

Toby

by Frederick Wickert



“Ooooh! My wife would love to have that!”

A short time after dark on January 14, 2006, I stood in line at Little Buddies pet supply store in Oneonta, New York. I had some purchases in hand and was waiting to pay for them, with two customers ahead of me. My dog, Missy, waited in my pickup truck.

A man came in the door carrying a pet carrier with a door in the top. Anne, the proprietor told him he could set it on the glass showcase inside the door. The man placed the carrier on the showcase, opened the top and lifted out the most adorable faced little Chihuahua. I exclaimed, “Ooooh! My wife would love to have that.”

Anne turned around looking at me and said, “He’s up for adoption.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Then you can consider him adopted.”

I walked toward the man holding him in the air, and asked, “What’s his name?” As I did, the name Toby flashed in my mind strongly, as though it were a psychic revelation. The man replied that he didn’t know the dog’s name.

The man was Don Vought, who together with his wife Terry, operate a dog retirement home. I learned this wonderful couple rescue dogs from being put down and do all they can to find them homes. Anne had been helping him find homes by keeping candidates in her shop. By that time she had helped them find homes for twelve dogs. Anne’s Mom, who loved the dog dearly, had adopted a blind mixed breed. Toby was to be the next one to find a home for.

Don explained that a woman passed away leaving two Chihuahua’s – a male and a female. The woman’s daughter was going to have them put down. Don learned of it and convinced her to let him take them. He took them home with him and put them together with some others he already had. The male did not get along with the other males, and a good home was being sought for him.

Don insisted I sign a contract agreeing to have him neutered, and that if for any reason we decided we could not keep him, he was to be returned to Don and Terry. I agreed to the terms. I had a number of things to attend in Oneonta before going home and asked Anne to keep him while I attended my other errands.

I purchased a little soft dog bed, some pee-pee pads and a litter box for him. Don had said he was litter box trained. I also got some appropriate food for him. Anne said she had a small carrier I could borrow to take him home in. My wife Tae had a birthday coming up in less than a month. She had loved the Taco Bell commercials with the Chihuahua and had expressed the wish that she could have a dog like that. This was going to be her birthday present.

When I returned to Little Buddies to pick up the Chihuahua, a matronly and heavy set woman with a low cut dress sat in a chair in front of the counter holding Toby to her breast. I nearly had to pry him from her ample cleavage to put him in the carrier for the trip home. I had the feeling that if the woman had been there she might have fought me for him when Don came in the store with him.

In the truck, Missy insisted on sitting tightly against me. She never offered any hostility towards Toby, but she wasn’t going to allow Toby to be placed next to me either.

When we got home, I took Toby upstairs and gave him to Tae. I told her he was her birthday present. It quickly became apparent that Toby had some problems. His breath smelled horrible. Tae refused to hold him. She couldn't stand his bad breath. His teeth were solid brown in color, encrusted with plaque.

When we took him to the vet, we were informed that he had a heart murmur. He was going to need to be kept with as little stress as possible and no strenuous exercise. When the doctor attempted to clean his teeth, they all fell out except for two all the way in the back. Toby had infections in his teeth and we were given some antibiotics to give him.

After being home from the vet for two weeks, Toby suddenly declared his allegiance and undying love for Tae. I was not equal. At first we thought he just didn't like men. He soon showed us that he didn't like anyone except Tae, who he adored.

As time went on, Toby settled in. We discovered that when he thought no one was looking, he sneaked kibble from the cat's food bowl and carried it back to his bed, one by one until he had six or eight pieces. Then he ate them at his leisure. I also discovered that whenever I took cheese from the fridge, or whenever I cooked bacon, he was near the fridge watching me and hoping for a treat.

Against Tae's orders, I gave him bacon and cheese every chance I got for he loved them. He accepted my advance as long as I was carrying cheese or bacon with me and I wanted desperately to get him to accept me.

Eventually, he stopped objecting so strenuously when I came near. I found that I could scoop him up and hold him, and he liked that. I held him cradled in my left arm upside down while scratching his chest with my fingers. He looked at me and wagged his tail happily when I did that, but then he turned his head and looked at Tae, as if he were concerned she might object. I gradually learned that most of his growling at me when I approached was all an act, which he often revealed with the vigorous wagging of his tail.

Tae took him outside for walks on the lawn and discovered that he followed her without the need of a leash. She also learned he never left the grass area. If she went onto the patio or into the driveway he refused to follow. He sat at the edge of the grass and whimpered. When she returned to him he was fine.

We learned that he understood many commands and when Tae spoke, he instantly obeyed. When we settled down in the living room in the evening, Toby lay in the recliner with Tae. He was always the happiest when he was close to her. She often took him with her in the car, which he loved. If she went in a store, I waited with him in the car. He watched the door of the store until Tae came back out of the store. I derived a great deal of amusement from him and I held him every morning when Tae was not around.

We had to stop feeding him the bacon and cheese because he gained weight and the heart murmur became worse when he gained weight. The coughing and gagging and gasping for breath when his heart bothered him were at once terrifying and heart wrenching to us and occasionally he had a very bad night.

We always believed the day was coming when Toby's heart was going to have a bad day, and more than Toby could handle. We understood that it could happen and believed his eventual demise was going to occur in that manner. We were wrong.

On Saturday we noticed Toby did not eat his food and he did not drink any water. Late that evening it became obvious Toby was not feeling well. By Sunday morning he was feeling really bad. He began vomiting small amounts of yellow liquid. Toby refused to eat. He was listless and did not want to be bothered. He had us afraid because we knew he was in big trouble, but it was Sunday. We live in a remote area and there is no emergency vet service in our area. We prayed he had the strength to make it until Monday morning so we could take him to the vet.

On Sunday night he finally drank a large quantity of water but continued to vomit and refuse food. He drank small amounts of water through the night and by Monday morning, had actually perked up a little. It was encouraging. We took him to the vet in the morning and they put him in the hospital.

The vet told us the kidneys had shut down. He was doing all he could. He gave him antibiotics and forced liquids and fought to re-hydrate him. He stopped vomiting by Thursday night and was up walking around a little. He was still refusing food. The vet was trying to get the toxins flushed out and get the kidneys to re-start. He said there was hope.

There was a terrible ice storm last night. The roads were very bad this morning. The phone rang. When I answered and the doctor began speaking, my heart fell for I knew instinctively what he was going to say. Toby didn't make it. He died yesterday afternoon. We can't get there to bring him home.

From January 15th of 2006 until December 8th of 2007, not even two years, little Toby had a good and loving home. We made him as happy and comfortable as we could. He made us happy with him, and his comical company we enjoyed so much. We adored the beauty of his face and enjoyed all of the company he gave us.

You came to us with a bad heart Toby, and now you leave Tae and I with broken ones. You will never be forgotten as long as either of us lives.

Thank you Don Vought for saving him and giving him to us. He was a great gift.

For those who are interested, the URL for Don and Terry's Silver Streak Kennel is:

<http://www.dogretirement.com>

They are wonderful people doing wonderful things for dogs.