

# Quincy's Last Walk

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By Colleen Isherwood



My husband and I had been waiting in the emergency vet clinic for hours, thinking maybe we didn't have an emergency after all. But no, there was no mistaking the fact that our 11 and a half year-old, 100-lb. German Shepherd cross with floppy ears was not well. Over Christmas, he looked so sad that all the relatives commented on his demeanour; he was panting; and when he wasn't interested in a Beggin' Strip, a normally irresistible imitation bacon treat, we knew he was very sick indeed. Even our cat, Mauwi, who thinks she is a dog, would sniff him, and look puzzled.

The vets confirmed our fears — all Quincy's bloodwork came back normal, although he wasn't breathing as well as he should be. But the telltale sign was the droopy chin that had appeared over the holidays — a biopsy confirmed Quincy had Stage 4 lymphoma, a fast-growing type of cancer.

The canine oncologist outlined our options. Chemotherapy would involve 12 sessions over the next few months – that might buy us a year or so. Or we could make him comfortable with steroids, a move that would give us a few days or weeks with Quincy.

When they injected him with steroids, the results seemed miraculous — instead of flopping on the floor in utter misery, he was sniffing all the other dogs in the waiting room. Outside, he chomped on some of the snow that had fallen just after Christmas, livelier than we'd seen him in a month.

Quincy was a University of Guelph dog born in 2004 — part of the Q litter that may also have included a Queenie and a Quark. The university's vets were studying a disease that was transmitted through the females in his family, which meant the males were put up for adoption.

Our son Mike had been dating a girl in the veterinary school, and they had taken Quincy for walks as student volunteers. When he came up for adoption, Mike had to have Quincy. University of Guelph, wisely, did not let students adopt pups unless there was a backup plan. I was the backup plan. I was extensively interviewed by the university, and apparently passed their test. Quincy went home with Mike to the house he shared with four other students. When Mike graduated, he moved to a small high-rise condo in downtown Toronto — and Plan B was activated.

As I walked with the now old Quincy to the nearby schoolyard, I remembered how bouncy he had been as a puppy. He was lanky and awkward, but what he lacked in co-ordination, he made up for in enthusiasm. He could leap from the porch of Mike's student house to the curb in two bounds. He ran after squirrels, but didn't have a chance of catching them because he'd trip over his front feet. He'd run madly in circles for the sheer joy of it — as we urged him on.

As if in response to my memory, a large black dog chased a ball with gusto, running across the field at the school. Quincy used to run like that.

On this day, he walked slowly, sniffing every snowdrift, and occasionally scenting, seemingly savouring each painstaking step. He was not recovered; he was still very ill, his jowls sagged and he had been losing weight for some time. But he felt good enough to come for a walk, and I treasured that walk knowing full well that it could be our last one. He walked at my side, with me matching his halting steps. It was easy to get him to obey me now — not like the ebullient puppy I once swore I could never control.

We were almost home. I held him back as we waited for traffic to ease in the busy street just down from our home. I waited patiently. I knew my dog wouldn't be able to cross in time unless there was a big gap between the cars.

This extra time with Quincy was a bittersweet gift. I am glad our family, including Mike and his fiancé Belinda, had a chance to say a proper good-bye. Quincy passed away on January 7, 2016, but will live on forever in our memories.

*Colleen Isherwood lives in Toronto.*