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Yes! We Loved Tegan

by **Jean M. Kennedy**
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Tegan (the name means "Pretty Girl" in Welsh) arrived as do most Beardie puppies, a bundle of energy, fluff, and love. If ever there was a dog that loved people unconditionally, Tegan was exemplary of that trait. She was never content to just kiss a hand, she insisted upon standing up, stretching to her utmost length, to kiss your chin. She asked little, gave all. But this story is not about Tegan's love for humankind, it is about that love that we were called upon to exhibit for her. You see, Tegan was one of a number of unfortunate Beardies that had Addison's' disease!

During the first few months in the house we realized that Tegan had an uncommon fear of loud booming noises. Our frequent loud thunderstorms in this part of Florida turned her into a panicky terror-stricken puppy, as did the boom of the large guns from the nearby National Guard Training Camp. She found refuge in the darkest, most secluded spot she could find in the house ... behind a toilet and under the tank in a windowless, dark bathroom. That came to be "her" spot, where she felt the greatest peace of n-mind away from any stress.

We felt so sorry for the little girl during her first year that we talked about putting her down before one year of age. She had developed an uncontrollable skin problem at about five months that left her hairless from the withers back to her tail, open scaled sores, red-rimmed, watery eyes. We were so busy treating the staph infection that always set in to do too much wondering about the cause. We were always going to work on that when we cleared up the infection. Then suddenly, perhaps through diet, treatment and a combination of medications we seemed to find the magic formula and she healed, began to grow coat, and we were able to see her beautiful dark eyes. We stopped wondering about the cause of it all which we never did really determine, allergy, fleas, diet, what did it matter now?

With the healing of her skin, she developed a joy of life that was beautiful to see. She became a playful bouncing happy Beardie. Her love and personality endeared her to all who knew her. Now finally we could begin her show career. She still had very little coat, but we decided to show her one weekend ... for experience! To our embarrassment she went Winners Bitch over the others with coats (but she had shown well enough to overcome the coat deficiency in a breeder-judge's mind). We were ecstatic! The following day we returned to the ring with high hopes. Our exuberant show dog of the day before had suddenly turned instead to a cowed little dog, head and tail hung, and shaking like a leaf. We didn't know what had happened! This was to be the story of her show career, but we didn't realize it until much later. We looked back on her show career and realized that all but one of her wins were on the first day of a show weekend. When she could, she showed her little heart out and moved like a dream. On other days she was a basket case in the ring. She finished her championship, our dreams for her were coming true. The final weekend she really put forth and won two days in a row! We thought we had finally overcome her hang-ups. Little did we know!



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The week after the show she seemed to slip into a depression, went off her food, we could find nothing specific wrong with her. Two weeks passed, Thanksgiving Day we returned home after going out for dinner. She was lying prone on the floor with little sign of life, our other Beardie was crying and poking her with her nose. Our vet had left town for the holiday weekend, so we rushed her to the Veterinary School at the University of Florida, thirty-five miles away. They could barely find a pulse, but were able to fortunately bring Tegan around. After a couple of weeks, and many tests they were finally able to diagnose her problem ... Addison's disease. For some reason hers had been a very difficult case to clinically diagnose. Then we began to look back ... and to realize the answers to many things we had faced over the last three years. We did not yet realize the things we still had to face. We have shown dogs for thirty years. We have had Standard Schnauzers for all those years, and Beardies for the past seven. We have no "kennel," no "run"...our dogs, usually numbering three or four, live in the house and are underfoot all day. From the day Tegan arrived she became my shadow, moving from room to room with me.

I began each day with a quick kiss from her, her "Good morning, Mom," as I performed the first of my toilette each morning immediately after getting out of bed. We love all our dogs, they are our "Family." But Tegan was special, such a sweetheart! Even our cat who lives outdoors rather than let a Schnauzer or other Beardie near her seemed to immediately sense that Tegan was nothing more than a bundle of love. She voluntarily came up to Tegan one day and purred against her, much to our amazement, and they became friends. For all of her boisterousness in playing, Tegan immediately sensed the vulnerability of each new grandchild, she was so gentle, and would come up carefully and bring forth many a baby chuckle giving some of her quick kisses. If you walked in our door she assumed that you came to pet and get kissed in return for the duration of your visit. She loved everyone and everything without question.

< Yes! We loved Tegan. We loved her enough to constantly clean the rugs. The bedroom carpet was particularly soiled with her constant lack of bladder control. We would wake up morning after morning only to step into a huge wet spot that had such a strong odor. Usually we didn't know for sure who had had "an accident," but we often lied to ourselves "that it must be someone else ... it couldn't always be Tegan."

Yes! We loved Tegan. Hundreds of times we cleaned the horribly malodorous diarrhea from our carpets, either when we woke up in the mornings, or when we found it by walking into a room. Until Tegan was diagnosed with Addison's we weren't sure who was constantly soiling the floors. Now we did, and we cleaned it up more or less uncomplainingly since we now know it was part of the disease. She told us she needed to go out whenever she had enough warning. We lived with a constant supply of medications in the house to treat her symptomatically for each ailment.

< Yes! We loved Tegan. We loved her enough to pay all the medical bills, which amounted to hundreds of dollars when she was first diagnosed, and much more later. When we were told that in her particular case it took an unusually large dosage of medication to stabilize her disease, we made the thoughtful decision to pay each month for the expensive pills that were necessary to keep her alive. The pills that we thought would let her lead a seen-tingly healthy normal life providing she received them each day. She was worth it with her little loving heart. We couldn't place her. The medication cost approximately \$50 per month, too much to expect a new owner to pay. We would keep her, would pay it. There were no shortcuts, no bargains other than that our pharmacist, a dog lover, offered it to us at his cost.



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Yes! We loved Tegan. One of the main aspects of Addison's is the inability to cope with any kind of stress. Oh! ... the explanation of all those crisis times in the show ring. She gave all she had the first day, and then with the stress of going to a show, the traveling, the excitement, the people, the dogs, and the obvious stress our dogs undergo in trying to show well, she had nothing left for the following days. We learned now everything that is out of the ordinary routine is stressful. Excitement ... someone coming to the house to visit; being challenged ... discussions among our dogs as to who gets to chew on the new toy; being ashamed ... the unthinking, complaining "oh no not again!" we uttered when she soiled her hindquarters with diarrhea while walking in the yard; protectiveness ... being convinced that every other dog in the house wanted to only eat her supper instead of theirs; these things that go on in a doggie household everyday of the year all add up to a stress factor when you have Addison's. It all made it so hard for her to cope with daily life.

Yes! We loved Tegan. First and foremost, our task was trying to keep her unstressed as much as possible. Second, was making sure that she always received her pills every day to allow her body to cope with the ravages of daily stress. It was difficult to vacation, to travel to shows. We were fortunate that our son came to live with us during this time, to return to the University to get his Masters' Degree. If we went, he stayed. We tried a few times to go to shows and take her, but she paid the price a few days later.

Yes! We loved Tegan. We were prepared to do so for many years. She was only three when her illness was diagnosed. Usually the dogs are older when the disease becomes apparent. Often it is not positively diagnosed until an autopsy is performed. We felt so fortunate that we lived near a University, and a school of veterinary medicine with a lot of specialists on staff who have expert knowledge in endocrine problems. We were happy that she could be with us for years and we could be the recipients of her personality and affection. And then, after a year, she suffered a relapse. Only a slight one. The return to depression, going off her eating, drinking lots of water, constant loss of bladder and bowel control. It lasted a week or two and then she bounced back. We were happy.

Six months later, she slipped back into another relapse (Addisonian crisis), this one much more serious. Back to the University for more tests to see what was needed to stabilize her. A phone call to Carol Lang in Minnesota who had published an article in the Beardie Bulletin confirmed that numerous Beardies were suffering from Addison's, as were dogs of other specific breeds. From the knowledge Carol had gained through her own experience, she gave us some good advice and our doctor at the University concurred. We began to split Tegan's medication into two daily doses. This seemed to help ... we thought. But Tegan never bounced back to her playful, happy former self.

Yes! We love Tegan. It grieved us to see her going down hill. Even though we really felt the financial burden, we paid the \$100 here, the \$150 there for more tests at the University. We fed her in a room by herself so she didn't feel threatened over her dish by the other dogs. We continued to keep her as unstressed as possible. Then we began to notice that she was flinching when she was touched. She laid often in a tight little ball with the abdominal cramps that she suffered. She who had loved to be groomed, to have that one on one contact, falling asleep on the table as I brushed her, suddenly couldn't seem to stand to be touched by a brush. I bathed her and began the usual brushing one day, she whirled time after time biting at the brush viciously. She bit my hand five times, each time with a very sad, "Mom, I didn't mean it," barrage of kisses the minute she realized what she had done. We stopped brushing. She became more and more matted. I waited and waited hoping for happy non-



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stressed days when I would try to brush for perhaps a half-hour not to upset her. Finally the mats were winning, and we were clearly losing. Something had to be done. The doctor gave us permission to tranquilize her to groom her out. Giving gradually more and more medication trying to find the necessary dosage to let her sleep while we gently groomed, turned out to be a futile task. We gave the maximum dosage, and her skin was so sensitive that she never went totally asleep. Walter held her head to prevent her constantly biting my hand. The grooming was done and we felt better that she was again comfortable and mat-free.

Yes! We loved Tegan. Seeing her increasing mental confusion was one of the hardest things to watch. She no longer wanted to go out in the yard with the other dogs. She didn't have the energy for their Beardie/ Schnauzer games. She had to be coaxed out the door each morning after all the others had come in. She would walk only far enough to reach "her" spot to piddle. Then she often seemed to lose her way in the fifty feet back to the door. She would go perhaps to a neighbor's yard and stand confused as we called her, looking for all the world like a lost dog on the side of a highway not knowing which way to head. Finally she would heed our voices and return slowly to our door. Gone was the bounce, gone was the life. Almost all day now she hid from life and stress underneath her toilet tank, in her dark bathroom. Walter left for a week's trip. When he returned she seemed confused, didn't greet him at the door with her usual kisses. She had had a bad day with a thunderstorm. She looked at first as if she wondered who this human was that was calling her. Then when she realized it was her beloved "Dad," the tail wagged, the tongue its usual barrage of kisses, and then back to her dark room.

Another call to Carol confirmed what we already knew. Not much could be done to help our sweet little Tegan. We were grasping for the last hopeful straw, and didn't find it.

Yes! We loved our sweet little Tigger as we affectionately called her. We had enjoyed her love for five short years. half of what we had hoped for, were willing to pay for. Yes! We loved Tegan ... but we had to ask ourselves ... did we love her enough? Enough to say "goodbye" ...to stop her gradual deterioration? Yes! We loved her enough. The doctor agreed it was time. It was time to stop wondering, to stop hoping, to stop her slow death. Goodbye little Tigger. Goodbye Ch. Chaniam Tegan at Ruffhouse.

In most cases Addison's' disease is inheritable. Neither of Tegan's parents have Addison's' disease nor have either of them ever produced any other offspring who show signs of the disease. The doctors at the University tested and tested again. It seemed from the tests that Tegan's case was a fluke. She showed no predisposition to Addison's. They felt that we would have been able to breed her safely without her offspring inheriting the disease. As we said, hers was a particularly severe case. We aren't sure where the Addison's is coming from in our Beardies. We haven't learned much about the disease in dogs. We are learning. If you know of, or suspect Addison's disease in your dog(s), seek medical advice, please don't hide it. It isn't your fault, it may turn out to be something that is in the entire breed from the early foundation stock. Who knows at this point? But become as informed as possible. Let us try to breed away from it. Don't breed into it with a lack of caring. Tegan came from some of the best English bloodlines, both her parents were imports. We speak from experience as you see from the story, it is hard, very hard, to go through this kind of thing. There is a rescue Beardie also in our area, one that a college student bought from a breeder in the Northeast and abandoned when he went home on vacation. It has also been diagnosed at the University as having Addison's. That little bitch is about eleven years old, and the Addison's had just surfaced. Carol said that when she wrote her article for the Bulletin a year ago there were 12 known cases. Now there are over 30 known cases.



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If you suspect, breed away from Addison's ... please ... for all of us that love the breed.