

Every pet has a tail, this is “The Scrap’s”

Part one: The volunteer

In the summer of 2007 I went looking for a laid back dog. One that would enjoy hiking however could enjoy a good afternoon siesta as well. I obtained him from a 4H girl who bred a black Labrador and Chesapeake Bay. Supposed to be a mixed breed called a Chessador. Beyond his bout with giardia, and some dry wall chewing he was a perfect fit. I named him Moose. For the several months we walked the neighborhood. Most commonly a straight shot between two major roads. For some odd reason I decided take a slightly different route. It was actually longer and brought us coming home just before dark. This is why I was more than a little bothered when Moose started walking like a praying mantis. Literally lifting one leg stiffly at a time and staring off at the sound barrier wall. The wall was approximately 20' away from the sidewalk. Being so close to dusk I could not see anything but waist high bushes. I tried to scoot Moose along; all I got was a couple more praying mantis steps and him glaring at the wall. I strained to see. Finally this little brown head popped up. Oh, explicative, there is a puppy. He would look at me wag his tail, then look at Moose and tuck his tail. I took a step towards him; he dashed south parallel to the sidewalk. I stopped, not wanting to chase him into a street. Turning to keep walking my hip was doggy body slammed. I grabbed a hold of his rope. The rope had obviously been chewed through. Immediately told Moose to walk, a little worried about an impending doggy scrum. Instead it became a leader race with my shoulders used as the medium for the tug of war.

My shoulders stayed in their sockets and we all made it back to the house. I plopped food down in the dishes, put the lid on the container, turned around, and the dope on a rope had finished and was begging for more. [Poor little guy, can't imagine what it is like to be that hungry. Had to purchase a sectional bowl to keep him from eating so fast. It took over two years for him to believe he would get two meals a day.] The first night I had both locked in my room. At sunrise I woke up with a weird feeling I was being watched. Rolled over, there sat the dope on a rope (rope long removed), did not wag his tail, just sat there

staring at me. Moose cracked an eye. Told the dope on the rope to go back to sleep that this family did not get up at sunrise.

The next I took him into work. He was 35lbs; adult canines descended, no microchip, heartworm negative, fecal nos (no eggs seen), and gave him his vaccines. In addition called Animal Control, the local Humane Societies, and took his picture. Spent all evening posting flyers. So for the first couple of weeks I did everything I could think of to find his owners or find someone who would take him. However, he bounced constantly. Even when I did manage to get him to sit he vibrated with excitement. Completely opposite of the personality I was looking for. Unfortunately, Moose was attached within the first 24 hours, two peas in a pod. This truly left me in a quandary. Keep a dog whose personality is annoying to me or find a home for him and then have to get another dog for Moose. Also at this time dope of a rope had a multitude of nicknames. The most popular with the team being Mini Moose, the least popular and incidentally the one he was answering to was little feces (more accurately the four letter explicative). I opted to keep him. Following the teams advice I gave him a name I could say in front of clients, Scrappy. Felt it fit his personality, always scrapping trying to get what he wanted.

Part two: The struggles of blending

Now I have a volunteer 6 month old with no training and bouncing everywhere. Same as everyone else, my first focus was potty training. Scrappy had absolutely no problem defecating outside; unfortunately he urinated inside in front of the door. Luckily he was not lifting his leg. [Yes, he was neutered shortly after I decided to keep him. The boy hormones already had him lifting his leg to urinate on bushes outside.] Kept multiple towels on hand and numerous run out doors, things were improving. Next focus was the easily overexcited. I opted for time outs. Scrappy's time out was to sit a recliner chair until he calmed down. Getting him into the chair was another challenge. Initially when I raised my voice (I did not feel it was all that aggressive) he would roll over with his water pistol on full automatic fire. Ducking from the urine stream, I would pick him up setting him in the chair. Slowly he stopped the water pistol, and then glued himself to the floor. I am not quite sure how a dog can suction himself or herself to the floor, however he did. I had to use my arms as forklifts to peel him off the

floor and set him in the chair. It took him a little while to figure out all he was getting was a time out and once relaxed he would be allowed to get down. Moose of course ran around grabbing toys, teasing Scrappy.

Early on the clown side of his personality shined through. Sometimes (please ignore this section Jessica) he would get me to smile while he was doing something wrong. I would be walking over to put him in a time out; he would repeat the behavior until I was laughing. Now he was clown even to Moose. Scrappy originally weighed 35lbs and was half the size of Moose. He was small enough to easily run underneath Moose's abdomen, then around his rear legs and back under his abdomen. Then Scrappy started to grow. Moose had to start lifting his belly to allow Scrappy to run underneath. The look Moose would give Scrappy out of the corner of his eye was hilarious. You could just hear Moose saying, "Hey, bud, you're too big now, cut it out. "

We did have a few toy scrums. Mostly instigated by Moose and his alpha ego having an issues with sharing. For a short time Moose would herd Scrappy away from me. Seemed like he was trying to keep Scrappy as his toy. More likely he was exercising his alphaness, trying to get all the attention from me for himself.

He has a couple of behaviors we had to reach a compromise on. Scrappy has to paw while being petted. His paws being thick and rough lead to my mother having multiple scratches on his arms. I tried "No feet", which he understood, however did not deter the behavior enough. Ended up with, "turn around", which meant he would turn his back towards you and sit down. You can pet him all you want and he can paw the air all he wants. Which he really does paw the air. Another notable compromise is sleeping our sleeping schedule. Scrappy would still prefer to get up at sunrise. Generally I can ignore him until 7:30am, and on a really good day we make it to 8am. He wakes me up by lifting himself parallel to the bed and giving me a low talking to. Not really a growl nor a bark. He knows he is not allowed to touch the bed, so he keeps his feet to himself. In the least it is an entertaining way of being woken up.

Part 3: Who needs knees?

A few months after he volunteered himself he would have an occasional limp. I palpated his legs noting a grade 1 luxating patella bilaterally. It is a fancy way of saying the kneecaps went to the side

instead of just going up/down with the bending of the knee. This is more of a problem with smaller dogs. With Scrappy I believe it was a nutritional origin. By the time a medium to large breed dog has their adult canines in place, they usually still grow, however Scrappy more than doubled. This indicated to me that his growth had been stunted and he was probably on his own for quite a while. Generally deepening the groove the kneecap sets in and tightening up the ligaments surgically correct this condition. The surgery has better success when waiting for pets to be full size. So even though he was having an occasional limp, I was waiting for him to stop growing.

When Scrappy was about nine months old, I came home to him not putting any weight on the right hind leg. Laying him down I felt his kneecap slide back into place. His right hind leg was now a grade 3 luxation and very painful. I do not perform stifle surgeries so I had our referral orthopedist exam him. He wanted to wait since Scrappy was still growing. I did a little needling. I was concerned about the acute change in grade and pain level. Luckily we did the surgery when we did. Scrappy tore his joint capsule ~3". In other words he blew out his knee. Now if you or I had done this we would be on the ground screaming. He was just limping and hoping I did not touch it. Immediately afterwards Scrappy felt well. I was back to using the chair to keep him calm. Poor puppy had to sit in a plush green recliner and watch his buddy run around the house playing. This was a trial for him, but after a few weeks and some aqua therapy he was back to playing with Moose.

Now I knew it was a matter of time for the other shoe to drop, so to speak. Scrappy did not limp on the left leg for years. When I was in the process of trying to purchase a clinic, in other words saving every dime I could, he started limping. It was mild at first, slowly progressing to a moderate limp. Shortly after purchasing All Care Animal Hospital, I had our orthopedist surgically correct the luxation. Surgery went well. Scrappy was progressing in his recovering well, until he started limping again. Restarted his physical therapy with no response. Repeated his x-rays, which showed he broke the metal pin and part of it was migrating into the joint. No idea how he managed to break the pin. His second left knee surgery was to remove the pin. Surgery went well. He started walking again. A few weeks later he curtailed and started limping. Repeated the x-rays, which showed a lot of arthritic changes. The joint palpated very stable. Dr. Van Lue did an exam with out finding an obvious reason. I went ahead with a joint fluid culture. Sometimes a

joint infection can cause arthritic changes on x-rays. The culture came back negative. No signs of infection. Now the poor Scrappy has had three knee surgeries (1 on the right, 2 on the left) and is not willing to use his left leg at all. Over a short time it was becoming obvious, either amputate his left leg or get a total knee replacement. Fortunately, Dr. Hay (the only vet in the state) performs a partial knee replacement. Basically he got new metal ends to his bones to help stop the pain from the arthritis.

This was something of an event. Dr. Hay was a mobile surgical vet that years ago practiced in our area. He even worked with Dr. Z prior to my purchase. As his mobile practice grew he settled in Tampa. He now has an office with a very professional surgical suite. His office is 90 minutes away. I had to drop Scrappy off the night before. While there he flirted with all the ladies winning their hearts over. Surgery went well. He stayed for a couple of days. After I picked Scrappy up he would occasionally touch his toe tips, however he was trying to run. As far as he was concerned he had 3 good legs. Even when I got him back to the clinic he tried to jump out of the back of my car. I literally had to catch him, wedge him against the car door and slide him to the ground. With his little attitude that he did not need to be taken care of, this resulted in me deciding to leave him at the clinic.

Part 4: Will he keep his leg?

Dr. Hay is still in the learning process of with dog knee replacements. When I first graduated in 2000, they were not doing this procedure. Hence this is relatively new procedure. Scrappy was put on completely restricted exercise. He was allowed leash walks to the bathroom and back in. Not an extra ounce of movement. One week into this we received a call from Dr. Hay. Scrappy's skin cultured positive for a really bad bacteria. It was susceptible to three antibiotics. Now just because the skin cultured positive, does not mean the joint will, however it was not worth the risk. Scrappy was put on high doses of three different antibiotics. Believe it or not his stomach handled it well. Pets have the same common side effects of an upset stomach to antibiotics. With using the number and quantity this was a concern. He has an iron stomach. Now in the mean time he is pouting in the kennel. Would not even chew on his bone with treats on it. Things at home were not much better. Moose would just huff and plop down on the

floor. He did not want to go for walks and even skipped some meals. Whenever I came to work Scrappy would bark, literally, arf arf cycle and at home Moose moped. A barky Scrap and a mopey Moose, not currently a fun time.

After four weeks Scrappy was to start longer walks. Instead I opted for aqua therapy. He is currently swimming for 10 minutes twice a day. The antibiotics are finished; there have been no signs of infection. The best part is that he is perking up. He has started using the left hind leg, just a little more weight bearing then to touching. I have one more week of aqua therapy planned, after which he should be able to come home. It will still be some time prior to knowing for sure if this will work. The team has done a wonderful job with him. Even though he is in an “arf, arf” cycle, they are working their hardest to get a full recovery for him. The team is also the ones who have given him his nickname, “The Scrap”. When he does something, all they can say is its “The Scrap”.

Part 5: Little Lemon Dog

For me it is easy to understand the tribulations of having an ill or injured pet. While understanding the medical side of Scrappy’s condition, it really does not help my emotional side in coping with his rehabilitation. There is no more greater guilt trip then to have Scrap bark at me because he knows I am leaving and he will be at the clinic for another night. I long for some way to explain to him (all pets) that I really do care. I didn’t go through years of Vet school to learn doggie torture. I went to learn how to help.

Being a vet I still have had to pay for the surgical services. Which no matter how much we love our pets this is a factor we all have to deal with. On the lighter side, I call Scrappy my little lemon dog or my money pit. I am really anticipating and anxiously awaiting my little lemon dog coming home. BTW with all his annoying idiosyncrasies, he is still priceless to me.