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ROLE REVERSAL: LIZ HOLZEMER



By Liz Holzemer
Photo by Heather Green

The gut knows when life's gone awry. I've been there, done that too many times. With myself, my two young kids, my dog. Ten years ago an intuitive puppy guided and healed me during two brain surgery recoveries. That yellow lab—Koufax—was my crutch. Now it's my turn to be his.

Earlier this year, I sat in the veterinarian's waiting room doing that agonizing thing associated with all waiting rooms—waiting for my worst fears to be confirmed. How much longer would it take for the hazy outline of each tell-tale symptom to become sharper and finally reveal itself?

The long face.
Significantly shed pounds.
Insatiable thirst and panting. In winter?
Such a sudden onset too.

I lost track of how many times I swallowed my heart. Eyes welled up over and over again preparing myself for the worst-case scenario parents can't prevent themselves from imagining. I failed at masking my emotions from the worried pair of brown eyes studying me. He knew too. The door swung open with a singular word diagnosis.

Diabetes.
Come again?
Needles?
Twice a day?
Prescription-only diet?
Vigilant monitoring?
It's manageable.

So many questions. The answers are carefully explained, but I can't retain what I know I need to remember. That will come with time. Koufax is a dog whose daily practiced religion is bounding after, pouncing on, and catching air—in Shaun White-fashion—for a fuzzy neon yellow ball. Koufax doesn't do group. It's always been one-on-one with the Wilson.

So how did an active and healthy dog contract diabetes? It's more common than you think. On average, one in 10 dogs will develop this disease. For Koufax, it's simply a case of bad luck. That's the thing with Koufax and me; we've shared a multitude of maladies: Meningioma. Epilepsy. Hypothyroidism. Lipomas. Diabetes.

Thankfully, with early intervention and careful monitoring, the vet reassured me Koufax could still lead a productive life. First, I had to quickly master a foreign language of blood glucose curves, cataracts, fructosamine tests, hypoglycemia, insulin, ketones...

Then I had to overcome my fear of using fine gauge needles to inject insulin into Koufax. What if I measured out the wrong dosage? Accidentally jabbed him? Hurt him? How could I forgive myself? "I'm saving my firstborn's life" became my twice-daily mantra.



And like clockwork, Koufax sits on cue when I take out the refrigerated glass vial of lifesaving elixir. He's such the compliant, non-flinching patient; I can't help but feel guilty with each prick. Is the insulin taking effect?

I'm dejected on days when he takes up residence in his favored corner of the couch. Terrified when he has a rare hypoglycemic episode. Thankful when honey on hand revives him. However, I'm encouraged on days when Koufax perks up at the sight of his favorite and formerly ignored ball.

I no longer see protruding ribs or empty water bowls.

He's talking again.

Hind legs don't falter when leaping on to the bed.

My boy is back.

The gut knows.

About the Author

Liz Holzemer is the author of When Life Throws You A Brain Tumor and founder of the non-profit, Meningioma Mommas (www.meningiomommas.org). For more information on Liz visit her Web site at: www.lizholzemer.com or she can be emailed at: info@lizholzemer.com .

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