

SMITHY ' S STORY

It's a lovely November morning, I have just come back from holiday and it's good to have dogs around me again. My own three are delighted to have me home and Katrina has just brought me two new fosters, one a spirited little girl called Hannah who, experience tells me, won't be with me long – she's pretty and looks like she has very few issues. The other a large, rangy and underweight male who is just desperate to 'get at' the lovely Hannah, having only been desexed a few days previously, still retains all the get up and go nature intended him to have. His name is Smithers, he's three years old and Katrina has just grasped him in time before he was taken to Gatton to be euthanized. He has been described to me as a 'special needs' dog, boy was that ever accurate ...



He initially takes up day time residence in our recently purchased caravan in a full sight position close to the open door. There he is fed and watered and only comes out for toilet breaks, and only when he can't see anyone looking. The evening/night spot he has chosen is in our ensuite bathroom, right in front of the sink, Rob and I develop a technique for cleaning teeth and face using muscles not normally associated with this practice. Smithers doesn't move and seems happy to just observe this fiasco. Thus we find a pattern for the next ten days or so, though more and more time is spent in the bathroom and less in the caravan. I would say that although I feel extreme anxiety coming from him, he is passive and his eyes are dead, he doesn't care.

I then begin to notice, almost a shadow quickly moving in my peripheral vision, this happens several times throughout the day, when I go to inspect his lair, I find a growing number of toys surrounding him.



He shows no emotion at my discovery, he doesn't look pleased or worried or anything. I notice that he has rituals that go with all of his activities, feeding, drinking, being clipped into his leash for a walk etc. He will only use the front garden for his needs not the side garden which is available to them all the time. He has issues with loud noises (well any noises actually), the Strelitzia plant, plastic bags, the tiled floor, things above his head, anything that is put on the kitchen counter and any new things that are put in his environment that weren't there before, and he never wags his tail. I'm now beginning to feel that slight trepidation that I'm not even remotely up to the task. I'm not even sure what the task is at this point.

It's apparent that he has a few physical difficulties as well, he has lupus and some kind of joint/muscle pain, there are obvious signs of drug abuse, not uncommon, but in addition to his other problems all the more threatening. We start to medicate his lupus and Esther gives him some acupuncture which helps enormously with his pain. His rehab continues..

Christmas is almost upon us and my daughter Gemma and I work feverishly to decorate the whole house as we always do, the dogs as usual are comatose during our efforts and rise and stretch in the late afternoon looking for treats and their appointed time. Smithers rises too... and is panic stricken, his whole world has changed while he was sleeping – there is a large plant like the Strelitzia in his lounge room with bright things on it, there are hideous statues of red suited men and white blobs with black hats, even fake geese on the floor – and worst of all, scary bright balls everywhere above his head. After beginning to believe he had landed in heaven, he was now thrust back into hell. But he sees me, and his eyes soften a little, now that he has begun to trust me, he allows me to walk him through this unfamiliar place. He's worried but he's brave and he has just enough trust left in him to accept this change and the many others that he'll have to overcome in order to move forward, but he still doesn't wag his tail.

Over the next few months his courage helps him overcome many of his demons, (except of course the Strelitzia which remains his arch enemy), he still has his rituals and is comforted by me sitting beside him to be on guard while he eats. The time has come I think to take him to a FOTH walk where he'll be subjected to children and noise and patting humans, some of which have no dog manners whatsoever. I have lots of protective concerns for him but.....he excels, he's not shaking, he's not cowering behind Rob and I, he's smiling I think, and I do believe he's actually enjoying it, his tail's not wagging though. It's at this point, when a very experienced foster Mum tells me he could 'pass for normal', that I realize, the moment I've been hoping for and dreading at the same time, has come – he's ready for a very special forever home. Six months have passed, and although I've had several 'special needs' foster dogs over time, I've never had one so long nor been so close – this is hurting. But he has fought so hard for this and shown so much bravery that he really deserves that loving, caring, comforting forever home.



In the end, as many of you know, he has found that forever home – with Rob and I. We discovered that the immune disorder, undoubtedly caused by the abuse he was subjected to, has now taken its toll on his kidneys and his life expectancy is not very long. We'll fight this last battle together too and try and beat the odds, which were stacked against him and thousands other greyhounds from the beginning.

The upside is, that he will never know the pain of parting, and will love and be loved for the rest of his life. One ritual that I hope he never gives up is that at around four in the morning, out of sight of everyone, he comes to the side of the bed and noses my hand, this is the time when he wants his ears vigorously rubbed, his chest tickled and lots of kisses, and for this.....yes, he wags his tail, and it's all worth it.

To all the kind people that help in this work, every life that is cut short because of racing is as special as Smithy's, that's why we must continue.

SMITHY'S FINAL CHAPTER



When we discover that he has kidney disease we put every effort into finding a way to help alleviate his symptoms and lengthen his life expectancy. Of course, he has to take medication but the best help is a really good diet to allow the kidneys to function at their capacity for as long as possible. For the next few months he is in great health and finds enormous pleasure in being a member of the pack, probably for the first time in his life. He does all the naughty things like fence running and barking at the passing dogs, getting into the tissue box (although he swears it was somebody else) and he finally learns to play with those toys he'd stolen in the early days. His days of terror, pain and drug abuse are a thing of the past, a distant memory. The winter is a time for growing in confidence and enjoying all the things he has missed in his young life, either because of his fears or his confinement.

As winter turns to spring we notice that he is slowing down, imperceptibly at first, and then it becomes clear he is losing his 'sparkle'. He's still having good times with his

mates and eating and drinking normally but the joy of the fence run has gone, he has little interest in playing with his toys now, and the Strelitzia is not even worth a bark, just a disparaging look. We try to ignore it, but we know what's happening. By November he's eating less and I'm just praying that he'll hang on till Christmas. We take him to the Friends of the Hound Christmas party, hoping a change of scenery and lots of companions will brighten his spirits, but it's clear to all who know him that he's shutting down.

One morning early in December, I realize that to my eternal sadness that all the light has gone from his eyes, he's trying to tell me it's time to go. So, in my arms he slips peacefully from this life with no fear and no pain, knowing that he's loved and very very special.

My heart aches knowing what I'm missing, but it also aches for all those other special souls that never get the chance to be loved, or know the exhilaration of running for the sheer fun of it, and showing off to their adoring humans what graceful beautiful creatures they are.

Smithy's life and death will not be in vain, if he is instrumental in spreading the word that racing these wonderful dogs is the root cause of a horrendous amount of cruelty, neglect and abuse. If we are a civilized nation, we cannot tolerate this in our midst.

Help us please, to stop the exploitation and tragedy of these majestic hounds, that were once considered to be "the noblest creatures in all the land".

RIP my beautiful boy.

Bobby