

Faith, Hope and Fiction

Puppy Magic

By Linda Breeden

The heat of July last year marked the six-month anniversary of the death of my husband. This was also marked by the introduction of Teddie into my life. His sparkly black eyes, white curly hair, and smiling face captured my heart instantly and convinced me to do something that I had not planned to do so soon. I adopted this adorable six-month old puppy from an animal rescue organization.

How could I not? It seemed the natural coming together of two wounded souls who needed each other in order to move through our own brand of recovery. Teddie had almost failed to survive his beginning in life. Only four weeks old, weak and sick, he had been discarded and left to die on the side of the road. Malnourished and frightened, he ran from those who tried to rescue him. Eventually, he was found and turned over to the local animal shelter.

Teddie was promptly taken to the animal hospital in critical condition. He was diagnosed with puppy strangles, thought to be caused by deficiency in the colostrums of his mother's milk; therefore his immune system had been compromised. His lymph nodes were painfully swollen, the hair around his head and ears had fallen out, and numerous sores oozed a smelly liquid.

He spent two months under the care of the wonderful doctors and staff of the hospital before being released to recover in a foster home. His appearance improved, albeit still small in stature, he was put up for adoption.

A friend who worked with the local rescue organization knew my husband had passed away and how deeply I was grieving. She was convinced that Teddie was the perfect therapy for me, and I for him. I wasn't so sure. I'd not had a dog since childhood. My career kept me much too busy over the years.

Suddenly, I had this very shy puppy, part poodle and part bichon, who needed house training, was a picky eater and incredibly stubborn. He pretended that he didn't need anyone, and his bravado never faltered during those first few months. His body language seemed to say, *"I'm okay all by myself!"* All too often he refused to eat, and I spent time on the floor feeding him, bite by bite, with my hands.

I had a fence installed so he could run and play freely. In the beginning, he wanted only to sit under a chair. Gradually, he developed a normal puppy curiosity about the world and began to chase the birds who flew overhead and dig for unknown treasures in the grass.

His dignity was evident from the beginning because he required privacy when he went to potty. I was careful to look the other way, as he always looked to see if I was looking, and would refuse to go if we made eye contact. This was the first time I laughed out loud, but not the last.

Soon he was eating out of his bowl and learned to walk on a leash. We began to take evening walks and I met many of the neighbors that previously I had only waved to in passing. Everyone seemed to be drawn to Teddie, whose earlier bravado was slowly replaced by his kindness to everyone. He began to find his place in life, and it became obvious that that his purpose, determined by him, was to take care of me.

From the beginning, when a dark moment of grief would come over me, he would stop his play and race to my side, jumping into the chair with me and sitting quietly while I cried. I

would look into those dark eyes that seemed to reflect an old soul, filled with understanding of my pain, offering the unconditional comfort of his presence and his love.

We experienced the change of seasons as we travelled that first year of our life together. Summer days meant sitting on the porch swing together, enveloped by the humid southern heat, but not really feeling it. Fall came and Teddie delighted in chasing the leaves that blew about the yard, soon replaced by the snows of winter. Snow was a particular delight to him, as he frolicked and dug in the elusive substance.

Spring brought an unexpected magic because I abruptly realized that I had begun to notice the world again. The budding of the trees, the flowers bursting forth with color, the baby birds chirping, and the ability to smile as Teddie became fascinated by the bees and chased them optimistically, as puppies will do.

Life continued to cycle, regardless of circumstances. I had experienced the change of seasons this first year through his eyes because mine fogged with grief. Unexpected magic came from the realization that this puppy had overcome so much, yet had created a life of substance and purpose in spite of his early adversity. He had evolved into a young, confident dog.

This was most apparent when I took him to the vet's office for his one year check up. He was immediately scooped up and taken to visit everyone in the office. Excited squeals of joy and lots of hugs and petting greeted Teddie. I felt like I was with a rock star!

One of the technicians who had cared for him during his illness had nicknamed him "stink, stank, stunk" in reference to those smelly, oozing sores that had covered him. At the time, Teddie desperately wanted to snuggle. Initially she didn't want to get the ooze on her, but Teddie continued in his own stubborn way to snuggle regardless. Finally, she gave in and returned the love. This steadfast determination is most likely the thing that saved his life.

The vet came out to say, “We didn’t realize this was *our* Teddie at first. He looks wonderful, with so much hair since we saw him last!” she exclaimed. “You know, we get many animals in serious conditions like Teddie’s and most don’t make it. Once in a while though...” Tears glistened in her eyes. “...you get a miracle. Teddie is one of those miracles.”

I thanked everyone and told Teddie, “Let’s go home.”

Smiling, I knew that the miracle was a gift. It was my healing that resulted from the evolution of sick puppy to confident, young dog. I now look forward to the journey into the next phase of his life – and mine.

Linda Breeden holds a B.S. in Business and a Master's degree in Human Resources. She is a practicing human resource professional which allows her to pay the bills, while working as an inspiring writer who views the world through optimistic, rose-colored glasses. She chooses to write about the way life can be, not necessarily the way it sometimes happens.

Her true stories have appeared in local publications in Atlanta, Georgia, SimpleJoy, Angels on Earth (a Guideposts publication), Chicken Soup for the Soul: Stories of Encouragement, Redbook's Cup of Comfort 2009 Silver Linings national contest winner, and various professional journals.