

Healing Help from a Canine Friend

By Carol Upton – www.dreamsaloud.ca

On December 20, 2006 I was diagnosed with a rare form of head and neck cancer – Adenoid Cystic Carcinoma, a malignant tumour, usually of the salivary gland, but in my case it had begun in the sinuses. The surgeon had removed enough of the tumour to biopsy and to allow me to breathe, but the prognosis was not very good. I would need to visit an Oncologist and undergo extensive treatment at the B.C. Cancer Agency once the holidays were over. My partner and I walked back out onto the street in the daze that would protect us from knowing too much too soon. We had no idea to what extent our lives had just been high jacked.



I suddenly felt like I had no past and no real future. My mind wouldn't take me back to that nice safe place before the diagnosis. It wouldn't take me too far ahead, either, because there might not be anything much up that road. Surgery was possible, but it was extensive and mutilating with no curative guarantees, and I decided against it. The alternative was 6 weeks of high-dose radiation and the hope of beating back the tumor. I made arrangements to leave my small hometown and live in Vancouver for the duration of daily treatment.

When I returned home, I was wearing a patch over one eye and could not see well enough to drive. I had lost weight, felt weak and tired, and the radiation burns to my face were painful. My partner was working a great deal and I was home alone for long periods of time. I had always found solace in nature, but I started seeing things in microcosm that I had not noticed before. Every flutter of an ordinary moth's wings seemed extraordinary to me. The little spring birds landing outside my office window appeared to be looking directly into my eyes. My dog, Luna, was radiant as she rested near my feet.

Every time I moved, Luna raised her head and searched my face to see what was up. I cried a lot, despairing that I would survive this ordeal. When my tears fell, she was there to rest her chin on my knee and gaze at me steadily. Her eyes promised me that we could get through this together. Slowly, some of her shining confidence seeped into my bones and recovery seemed like a possibility.

Luna and I began to take short walks down the street together, even though I couldn't see very well and felt unsteady on my feet. Previously, she had always galloped far

ahead of me, but now she stayed close, looking back over her shoulder to be sure that I was still with her and waiting for me to catch up if I fell behind.

I knew that all animals had an amazing ability to heal, but I had not ever experienced it in the way that I did now. In the world of animals, illness, injury, and even death are simply things that happen and no other meaning is attached. As a typical human, I was thinking too much. Luna sent me the message that I needed to heal my body and my spirit. She was determined to assist in every way she could, leading me down the street so that I could begin to get strong again, and comforting me when I whined and cried.

Today, I work from my home office doing publicity for animal-related authors, speakers and healing artists. My long, rambling walks with Luna are the highlight of my day and I know I wouldn't be where I am now without her assistance.