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Faith's Round with Leptospirosis As Shared with BDL by Cindy Mendonca, Faith's owner

Date: 12/10/2002 9:30:22 PM Central Standard Time

I just left Faith at the Animal Emergency Clinic, the place where I work as a vet tech. When I got home this morning, I found that she had vomited bile and liquid, but I thought it was a GI reaction to the Etogesic she had last night for a pulled muscle. She ate breakfast although was a little slower than she usually is. I slept for about 4 hours this afternoon (I worked last night) and when I got up, she was lethargic and wouldn't even take a biscuit. That isn't like her at all. I took her temp and it was 104.9. By the time I got her to AEC less than an hour later, it was 105.7. (Normal for a dog is 101.5). She's on fluids, antibiotics, and ketofen to bring down the fever. I did the lab tests myself. She shows normal in everything except one of the liver enzymes is sky-high and the potassium is a little low. The x-rays are a bit worrisome as they show a normal sized spleen out of place. She is not in imminent danger and is on fluids, not because she's dehydrated, but to keep her from becoming that way and also to deliver the potassium..... but she's my baby and we don't know what's wrong. Sometimes it's hard to be a vet professional and to have too much knowledge for some things (the mind tends to run away with possibilities), yet not have enough knowledge to figure out what's going on.

I am so glad that I didn't wait to see if her appetite picked up tomorrow and that I have a thermometer on hand for the pets. While I'm asking for a little bit of white light for Faith, I'd like to encourage you all to add a digital thermometer to your bag of pet items. If your dog seems a little bit off, it only takes a minute to check the rectal temperature. If it's elevated, then it's time to see the vet. (BTW, normal for a cat is also 101.5).

I left the clinic because they don't need me hovering and Faith needs to rest. I understand why medical people don't treat their own family members. It's hard to be objective. I'll pick her up first thing in the morning and will try not to make more than one call there tonight. At least I know she's in the best of hands with my colleagues watching over her and with you sending her white light and prayers. Thank you all.

Date: 12/10/2002 11:39:42 PM Central Standard Time



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Doc Charlie just called and the news is good. Faith's fever has broken, she's eaten a little bit and wanted more, is happy to walk out to go potty, and is wagging her tail at everyone. She'll stay on the IV fluids tonight and my co-workers will continue to monitor her temp to make sure it doesn't go up again undetected. We still don't know what caused the fever to spike the way it did or why the ALT is 10 times normal. I will monitor her blood chemistry weekly for liver enzymes mostly and depending on what happens with them, we'll decide on the next steps. Tomorrow I'll take the x-rays in to the regular vet and we'll probably schedule an ultrasound in the next week or so to see if there's a reason that her spleen isn't lying against the abdominal wall. It is, however, an excellent sign that she isn't in pain even when her abdomen is palpated.

Date: 12/11/2002 9:10:19 AM Central Standard Time

I picked Faith up from the ER this morning to transfer her to our regular (daytime) vet. Her temp had gone back up to 103.8 and I want her monitored where something can be done if it spikes at a higher level. The ER doc and I injected her with a little more ketofen to bring the fever down and by the time we got to our daytime vet, it had dropped back to normal. When the fever's down, she'll eat and drink with no problem. Even at the higher temp this morning, she had a little more "bounce" to her step than she did last night.

The regular vet is going to do an ultrasound this morning, too. We don't like the placement of the spleen in the x-ray. Normally it should be laying flatter against the abdominal wall, but this one appears to extend into the abdomen. The good thing is that she still doesn't show any pain when she's palpated. Dr P wants me to call her after 1:30 to get an update. If Faith needs to stay overnight again, I will transfer her back to the ER.

I'm hoping that the liver enzyme was elevated because of a medication she was on for four days after pulling a muscle while herding last Friday. However, if it is, it's a pretty rare occurrence for Etogesic to have that kind of effect. It's one of the reasons that we use it..... the side effects are so low. I will be doing another chemistry on her next week. If it's still elevated, I will look at having a liver biopsy done. That would be done by a specialist.

The hard thing is not knowing the cause yet. I know that we don't always



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find causes for things and occasionally have to treat symptomatically, but it's still hard. I know she hasn't eaten anything "new" this week or been subjected to a trauma. I can't imagine that anyone would have thrown anything over the fence for her to eat that the other dogs wouldn't have also got. Also, in this area, if an animal is poisoned, it's normally rat poison and she doesn't show any signs of that. (Thankfully, that type of activity is very rare).

Date: 12/11/2002 2:31:17 PM Central Standard Time

Faith's ultrasound was pretty normal and that's a great thing. Her spleen is slightly enlarged which can be normal when there is an infection present, but the edges are "clean" and it appears to be where it's supposed to be.

Her temperature is going up again and was 103.1 at 1:40 and she had vomited a small amount of bile/liquid. The vet gave her an injection of an antiemetic to stop the vomiting and has put her back on fluids, but wants to monitor the temperature to see if it goes back up to 105 or if it stabilizes at a lower level. If it goes above 105, Faith will get another shot of an anti-pyretic drug.

I will be picking her up before the regular vet closes and taking her back to the ER where she can be on fluids overnight and my co-workers can monitor and treat her fever. I may do another CBC to see if the white blood cell count has changed.

So, basically we're at the same point we were last night when I took her in, except that the worry about her spleen is over.

Date: 12/11/2002 9:53:30 PM Central Standard Time

I just got home from the ER. Faith is resting comfortably, but she is very sick. Her fever was up to 106.1, so we had to give her another shot of ketofen to try to bring it down. We don't want to do that as fever is important in killing the virus/bacteria, but it's dangerous to go over 105 degrees. I ran another CBC and Chem panel and her liver enzymes are seriously elevated from yesterday. She also has bilirubin in her urine.

I will take her back to the regular vet in the morning and we will draw blood for tests that will have to go to a laboratory.... for Leptospirosis and



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autoimmune mainly, although she really isn't presenting as autoimmune. I guess I just want to cover as many bases as I can so we know what to rule out. I've been going over my text books and veterinary diagnostic books and making graphs of symptoms and diseases. More and more of the symptoms are beginning to look like Lepto or some kind of toxicity to the liver. The Etogesic that she had for the pulled muscle in her leg is a long shot, but hasn't been ruled out. In the meantime, she's on fluids and antibiotics for supportive care which is basically all we can do for these things anyway. I take comfort in knowing that the liver can regenerate itself.

As a note, Marilyn, Leptospirosis is generally spread through urine, so casual contact between the dogs in your household isn't likely to spread it. Diagnosis is usually confirmed by rising titers taken a week apart, so that's probably why the vet wants to do another test next week. Some dogs will have a false positive due to previous vaccination. Vaccine related titers won't appreciably increase over time. Leptospirosis can occur in humans as well. The most common signs in humans are fever, headaches, rash, muscle pain, and general malaise. Hand washing is the best defense against catching it from an infected animal. I hope your daughter's dog will be OK and I send white light as well.

I'm very tired and upset that I haven't yet found an answer. It's the unknown that is so frightening. Hug your Beardies tonight for Faith and me.

Date: 12/12/2002 11:37:37 AM Central Standard Time

I've just got home from leaving Faith with the daytime vet. Before I left the ER this morning, though, I ran another CBC and chem panel. While her blood counts are looking good, the chemistry shows that her liver continues to deteriorate. On the plus side, her fever seems to have stabilized between 103 and 104. She's still vomiting if given food, but when the fever is broken by the ketofen, she is eager to eat. Other than bilirubin in her urine, her kidneys seem to be functioning pretty well. However, it takes a lot of damage before kidneys really begin to show they're in trouble.

Dr P and I are leaning more and more toward Leptospirosis as being the cause of the problem, but this morning we drew blood for a number of tests including Lepto, autoimmune, cortisol levels, and so on. If it isn't Lepto, I don't want to be waiting for labs to take days to finish other tests. I just



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want them all done at the same time. If nothing else, it will give us baselines. Dr P will be talking to the experts at Kansas State today and one of the things she'll be asking is if we should put Baillie and Rorie on prophylactic penicillin if Faith does indeed have leptospirosis. Faith was switched to penicillin today in anticipation of a positive test result. Since she hasn't shown much response to the Cefazolin or Baytril, we would have wanted to switch anyway. Of course, if it isn't a bacterial problem, then the antibiotics are only keeping her from having secondary complications. We don't want to do a liver biopsy at this time. There is a risk to that procedure and she's too weak to take that chance. Her liver would probably not be able to handle the anesthetic.

I've been on edge and either in tears or close to it many times, but strangely right now, I'm calm. I think we have a diagnosis even if it hasn't been confirmed and we have a new course to follow. The old one wasn't working, so at least I feel we're being proactive. The worst thing is to not be able to do anything.

I think that I've always been sympathetic and empathetic to our clients at the ER when talking to them about their fears, but now I've been in their shoes in a much more personal way. When they call for the fourth time in an hour and a half and I have to stop treating their dog or cat to talk to them, I will try to remember just how frightening it is to be the one waiting at home. I'm frightened and I've been able to be involved in the treatment..... and they don't even have white light and you to fall back on.

Date: 12/12/2002 9:07:30 PM Central Standard Time

I am cautiously optimistic. Faith's fever "stabilized" today, hovered around 103.5, and dropped once to 102.7. This is without an antipyretic drug, so her body is managing the fever and that's a very good thing. She was still vomiting small amounts of bile occasionally, but that also seems to be happening less frequently. She was a little more alert as well. She's still on IV fluids since she isn't able to keep food down. Also, with a fever, IV fluids help keep her from becoming dehydrated.

Dr P talked to the vets at Kansas State today and they feel it is most likely one of two things... either Leptospirosis or a bacteria that attacks the gall bladder. They felt that I could hold off on doing the autoimmune tests, but I opted to get them done now. It takes a week to get the Lepto titers back



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and I didn't want to lose time in getting answers if it isn't Lepto or whatever the other bacteria is. I figured that at the very least, we would get baselines on her if they're ever needed in the future. So, for now, she's getting penicillin/amoxicillin and Baytril to cover all the suspected causes. I had asked Dr P to ask what I could do about keeping Baillie and Rorie healthy (for instance, if should I start them on penicillin as a "preventative") and the K State doctors agreed with that. So now the two of them have started their antibiotics. The other thing is to bleach everything possible. Well, that's basically the kitchen floor! The rest of the house is carpeted.

All of the vets feel that we are early enough in the game that the liver damage will be mostly, if not completely, reversible. I will do another chemistry panel in a week. It can take 72+ hours for the enzyme levels to deplete and I could be getting a false picture of what is actually going on if I do it on a daily basis as I've been tempted to do. Going up or down, it really doesn't matter as far as treatment goes (although Dr P was glad to see the chems this morning as they confirmed her thoughts). Faith would still need supportive care.

Sooooooooo..... if Faith's temp goes below 103 and if she is able to eat and drink tonight without vomiting, I will be able to bring her home during the day tomorrow. I would take her back tomorrow night to see if she needed to go back on IV fluids. In any case, I'm working at the ER tomorrow night, so she'd go with me anyway. I'm not leaving her home without me here until she's completely recovered. She will also have to be confined for a while as rest is important in the recovery. At least at work, I can put her in a run so she has more room.

All in all, things are looking up at the moment. We might be wrong in the diagnosis, but I feel that we're moving in the right direction and that is very calming.

Date: 12/13/2002 9:48:20 AM Central Standard Time

Well, it may be Friday the 13th, but I'm feeling pretty lucky right now. I have Faith home with me for the day. Her temperature is running around 102.2 which is very close to her normal. She wouldn't eat or drink last night and I was afraid that I would have to take her back to the daytime vet today, but Dr Y at the ER knows she's BARF fed and thought she just might not want the prescription diet. She's also been well hydrated on fluids. So



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he OK'd me bringing her home along with injectable antibiotics and fluids in case she doesn't start drinking by this afternoon. (It's a distinct advantage today being a vet tech)! She will be going back to the ER tonight, but that's OK, because I'm scheduled to work and I plan to take her with me for this entire round.

I had already cooked up some rice and browned the ground turkey (normally I don't feed grains and I leave the meat raw) as part of the bland diet. She scarfed it right down. Now I need to wait to see if she'll keep it down. If so, I'll give her another small meal in about 2 hours. I've got her in a crate in the family room since she still needs to remain quiet. She's fairly lethargic, but she does want to get out with Baillie and Rorie. I will be taking her to potty in the front yard and catching her urine to flush it down the drain in case the diagnosis is positive for Lepto. I sure don't want to spread it to any other animals, wild or pet.

Baillie and Rorie were pleased to see her. They've had their second doses of amoxicillin, so I'm not too worried about them being around Faith.

I hadn't realized until I started reading the white light messages just how many people Faith has met at Specialties and Beardie Camps. It's truly amazing. Thank you all again. We're not out of the woods yet, but we can see light through the trees.

Take care all,

Date: 12/15/2002 9:29:32 AM Central Standard Time

I've had a number of requests (some very worried since I didn't post yesterday) about Faith's progress. I'm sorry about not posting. I had worked a long shift on Friday night and have spent time since yesterday morning sleeping an hour or two at a time. All of the Beardies are on meds at least three times a day (Faith has four), but it was at 7 different times. I've got Baillie and Rorie's amoxicillin now closer to Faith's dosing times, so that will make it easier for me to get a little longer periods to sleep. The problem with having them on exactly the same times is that I'm having to leave work once during a shift to dose Baillie and Rorie. I can't be sure that the 15 year old who lets them out when I'm at work could dose them. For my own peace of mind, I'm doing it. Baillie and Rorie are still looking great. I don't think they're in danger, but we'll finish up this round



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and see what Faith's test results show. Those won't be back until later in the coming week.

There's no basic change since Friday and Faith is holding her own. Her temperature still fluctuates between about 101.5 (normal) and 103.0. Sometimes she eats and sometimes she doesn't. Fortunately, though, she's willing to drink even when she won't eat. She has urinary incontinence that is worse sometimes than others. The current theory is that because she is so house-broken that when she was in the two hospitals and getting fluids, but not getting out often, her bladder stretched and she can't feel that she is leaking. I'm getting her out every one to two hours while I'm awake. I was also trying to get myself up from sleep to do it, but my last bit of sleep went to 3 1/2 hours. (Just couldn't wake up to get up). She still hasn't defecated, but it does take 48 hours sometimes for the GI system to get moving. If she doesn't defecate by this afternoon when I take her to work with me, I'll talk to the vet to see what we can do to get things moving (pun sort of intended). May do an x-ray to see where things are in her system. At work on Friday night, Dr Y was curious as to whether the liver enzymes and electrolytes were stabilizing, so we did another chem panel. Couldn't get a reading on ALP as it was higher than the range the machine reads, but the ALT was coming down. The bilirubin was up, but she's shedding bilirubin in her urine and her kidney values are great. The electrolytes were all normal. I'm optimistic that the liver enzymes are improving since she hasn't been vomiting.

The hardest thing is to see my normally live-wire girl so listless. She seems to enjoy the "walks" we're doing (probably equally as thrilled to get out of the crate even though it's an extra large one) and this morning I did let her out in the back for a minute with Baillie and Rorie. She hurried out and gave a few of her usual "glad to be alive" barks that normally lead to play, but she was too weak to play. I would have stopped her anyway, but it was great to see that she still has the spark.

Date: 12/17/2002 5:19:52 PM Central Standard Time

Things are definitely looking up. To look at Faith right now, it's hard to believe that last Tuesday night the ER vet told me that "death is not imminent tonight, but we've got to turn this around fast." When she got worse on Wednesday, I was terrified. Your notes and white light helped me keep it together for her.



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By Sunday, Faith was over the urinary incontinence. The theory is that because she's so house-broken and she wouldn't pee in the kennel runs at the two vet hospitals, her bladder was stretched by the amount of fluid that she received in between trips outside. By taking her out every 1-2 hours over Sat and Sun, she was able to regain "feeling" in her bladder. I was concerned that she hadn't defecated even 48 hours after she began eating again, but Dr B palpated her abdomen on Sunday evening and the feces hadn't reached the colon yet. He assured me that although 48 hours is the number usually given in the books, it isn't uncommon for a dog to go much longer after having been off food as long as Faith was. Sure enough, Monday morning (72 hours) was "D" (for Defecate) Day. 😊 Her temperature has stabilized to normal, her attitude has brightened, and her appetite has returned. Her urine is still dark which indicates she's still spilling bilirubin, but I'm OK with that at the moment. It takes a while for liver enzymes to return to normal. I'll be doing a follow-up test on those on Friday night and probably weekly follow-ups for a while.

In the meantime, the autoimmune and cortisol testing came back and they were normal. We hadn't really expected them to be positive, but I wanted them ruled out as soon as possible. We're still waiting for the Leptospirosis test and that may not come back until the end of the week. If it's a high positive, then we know she has had lepto. If it's negative or a weak positive, we'll need to repeat the tests since Lepto is sometimes diagnosed by a rise in the titer over a period of time. She will continue on the course of treatment for Lepto until it is basically ruled out. So, since it takes so long to get the results, she will have had the entire two weeks of amoxicillin and will probably have started the doxycycline. Baillie and Rorie continue to do beautifully and are enjoying their amoxicillin "treats" as I make an hors d'oeuvres out of it with canned cheese on top. 😊

I, too, am getting back to normal. This morning when I got off work, I'd intended to sleep a few hours and then get up to get Christmas packages wrapped, ready for mailing, and then over to the post office. I set the alarm, but forgot to turn it on and ended up sleeping for six hours. That's the longest I've slept since Faith got sick. Guess I needed it. 😊 My three ER doctors have continually followed up with me to the point that even when they're off, they've called to see how Faith's doing. Our daytime vet called before she left town last Friday and then again when she returned this morning and when she got the results of the tests this afternoon. They've been great.



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Date: 12/21/2002 6:40:22 PM Central Standard Time

Faith continues to look the picture of health and we (the four interested vets and I) are basing a lot on the way she's behaving. She's active, eating well for the most part, and just as loving as ever. However, her liver enzymes continue to climb and are now about 20 times the normal values, although the bilirubin is stabilized. I am quick to remind myself (and the vets are quick to remind me!) that a rise in the liver enzymes only indicate what damage has happened in approximately the last 72+ hours and that the enzymes can be very slow to leave the system. On the plus side, her kidney values remain very good and her Complete Blood Count has improved. I will be doing another chemistry panel and CBC in 5 days when I take her to work with me on Christmas Day.

We still don't have the results of the Leptospirosis test, but hope to have it by Tuesday. The problem is that unless it's a strong positive, we won't really know whether she has had it or not. If it's negative or a weak positive, we need to run it again next Thursday and it will be an additional week after that before we hear the result. (Sometimes Lepto is diagnosed by an increase in titers). Her primary vet and I discussed today that we will probably do a modification of the normal treatment for lepto by keeping her on amoxicillin instead of changing to doxycycline on Thursday. Doxycycline is a derivative of tetracycline and can be hard on the liver. We don't want to compromise her liver any more than it already is.

We have much to be thankful for in the Mendonca household tonight. My three ER vets and Faith's daytime vet take an active interest in her case and include me in all aspects of her treatment. We're all together here tonight and living comfortably in our home. Faith is able to come to work with me so I can keep an eye on her and my co-workers are willing to stand in for me so I can run home to dose Baillie and Rorie with their prophylactic amoxicillin.

Date: 12/24/2002 3:03:24 PM Central Standard Time

Just in time for Christmas.... we have an answer to what made Faith so sick. The vets at Kansas State University confirmed that it was Leptospirosis. Fortunately we began treating her for that two weeks ago on Thursday based on her symptoms. Last night I did another chemistry panel



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and complete blood count on her. (I was supposed to wait until Christmas, but couldn't stand the suspense). Her liver enzymes are decreasing which is wonderful news. It's funny how things are a matter of perspective. When they first hit 1500, I was extremely worried. Then they topped 2300 (23 times normal). Now that they're backed down to 1500, I'm thrilled. 😊 It's a bit worrying that her BUN is now just above normal, but I will continue to monitor that. As I said in an earlier post, the kidneys values don't tend to increase until the kidneys have a lot of damage.

Faith's main vet and I have decided that with her improving liver values that we will probably start her on the doxycycline on Thursday. It is the best treatment we currently know for getting rid of the Leptospirosis bacteria even though it can be hard on the liver. I will continue to monitor those values. Baillie and Rorie will get the amoxicillin for at least one more week to be on the safe side.

Date: 1/9/2003 4:49:24 AM Central Standard Time

I've delayed posting to the list until I could acknowledge all of the lovely posts I've received for Faith up until now. I still have about 60 personal posts to answer, but I think that I've posted everyone a thank you up to this point. If I've missed anyone, I sincerely apologize. The notes and white light have meant a great deal to me.

Faith is improving and to look at her, you would think that she is back to normal. However, her liver enzymes are still sky high and her kidney values are borderline high. We took her off the doxycycline yesterday (1 1/2 days early) in order to see if the fact that it's a tetracycline is affecting her liver. I will be doing another chemistry on Monday to see if that is helping. We are pretty sure based on the complete blood count and the differential analysis of her blood cells that the antibiotics have been taking care of the Leptospirosis bacteria. If Faith's liver enzymes do not show improvement in about 2-3 weeks, we will be looking at the possibility of a liver biopsy. That's a serious step that the vets and I have been trying to avoid as it involves surgery. Sometimes it can be done as a laparoscopic surgery, but in this case, the surgeon wants to get a good look at the entire liver and it would mean that she would have to be opened up. We've done all of the non-invasive tests we can do.

I've been asked about Lepto vaccinations for all three dogs. We have not



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given Lepto vaccinations in years for a number of reasons. First, the risk of adverse reaction to the vaccinations is actually higher than the risk of contracting Lepto. Second, the vaccine immunity only lasts about 6-8 months, so those of you who are getting annual vaccinations might want to ask your vets why they don't recommend them every 6 months. Third, the vaccines only cover 4 of the serovars (types/species of lepto bacteria). Fourth, if Baillie and Rorie had already been exposed, a vaccine would have been too late to prevent the disease. It would be like giving the rabies vaccination to someone or some Beardedie who had been bitten by a rabid animal... too late to do any good. Many vets now feel that the Lepto vaccinations provide a false sense of protection while running the risk of serious reactions to the vaccine. Others are compromising by vaccinating at least once a year for it to try to mitigate the risk.

In any case, the current vaccinations would not have covered Faith. The researchers at Kansas State were able to identify the bacteria in her urine, but were not able to determine the serovar. The bacteria was not discovered in her blood serum, leading them to believe that she had a serovar other than the six they test for in dogs.... and definitely not one of the four currently covered in vaccines. It may have been, and probably was, in her blood, but the test wasn't designed to find anything other than the six.

Baillie and Rorie handled the prophylactic amoxicillin very well and have not shown any signs of illness. They are no longer on meds, although Faith still has a week of Baytril to go.

Faith is ready to go back to herding and wants long walks, but for now her activity will have to remain restricted. Since her liver and kidneys are already compromised while trying to recover from the illness, the vets don't want her body having to handle the additional wastes created by excessive activity and stress to the body.

Date: 1/21/2003 1:23:54 PM Central Standard Time

Yes, this should be the thirteenth update, but I'm a little superstitious and am counting all of the personal updates as number 13.

To look at Faith, you wouldn't think there's anything wrong with her. She's bouncing, has quite a bit of energy, and seems to be back to her old



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self. Unfortunately, her liver enzyme values are not coming down as fast as we would like to see and we have done all of the non-invasive investigation that we can do to reverse them or discover what is causing the sky high elevation. The thought is that there is probably something going on other than just the Lepto she contracted, so tomorrow morning she is going to have liver biopsy surgery. It seems funny to be doing surgery when she looks and behaves as well as she does, but the fear is that she could go into crisis if this isn't resolved and it's much better to do the surgery while she's doing well clinically.

I am conflicted, but I know she can't go on indefinitely unless we can figure out what's going on inside and treat her properly. I was ready to postpone the surgery this morning after doing her latest tests, but my boss reminded me that I've had a gut feeling that there's been something going on for quite some time and that my gut feelings have been pretty good up to now. He especially reminded me that I was the one that pushed for Lepto testing when all of her vets thought she had an autoimmune disease.

Four weeks ago, this biopsy wouldn't even have been an option as we were worried we'd lose her during the surgery. The surgeon who will be doing the biopsy and I have discussed the anesthetic protocol and have agreed that she will receive a pre-anesthetic of atropine (to keep the heart rate up) and acepromazine (a sedative that will ease anxiety), but will be masked down, intubated, and maintained with isoflurane gas instead of being induced with another anesthetic and then put on the gas. There's only one induction anesthetic (Propofol) that is liver-sparing, but my vet has little experience with it and prefers not to worry about it while doing the liver biopsy. I have experience with it, but I won't volunteer in this instance as I don't know if I could be objective in case of an emergency. There's a very good reason that medical doctors don't treat their families.

Date: 1/22/2003 5:08:13 PM Central Standard Time

Faith is home from the hospital now and is sleeping in the extra large crate. Dr P gave her some torbutrol (a pain relieving "narcotic") just before I picked her up, so I literally had to pick her up to get her to the car and then into the house. That's quite all right. I'm a believer in pain relief for animals.

The surgery went well. Except for the liver, all of the abdominal organs



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looked fine. The liver was swollen and mottled toward the edges. The gall bladder was also distended a bit. Dr P didn't want to get a sample from the gall bladder as that would increase the risk of peritonitis. Even on the liver, though, there are no obvious signs of any cancer. The biopsy samples were Fed Ex'd to a pathologist in Utah today and we hope to get results back within a few days. Obviously, the weekend may get in the way there.

I've spent the morning researching various liver diseases in dogs, but Faith just doesn't show classic symptoms of anything in particular. Yet, something is affecting it. At any rate, she's home now and will be sleeping in the crate tonight with me on the couch right next to her.

Date: 1/24/2003 11:40:21 AM Central Standard Time

I am so relieved that I'm having trouble stopping the tears. The pathology report came in this morning and Faith's illness is something that we can deal with in a relatively easy way.

The pathology report showed no cancer cells which was probably my biggest worry as I've been tracking her bloodwork for nearly a year, because some abnormal red blood cells showed up in a routine CBC/differential I did on her last March. Those blood cells are called acanthocytes and usually indicate a hemangiosarcoma or liver disease. Her chemistry and the CBC numbers as well as her general health were all great, though. I'd had two ultrasounds done on her which showed nothing more than some sludge in the gall bladder and a slight inflammation around the bile ducts. Chemistries done every two months still showed that she was doing fine and she continued to be full of energy. We tried changing the diet to a low-fat one as that is often the cause of a "sludgy" gall bladder and inflammation. It didn't seem to make any difference.

It turns out that the sludgy gall bladder allowed bacteria from her intestines to move up her bile ducts and cause an infection. (It's called an ascending coliform bacterial infection). That caused the inflammation in the bile duct and the adjacent liver and thus, the acanthocytes. It probably also weakened her enough to contract the Lepto, although she may have got that in any case.

The great news is that this is treatable. Faith will be on two antibiotics (amoxicillin and metronidazole) for 4-6 weeks and will also start a drug



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called Ursadiol which will help get her bile moving. I will monitor her CBC/diff and chemistry every 2-3 months once she finishes the antibiotics and we'll see if she needs to stay on the ursadiol indefinitely, too. Interestingly, the acanthocytes had already started to decrease while she was on the amoxicillin for the lepto. Unfortunately, though, that wouldn't have lasted as long as the gall bladder wasn't emptying correctly. I've also got her on other supplements that promote liver health, such as milk thistle and vitamins E and C.

Date: 2/6/2003 5:34:41 AM Central Standard Time

I did Faith's bloodwork on Tuesday morning and her lead vet called me last night. She's just as thrilled as I was when I saw the chemistry numbers. Faith's doing so well now that she's been given leave to go to obedience classes next week and back to herding training as soon as the ice melts off the fields. Her liver enzymes are now down to only four times normal. When I think that the ALP was over 30 times normal (and was literally off the scale and unreadable for so long) and that the ALT was 24 times normal only two weeks ago, this just seems like a miracle. (Of course it's a miracle of white light - G).

I'm going to do more bloodwork in about two weeks. Faith still has a month to go on amoxicillin and metronidazole. She'll also continue on the ursadiol for another three weeks at least. The bloodwork in two weeks will let us know if we'll be continuing the ursadiol beyond the initial month.

Date: 5/10/2003 8:18:38 AM Central Standard Time

I took Faith to the farm yesterday. We've only been out four times since she was so sick and nearly died in December. The doctors didn't want her to do much exercise because they didn't want her liver to have to get rid of excessive waste while it was trying to heal and cope with the cholangiohepatitis and the aftermath of the Leptospirosis. As her liver enzymes improved, I told the vets that Faith needed the time at the farm for her emotional well-being. Her behavior has been wonderful and to look at her, you wouldn't think she had been so ill. They agreed as long as I kept the sessions very short. We also have been doing increasingly longer walks and playing more in the backyard to get her built up.

The first time I took her to herd a month ago, she barked her head off at the



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gate and then settled into business when we walked on to the field. She was so happy to be there and it was wonderful to watch her joy, but on the flip side, her stamina and condition were so poor that it was also difficult to watch. Not wanting her to have to overwork the second time, I put her in a smaller field with older heavier ewes and she was better able to cope.

The third time was last weekend and she was settling in better, but was still pretty distracted. Part of the distraction, I suspect, was that I hadn't been out on the field either and I didn't have a clear plan on what I wanted to accomplish.

We went out again yesterday and Miss Energy is back! (Her liver enzymes last Tuesday were less than three times normal, much better than the 30+ times normal they had been). We stepped into the field and she started racing like a demented NASCAR driver! She wasn't going after sheep.... she was just running the field at high speed and in various patterns! She finally slowed down and checked out the field. Then she came back to me and downed in preparation for an outrun. I'm sure the sheep were wondering what in the heck she was and what she was doing! When I sent her, she did her trademark gorgeous outrun. The rest of the practice wasn't too bad, but it wasn't the Faith of last year. But she's getting there and that's good to see. Six months ago, I wasn't sure that I'd even have her for another week. I'll take what I can get.

On 2/6/2003 5:34:41 AM Central Standard Time

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This post wasn't actually sent to any lists and I'm actually writing it on Sept 20, 2007, but I wanted to include information on Faith's medications after she was hit with Leptospirosis and Cholangiohepatitis. Because the liver enzymes remained high for so long, Faith was on a cocktail of drugs for nearly six months (amoxicillin, Baytril, and metronidazole). In early June, she began to show rear end weakness and would collapse on her hind legs if she made sudden changes in direction. Then, it began to happen as she climbed stairs or tried to take off on a run. We did x-rays of her spine, but found nothing to indicate there was a problem. I had done some research



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and found that Flagyl (metronidazole) could cause muscle weakness. Although Faith's enzymes weren't completely normal, I stopped that drug and she quickly regained strength in her rear. Initially, the vets were concerned about stopping the drug, but agreed to a trial period. The weakness disappeared and Faith's chart was annotated to delete metronidazole from any future treatment.

Date: 8/19/2007 1:08:35 PM Central Standard Time

Many of you know that Faith contracted Leptospirosis in Dec 2002. According to KSU, it was a serovar that "dogs don't get." At the time, it mostly affected her liver and she was hit with chronic Cholangiohepatitis. After a six month treatment for the bacterial infection, it went into remission with medications and supplements. I always knew that the probable sequelae to the Leptospirosis would be kidney failure. In Dec 2005, on Faith's regular 6 month lab work, we discovered the beginnings of kidney failure. She was losing protein in her urine and her albumin was dangerously low. The specialists advised then that Faith's activities be severely curtailed as she ran the risk of dying from a blood clot. I knew if I stopped her herding and walks, I might as well have euthanized her then and there. We lived the last 20 months basically the same as the previous decade. I let Faith do as much as she wanted to do.

This week, Faith went into end stage renal disease. Conventional renal treatments, such as IV fluids, would only have made her worse, due to the nature of the particular disease she had. I wanted to get her to the farm this morning when it was cool, so that she would have one more time doing her beloved stock work. It became obvious last night that she might not be able to do anything this morning, so I took her to the farm then. Thank heaven we were blessed with a strong breeze and cooler temperatures, so that I didn't have to worry about the heat we've been having. Ann had put a few sheep into a small field and I just wanted to see if Faith wanted to work. If nothing else, she would see "her" farm.

When we went into the field, Faith went straight to the gate of another field where the flock was grazing. Rather than steer her toward the easier small field, I opened the gate to the flock. Noticeably weak, slow, but deliberate, she moved the entire flock around the field a number of times. The ewes that like to challenge dogs moved without any complaint. She had total control of the flock. We then took a break. After our break, I asked her if



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she wanted to do a chore and she came with me. We put the small group back with the flock and gave them access to food and water. Then we left the field for the last time. Faith didn't feel well physically, but you could see in her eyes how happy she was to have done her job. When we started herding, it was just her and me at the farm most of the time. On our last time there, again it was just Faith and me. It leaves me with a wonderful memory, among many special memories.

Faith slept next to me on the sofa bed all night long, which is unusual. I was awake most of the night, just stroking her. In addition, since yesterday, she had constantly held eye contact with me. That is also unusual for her. This morning, for the first time ever, she didn't accompany me on the morning walk around the yard to clean it up and her breathing was becoming borderline labored.

I knew I couldn't wait until tomorrow when I go back to work at the clinic to give her final relief. I took her to my old clinic here in town. Faith was very calm. She gave Dr P a little nuzzle, but was unable to wag her tail. I held her while Dr P injected the solution. It was all very peaceful and I have no doubts that it was the right thing to do and the right time to do it. She will be cremated with the stillborn puppy from Jolie's litter. She loved puppies and it's fitting that one be with her at this time.

I talked to an animal communicator a month ago who told me that Faith wanted to have part of her ashes scattered "at the farm on the hill under the tree where I can see the sheep, but they can't walk on me." The AC had no idea that such a place exists. The rest of the ashes were to stay with me. Faith was concerned about who would take over her duties, especially my protection. And she was my protector... she once faced down a charging Scottish Blackface ram and as little as she was, she pushed him back into a pen. After I shut the gate and left the area with Faith, my knees collapsed and I was on the ground shaking from the adrenaline rush of fear, but Faith was leaning against me as if to say that all was OK. During the course of the AC conversation, it came out that Jolie would be the protector. She truly is the logical choice. Since Baillie died, whenever I left the house, I would say, "Faith's in charge." This week, I would say that phrase, but then I would add, "Faith, you can delegate if you want."

Faith has left a wonderful legacy. She was one of the first herding Beardies to have training and trial situations discussed on the list in detail. Many



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people told me that they began herding with their Beardies (especially the bitches), because of those stories. She was the third Beardie and the first Beardie bitch to earn the AKC Herding Championship. We didn't do much ASCA, but she earned the AHBA HTDIII and HRDIII titles. Because of her innate skill and talent, I wanted to keep her lines available and eventually became a breeder, using her niece (sire was Faith's litter brother) as my foundation bitch. That talent is now seen in a second generation and soon will show in a third generation.

I don't like the term "heart dog." All of my dogs are special in their own right and I love them tremendously. I don't want to think that I've already had my heart dog, when I still have Rorie and Jolie and the Beardies to come. But Faith is the one that started me in this path of performance and breeding and opened up the world of dogs to me even more.

Ann Witte wrote a poem that is featured at the end of the GPBCC's Getting to Know Ewe II tape. Behind the scrolling words, you can see Faith. I have always thought of that as "her" poem. These lines have special meaning:

"Heaven must be for dogs like you
Green hills with sheep to heard anew.....

So tend the sheep we knew so well
And wait for me on Heaven's Fell."

Faith is now with Baillie, Barkley, and my Dad, but I know they'll be there when I reach Heaven's Fell.

HC Artisan Starlight HXAs HRDIII HTDIII OTDs STDd CGC
Mar 21, 1995 to August 19, 2007