

On the Positive Side

Adopting a pet with problems: Gracie's entrance

By Jo Ruprecht For the Sun-News

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Gracie came to us with perfect timing. Oscar had passed on a few months before and had left his friend Mulligan alone with Deb and me and a big hole in our family. Deb was away, and Mully and I were on our morning walk when I spotted a small dog curled up in a yard where I knew the only dog was a big, gangly girl. We went on, but I promised Mulligan I would come back.

Later that spring morning, I ventured into the yard. The little dog didn't get up but was watching me. I sat down and talked quietly to her, eventually reaching out my hand so that she could sniff me. We were sitting there when my neighbor came out thinking that I, being in my dog-walking clothes, was a stray person encamped in his yard. A moment later, he recognized me and approved my taking the dog.

My new friend let me pick her up and bring her home to fresh water and food. She had a look between a terrier and a poodle, suggesting bichon frise. I arranged an appointment for the next day at Arroyo Clinic to check for a microchip. But as I watched over the next hour or so, I became more concerned. I realized that the dog might be more sick than tired and so Gracie and I were seen that very afternoon.

Dr. Amber Thompson did an exam and said Gracie was pretty sick, but from what? Routine checks - heartworm, blood work, parasites - were all negative. Next, Gracie was taken for an X-ray to check her tender midsection - nothing clear. An ultrasound gave us the answer, a good news, bad news answer.

With a catch in her voice (obviously Gracie had been communing with her, telling her what a great dog she was) Dr. Thompson let me know the good news - there was time to do something; the bad news - timing was everything. It turned out that Gracie was carrying four dead puppies inside her. They were too well-developed for her body to dissolve them, and she was too weak to expel them. Surgery as soon as possible was the only solution, otherwise the kind thing was to euthanize Gracie to spare her from further pain. Gracie had no microchip, no owner of record - this decision was now mine.

I stalled. I tried to act like this could be a plainly rational decision. I asked for an estimate of the costs involved and the options for what could be done. I called Deb and talked the situation through with her, hoping that by talking aloud I might help myself make a choice. No matter how the vet and I looked at the fees and charges, this was a large amount and I was torn by the pragmatics involved. I tried to balance the choice: money cost or this small near stranger. I thought that this was a time when money would have to win out over my heart.

You can guess the rest of the story. I took a leap of faith. I decided that Gracie was lucky that I had worked to set aside hundreds of dollars, lucky in that I believed that Oscar might have sent her to our home for the help she needed. I had a hunch that Oscar might have picked Gracie to help round out our family. Indeed, she became the "little squirrel" to Mully's "big squirrel", our shorthand for describing the ways and habits of terriers. For now, let's just say that Gracie Allen, bichon or not, is a great dog, a sweet and loving companion. She is her own creation, and I'm glad for my choice that day.

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