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Katie's Story, Beardie Bulletin, May 1999

(This article tells of yet another Addisonian Beardie, with an initial diagnosis of "kidney failure". Katie (not the real name of the dog) was fortunate to have a responsive veterinarian, who listened to her owner's suggestions. Elsa Sell).

It was Christmas time and I was in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the season. The cards had to be sent and special cookies baked. The dogs were involved with taking ornaments off the tree and hiding them and sniffing the packages. With all of this going on, I missed some of the early signs. Katie didn't eat her evening meal. That is unusual as she is always first in line when it is dinner time. She must be feeling off and would probably eat later. Katie also quit playing with her Beardie buddies. I noticed she was lying out in the yard, looking away from the house. Odd I thought, she is the nosey one and has to be in on everything usually. She missed her next dinner and I noticed she would look at her food and look at water but, not eat or drink. She also made a couple of wet spots on the floor, which was strange for her since Katie hadn't had an "accident" since she was a pup. She would hang her head and looked so sad. Then I started to notice other things. When she would move she seemed weak and staggered. She also tried to vomit but with nothing in her stomach she was unable to bring anything up.

I took her temperature which was normal. Her eyes were clear and bright. I thought about pyometra since she had puppies about 6 months ago. It had been a difficult whelp with the last pups being delivered by C-section. (She developed a slight infection after the surgery and was on antibiotics. Katie recovered quickly, was a great mom and her puppies were healthy and happily went off to their new homes.)

I decided to call my veterinarian and she recommended that I bring Katie in for an examination and some blood tests. Her electrolytes came back with a low sodium and high potassium. Her creatinine and BUN were elevated and everything pointed to kidney failure. Intravenous fluids and antibiotics were started immediately and she rallied to quickly go home in a few days. Two days later we were back at the vet; Katie had stopped eating again.

I searched through my books on Beardies looking for some ideas of what this could be. A good friend made the suggestion to check for Addison's. The symptoms of a disease came into focus - Addison's or hypoadrenocorticism - but surely not. I hadn't heard of this disease in any of my bloodlines or in the bloodlines of any of the dogs I had used for stud. But it was worth investigating. I called my vet and she ran an ACTH test. I waited on pins and needles for the results while Katie remained on IV fluids and antibiotics . . . This disease is very hard to diagnose as the symptoms are non-specific and seen in patients with other more common medical disorders. Sometimes there is a "waxing and waning" course which respond to non-specific medical intervention. The diagnosis came in - Addison's. My heart stopped.

I read up on Addison's disease and learned that it is a disorder of the adrenal glands in which adrenal hormone production is insufficient. The condition may result from damage to the glands by infection, cancer, drugs, environmental toxins, or be inherited. Katie had never been on heartworm medication and we do not use



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pesticides or herbicides. Her most recent immunization had been a combination for parvo, distemper, parainfluenza and leptospirosis prior to being bred 8 months earlier.

Katie was started on florinef acetate and a cortisol compound, and she recovered quickly. She was out of the hospital for Christmas and within 3-4 days she was her old self again. The medication was expensive, \$60 per month, but we decided that we wanted to keep Katie with us and that was the only way. Currently she is receiving monthly injections which are less expensive and easier to give than pills twice daily. In addition we decided to spay her.

After the initial heartbreak of learning that Katie, the third generation of a careful, well planned selective breeding program had this disease, came the difficult phone calls to the wonderful people who owned her puppies. I told them the symptoms so that they were informed as to what to look for. I also told them some studies seem to show that Addison's is inherited, but it had not been proven. These studies also reveal that as many as 75% of the dogs that get Addison's are females, implicating a possible hormonal link.

I called Elsa Sell and told her about Katie. Elsa was very supportive and suggested that I might want to become a part of the study of inheritance and identification of DNA markers in Addison's disease. This study is sponsored by the AKC Canine Health Foundation (receiving financial support from the BCCA donor fund created in 1996). I felt that maybe one good thing could come out of this terrible ordeal, so I called all the people that had puppies and asked them to submit samples of blood. They were sent prepaid canisters for the transport of the blood specimens and we are now all part of this very important research project.

As the weeks go by, the pain of knowing your dog has an incurable disease seems to lessen. At times I am still in denial; I have produced over 15 Champions, 2 Companion Dogs, and 3 Register of Merit Dogs and I have never had a problem like this. When I look at her, you would never know that she is just one shot away from complete collapse. I am so thankful to my friends who have supported me through all of this. They held my hand and gave me comfort when I needed it the most. I recently learned that there is a national Addison's support group for dog lovers dealing with this devastating disease.

It is almost Spring now and I am paging through catalogs, deciding what dog shows to go to. Also I am looking around for another puppy to become my foundation bitch. The celebration of life goes on.....