys were adopted so quickly we didn't have a chance to seriously consider an adoption. Still, they tugged at our hearts, and we couldn't stop thinking about them.

Two weeks after Barney's passing, I began to receive strong energetic vibrations that we would soon be meeting our next canine companion. As a Reiki master/teacher, I have learned to pay attention to such signals as reliable indications that something is about to happen. The vibrations were accompanied by an image of a little white dog, then by the image of an anxious Barney hopping and spinning alongside the white dog as if to say: "Hurry up! Hurry up!" One of the Chihuahua/Jack Russell brothers has been white.

Much to our surprise, the two little guys suddenly reappeared on the city pound website because their adoptive home didn't work out. This was what Barney was trying to tell me! The little white dog he was showing me was one of the brothers. My visions of Barney's anxious spirit stopped as soon as we decided to adopt Simon and Peabody. I knew deep down that Barney had brought us all together to ease our grief and pain. He sent us two lively handfuls to fill our days – and our hearts.

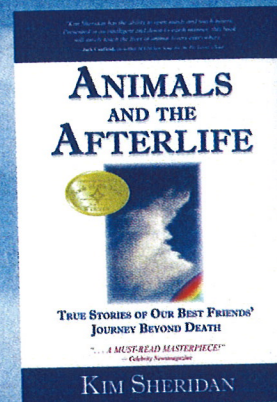
There will never be another Barney, but Simon and Peabody's antics have brought renewed joy to our home. When I look at them, I remember Barney and how much we will always love him. I also think of how that love is growing to include our two new furry family members. Our once-in-a-lifetime dog is with us still. 

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