

In Loving Memory of Just-In "True Friend, Faithful and Loyal Companion"



The cover photo of the last issue of this Journal had a photo of Curlee's Just-In who passed peacefully with the help of our vet not long after that issue came out.

The prognosis back in December 2005 was that Just-In had only 2 to 6 weeks left to live, so we are very thankful for the five months Just-In gave us to adjust.

Just-In was as true a faithful and loyal companion a person could ever have. We mourn his passing but take great pride in his being.

Just-In, as are all our pups, was regarded as a full-fledged member of the family, and was quite sure he was a human, not an animal. He went everywhere with us and if they would have issued him a frequent flyer card he would likely have more frequent flyer miles than the average human.

He brought us all unabashed joy and happiness and instilled a pride that we have not experienced before or expect to experience anytime soon. Just-In was also loving and would eventually win over the most reluctant person.

My spouse, Michelle, calls Just-In the King of All Dogs, and for good reason. He was a truly magnificent dog, with such character, intensity, drive and an aristocratic bearing. He was a certified alpha male; no therapy needed. All of this is accurately reflected in the cover photo of

last month's issue.

Just-In left long before his time. His death is incredibly hard and wrenching. Recovery will be painfully slow, but forgetfulness will not be part of it. I have lots of stories and will try to remember them and record them, including the time he saved my life.

I choose the words of Senator George Vest, circa 1870, to commemorate the passing of Just-In: "The best friend a man has in this world may turn against him and become his enemy. His son and daughter that he has reared with loving care may become ungrateful. Those who are nearest and dearest to us, those whom we trust with our happiness and our good name, may become traitors to their faith. The money that a man has he may lose. It flies away from him when he may need it most. Man's reputation may be sacrificed in a moment of ill considered action. The people who are prone to fall on their knees and do us honor when success is with us may be the first to throw the stone of malice when failure settles its cloud upon our head.

The one absolutely unselfish friend that man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him, the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous, is his DOG. A man's dog stands by him in prosperity and in poverty, in health and in sickness. He will sleep on the cold ground where the wintry winds blow and the snow drives fiercely, if only he may be near his master's side. He will kiss the hand that has no food to offer, he will lick the wounds and sores that come in encounter with the roughness of the

world. He guards the sleep of his pauper master as if he were a prince. When all other friends desert, he remains. When riches take wing and reputation falls to pieces, he is as content in his love as the sun in its journey through the heavens. If fortune drives the master forth an outcast into the cold, friendless and homeless, the faithful dog asks no higher privilege than that of accompanying him to guard him against danger, and to fight against his enemies. When the last scene of all comes, and death takes his master in its embrace and his body is laid away in the cold ground, no matter if all other friends pursue their way, there by his graveside will the noble dog be found, his head between his paws and his eyes sad, but open in alert watchfulness, faithful and true even to death."

Just-In was just such a dog -- as true a faithful and loyal companion a person could ever have.

- Greg Copeland



Greg with Just-In and Sadie following an afternoon pheasant hunt in Platt, SD.



Healthwise



THIS JOINT PROBLEM MAKES DOGS AND OWNERS WEAK IN THE KNEES

A Human Jock's Ailment Also Plagues Pooches; An \$80 Pet's \$6,000 Bill

By KEVIN HELLIKER

A dog named Paddi was chasing a cat through a suburban Seattle neighborhood when suddenly she pulled up lame. So tender was Paddi's hind leg that her owner, physician Kevin Bulley, had to carry her home.

The diagnosis turned out to be a ruptured cruciate ligament, an injury that Dr. Bulley, a family practitioner, had associated only with humans. Cruciate ligaments hold in place the parts of the knee, and wrong turns on the athletic field often injure these cords.

The cost of fixing Paddi's knee was about \$3,000. She had barely recovered from that surgery when the cruciate ligament in her other knee ruptured, prompting a second \$3,000 procedure -- all for a mutt that Dr. Bulley and his family had adopted and grown to love. "She's the most expensive free dog I've ever heard of," says the physician.

Being an athlete is a well-known risk factor for cruciate-ligament injury. A larger -- but lesser-known -- risk factor is being a dog. The number of dog knees undergoing cruciate-ligament repair each year in America is estimated to now exceed 1.2 million. That's about five times the number of human procedures -- even though humans outnumber dogs in the U.S. by nearly five to one. And it's not as though dogs have more knees: The joint on their front legs are elbows that aren't vulnerable to the problem.

Dog owners often have no idea that this danger exists. Pennsylvania engineer Martin Yester, for example, investigated the medical history of his yellow Labrador, Sarah, before purchasing her as a puppy. Knee risks didn't come up -- until her cruciate ligament ruptured in December. Even though certain larger breeds have been shown

to be more susceptible, "nobody talks about knee problems," says Mr. Yester.

The extraordinary rate of failure in dog knees is mystifying even to veterinarians. Is the prevalence of such canine injuries rising -- or are people less willing to let their pets hobble on three legs? "It's a bit of a mystery as to the cause," says Steven Budsberg, a veterinary surgeon who is director of clinical research at the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine.

Today, cruciate-ligament repairs are the most common surgical procedures for injured or diseased dogs. And inside veterinary medicine, controversy is raging over the best treatments.

A relatively new technique, called tibial plateau leveling osteotomy, or TPLO, involves breaking and resetting the tibia, the long bone below the knee, in such a way as to obviate the need for a cruciate ligament. The surgery costs from about \$2,500 to \$5,000 per knee. That's about twice the cost of the conventional procedure, which like the human equivalent involves constructing a replacement ligament.

Many respected academic veterinary experts believe that TPLO offers a faster and fuller return of function. But published proof of that theory is lacking, prompting some to avoid the procedure. For instance, surgeons don't perform it at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, says Gail Smith, chairman of the department of clinical research. He calls TPLO "a fashionable procedure."

Still, TPLO now is used for an estimated 50% of cruciate-ligament procedures in the U.S., and by all accounts that percentage is growing.

Such treatments have helped fuel a doubling of the number of veterinary surgeons in the U.S. in the last decade

to 1,219 from 660. It is also the largest factor in a near doubling of the average annual cost of veterinary surgery visits -- to \$574 in 2004 from \$289 in 2000, says the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

Like Dr. Bulley, hundreds of thousands of Americans are digging deep into their pockets each year for a surgery most never realized a dog might need. A November article in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association estimated that Americans spent \$1.32 billion to fix dog knees in 2003.

Without surgery, only 20% of dogs will regain normal function, says Dr. Michael Conzemius, an Iowa State University veterinary surgeon and a co-author of the November JAVMA article.

Even if Americans increasingly consider dogs to be part of the family, health insurers don't. According to the pet products industry and insurers, fewer than 3% of dog owners have purchased a medical policy for their pet.

A spokesman for the largest pet insurer, Veterinary Pet Insurance of Brea, Calif., says that cruciate-ligament problems in dogs accounted for nearly \$4 million in claims in 2004, and that no other condition had a higher cost per claim.

One claimant was David Wright, a San Jose software engineer who several years ago bought two Labrador Retriever mixes for \$80 each. The male, Sage, tore the cruciate ligaments in both of his knees in 2002. "The \$80 dog became the \$6,000 dog," says Mr. Wright.

Then the female, Kenya, wrecked both of her knees. Of the \$12,000 that Mr. Wright spent on those surgeries, he says Veterinary Pet Insurance reimbursed him about \$5,000. "Thank God I

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