



A Dog's Tale

Samson's Story

My Humble Beginnings

My Dad was a criminal – at least that's what they told me. It was February 3, 1995 and both my parents had been dropped off at the breeders. The first time my Dad saw my mom, an award-winning-party-colour-show dog, he was smitten. But when he later found out that her owner had selected a more "suitable" stud, he decided to take things into his own paws. One night, when everyone was sleeping, he broke out of his kennel. Two months later, my Mom gave birth to a litter of six jet-black puppies. There was quite a frenzy following the birth. Simply put, my mother had no interest in keeping a litter of "black" puppies. So we were shipped off to live with my Dad until we were adopted.

Yes, we were all black; everyone except me. I was unique – the only puppy with white markings on my chest. It was those markings that attracted my adoptive mother in the first place. She thought I looked like I was wearing a little tuxedo. And that's what sealed the deal. With financial matters dealt with and papers signed, I found myself cuddled up on her lap on the way to my new home.

Testing My Limits

As the weeks went by, I grew and I grew and I chewed and I chewed. Being a puppy was fun. But eventually, every upwardly mobile puppy needs to get an education. So with my best interests at heart, my mom enrolled me in an obedience class. Those classes could have been a blast, so many dogs to sniff. But all I heard was "sit", "stay", and "heel". In spite of all the distractions, I passed the class with flying colours.

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Yes, I was a dog of high intellect. Still, I did some pretty dumb things. Two particular incidents come to mind. The first occurred shortly after I graduated from obedience class. It was springtime and we were playing ball in the back yard. It wasn't fenced, so my mom was making a painful effort to teach me to "stay". I was trying to pay attention, but then out of the corner of my eye, I saw a kid whiz by on his bike. In a flash, I was off and running. As the wheels of the bike spun closer and closer, all I could think of was catching that kid. Little did I know there was a big, old Coca Cola truck rumbling down the street in my direction! As it screeched to a halt, as miraculous as it may sound, I managed to run under the truck and out the other side. While my mom hugged me and cried, the reality slowly sank in – I was one lucky dog!

The next close call took place when we bought an old house in Crescent Heights. That house had some interesting history. Back in the 70's, someone actually found a \$500 Confederate bill in the ceiling! It really was a great old house, but there was something about it that we didn't find out until later. It was riddled with tiny nooks and crannies just big enough for mice to crawl through. And crawl through they did. After gobbling up a whole bag of my dog food, we had a full-blown infestation. Those mice were so cocky, they skipped around the house from cupboard to closet and back again without a care in the world... in broad daylight!

We did everything we could to keep them out, but eventually we had to get the exterminators to plant poison all over the house. Not long after, a pipe in the basement burst. And with all the banging the plumber did to fix it, a big chunk of poison was dislodged from behind the fridge. Normally, the poison was in "lock boxes", but the exterminators never imagined that I would ever have an opportunity to get at it. So there it lay, ripe for the taking. It tasted so good, I'd just about gobbled it all up by the time my mom caught me. But when she did, I knew I was in trouble.

In a panic, she grabbed me and stuck her fingers in my mouth forcing me to spit out those last delectable morsels. Then, she promptly marched me out the door and into the car headed for emergency. When we got there, the vet quickly whisked me away and gave me an injection. He then locked me in a cage where I proceeded to vomit. He then put me in another cage, and then another, until I stopped throwing up. I never thought being sick

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was a good thing, but the vet said I had eaten enough poison to kill nine dogs! In any case, all that throwing up was a success, because they didn't find any poison in the follow-up blood tests. So in spite of the fact that I am an American Cocker Spaniel, I think it's fair to say I had the luck of the Irish that day.

Counting My Passions

Now let me tell you about my passions or, as some like to call them, my "obsessions". After the Coke truck incident, my mom started taking me for short runs by the river. It didn't take long before I was hooked! We ran come rain or shine, but winter was a challenge. Hard packed snow cut into my paws and made them bleed. So my mom put booties on me attached by Velcro to doggy pajamas. Now, it's just my opinion, but no self-respecting dog should ever have to wear clothes! But there I was, dressed up in purple, fleece pajamas. It was truly a humbling experience. Has anyone seen a flash of purple against the snow? I hope not!

In addition to running, chasing my ball was an immense source of pleasure! When I was a youngster, I loved all kinds of soft, cuddly, stuffed toys. But there comes a time in every dog's life when he must turn away from puppyish things. And when that day came for me, I found the ball. Not just any ball mind you – only the "ball du jour" would do. And so, as it turns out, I have more balls than you can shake a stick at. In fact, I have become quite a ball connoisseur. All I have to do is smell it, and I can tell you just about everything you ever wanted to know about balls.

It's a Dog's Life

Those were the good old days – when I could run and chase the ball all day and all night. But three years ago, those days all but came to an end. I was out in the back yard chasing my ball from one end of the yard to the other. I was having a blast. Then something unexpected happened. The ball zigged one way, and when I zagged the other to catch it, "pop" my left knee went out. The diagnosis – a torn Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL). Unfortunately, surgery was my only option.

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I was in tremendous pain after the surgery, and I had to be carried everywhere. Unfortunately for me, I was just getting back on my feet when “pop” my right knee went. Can you believe it? I wasn’t even chasing my ball that time! The second surgery wasn’t any easier than the first. But with my mom and Paul’s support, and my "pawsitive" attitude intact, I got through it.

Now that I’m fully healed, I can only go for short walks and chase my ball a few times before I’m pooped. Still I have a very good life. I always get the most nutritious meals, the tastiest treats and once in a while, I even get a rawhide bone. But most of all, I just love to crawl up on my mom’s lap, and get lots of love and affection. I guess it really is true what they say – it’s a dog’s life.

The Next Generation

Before I finish, I’d like to introduce you to my adopted sister, Maya. Boy, is she a bitch! Last summer she actually bit my nose! I guess I shouldn’t be surprised, since she is related to Gryphon. Gryphon is Maya’s brother, and we actually adopted him first. As it turned out, he was one fiery little chap. All he wanted to do was bark, bare his teeth and challenge me all day and every day. We even had a dog behavior specialist come to the house to evaluate his antics. But it really didn’t help much. After awhile it got so depressing I had to hide in my mom’s walk-in closet just to get a little peace. But then he bit my mom, and a few weeks later we swapped him for Maya. Having lived with Gryphon, I really can’t complain too much. Things could have been a whole lot worse.

Maya's Story

The Puppy Swap

I was puppy number five in a litter of seven – six girls and one boy. My brother, Gryphon, was the only male. He wasn’t particularly bad, but we girls made a point of keeping him in his place. My owner was a breeder, but she also showed dogs. In fact, my mother was one of her champion show dogs and so were her mother and grandmother before her. And that was to be my fate as well – and then everything changed.

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There were only two girls left, my sister and me. We were the “crème de la crème”, and our illustrious future was to be on stage. But then the call came. Gryphon was not settling into his adoptive home. I heard my owner suggest a swap, one of us for Gryphon. I’m not sure how the decision was made, but one week later I was in the car on my way to Red Deer.

The puppy swap took place in the parking lot of Tim Hortons. Over the course of the exchange Gryphon peed all over his owner’s foot, while I proceeded to throw up on mine. If only we hadn’t bullied him so much! No matter, the damage was done and I was on my way to Calgary in the back seat of a silver Toyota. Although my new owner tried to comfort me, I would not be consoled. All I could do was shiver and drool all the way to Calgary. When we arrived, a black cocker spaniel ran up and started sniffing and licking me. That was my first introduction to Samson.

Medical Mysteries Solved

The first few weeks in my new home were a little rough. I really wasn’t feeling very well, and it turned out that I had a very bad bladder infection. It took a few months of antibiotics before we got the infection under control, and a few more before I finally got the hang of potty training. Just think, I was six months old before I was house trained. But then I knew it wasn’t my fault. I had an infection, and my original owner had ignored it! Puppy swap or not, I knew right then and there – I was one lucky dog.

With the bladder infection behind me, I finally started to settle into my new home when, out of the blue, one of my lower eyelids popped out. Within a few days, so did the other one. It turned out that I had something called “Cherry Eye”, an affliction that plagues many a cocker spaniel. Although I could barely stand to look at myself in the mirror, the good news was that surgery could restore my good looks.

When I came out of the anesthetic my eyes really hurt and everything was blurry. But the surgery was a success and today you would never know that I once had a facial deformity. I have these beautiful, big, brown, expressive eyes with super long lashes. I really am quite an

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exceptional looking spaniel if I do say so myself. The only lingering effect is that I now have “Dry Eye”, but it’s easily treated with daily eye ointment that my mom puts in them.

Confessions of a Food Junkie

It’s fair to say that my passion for food has gotten me into trouble one too many times. It wasn’t long after my eye surgery when I engulfed a whole dog biscuit that my mom had dropped on the floor. It got lodged in my canines and my mom couldn’t get it out. All I could do was stand there on the front seat of the car and drool as she rushed me to the vet. My mom was worried that I was going to choke to death. But with a good pair of long-nosed tweezers, the vet was able to remove that disagreeable biscuit and I was just fine!

Food fetish number two took place about a month later. My mom had a box of staples in her backpack and they looked pretty darn interesting to me. First I chewed the lid off the package. Then I proceeded to meticulously chew up each shiny row. As I recall, they had an interesting metallic flavor that I just couldn’t put my paw on. I’m not sure if I actually swallowed any, but that didn’t matter. As soon as my mom caught me, it was back to the vet for x-rays. You couldn’t see any staples on the x-ray, so the vet sent us home with a few cans of high fiber dog food and a strong warning to watch me closely when I went potty. If those staples had lodged in my intestines, they could have killed me!

Luckily, there was nary a staple to complicate my daily constitution. And as you can see, I lived to tell the tale. I still have a tendency to wolf down anything that hits the floor. But after going to obedience class, I know what “leave it” means. Hence, I rarely get the chance to scarf down many exotic things.

That’s Show Business

As I mentioned earlier, I’ve never really had much of an interest in physical activity – not like Sam. But lately, and I don’t know why, I’ve actually started to like it. A few weeks ago my mom upped the ante and signed me up for agility classes. She actually had the nerve to tell the trainer that I was a “couch potato”! Boy did I show her. I can run up and down that A Frame, run through the tunnel, and walk on and off the teeter-totter without a

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twinge of fear – because I know that at the other end there is a cookie with my name on it. I recently graduated from level three with flying colours. So watch out for me, I just might be in the entertainment business after all.

That Bite on the Nose!

One last thing, I really need to clear my name on that “bite on the nose” Sam told you about. It went something like this. It was a hot summer day and we were both out on the back deck. I was just minding my own business when Sam came up and started humping me. I got up and moved. He followed me and stuck his nose right in my face. So, I bit it! Come on, have some empathy! He’s been humping me constantly for years, and I have been really patient. But that day I just snapped.

Since then, he’s a little more reluctant to come near me. I like to think it's because I bit him. But chances are it's because his knees are bothering him. Still, I can't help feeling sorry for the old guy. He has been through a lot. And although I hate to admit it, I actually miss him when he's off to the vet for more poking and prodding. Even so, I'm glad it's not me!