

HOLISTIC HEALTH CARE FOR CAVALIERS

Part IX

Challenges, Lessons and Spirituality - Some Personal Stories

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Our Cavaliers have given us endless joy (and sometimes real sorrow) over the decades. The previous articles (chapters) have noted a few of these stories, but they have focused more on the medical aspects of caring for our animal companions in a natural way and dealing with many of the struggles that all loving owners face.

Over the many years of having these wonderful creatures (and other breeds, as well) and dealing with thousands of clients, we've learned the following:

- They own us and not the opposite!
- We can only do our best and sometimes, that is not enough.
- Many of our animal companions come into our lives to help us learn specific lessons.
- They also have their own stories, lives and destiny, as we do ours.
- These separate "movies" intersect and affect our stories, as we do theirs.

Karen and I wanted to take some time to discuss this more spiritual aspect of our holistic practice and personal experience. We have alluded to it in some of the previous articles and many of you have experienced this aspect yourselves.

First let me state that we feel, without reservation, that these animals have something akin to souls. Perhaps this is a collective consciousness of some sort, but we have seen in practice (and lived with) so many critters that have passed on and then reentered our lives in the form of a new animal.

I am sure many of you reading this have had similar experiences and always wondered if it was your imagination or wishful thinking. I used to have clients come into my office and say, "Oh, she is acting just like my other dog" or "she reminds me of 'Fluffy,' who used to look at me the same way." After a few years of this, one figures it has more to do with being in the same household, or a strong need on the owner's part.

I remember one client with an older Terrier. It was in the early 80's and I cannot remember the name but we can call him "Snoopy." He was in severe kidney failure. This was long before I was in holistic practice and we treated with medication, loads of IV fluids and anything else we could think of. After about four weeks of exhausting care, he finally passed and the owner was exhausted. She explained that she was done

with dogs for now and was heading across Florida to the Gulf Coast for a three-day rest.

Much to my surprise, she showed up at my office the following Monday with a puppy! My first question was, "I thought you were taking a break?" Then she told me what had happened: She was headed back from Captiva (near Naples on the Florida Gulf Coast) and was driving across "Alligator Alley." For all of you non-Floridians, State Road 84 was a narrow desolate stretch of road that took you through the Everglades to the Florida West Coast. Back then, it was two lanes and nothing for miles but alligators and seas of grass and water.

She continued to explain, "I was about halfway home Sunday afternoon and this puppy was just walking along the side of the road. I pulled over, opened the door, he jumped in the car, gave me a few kisses, curled up and rode home with me. I got home, opened the door and he went in the house, trotted over to Snoopy's bed, laid down and wagged his tail with a knowing look. What was I to do?"

She had that dog for many years and it was my first memorable experience with this phenomena. Was it Snoopy having come back? If so, then how, as the puppy had already been born? Was it someone Snoopy "sent" to help her through her sadness? These answers are beyond our knowing, but I have seen similar events so many times that I truly believe there is a consciousness which is transferred or even shared in some way. Many years later, I had an experience that convinced me it was truth.

In the early 80's Karen and I had two pups, a Golden named "Darling" and a Labrador named "Maggie." They were six weeks apart and essentially sisters. Darling was the boss with all things except food (Maggie WAS a Lab!). They had a favorite toy, a stuffed gray cat and whoever had that toy was queen for the day! They used to wrestle over it all the time and it was often the victim requiring many a suture and replacement stuffing. It became known as the famous "headless gray cat" since the head was long gone but they still loved that toy.

Over the years it was their constant plaything. Darling died and about two years later Maggie followed. We decided to cremate Maggie with the toy but it was nowhere to be found even though we searched and searched.

About four years later, we imported a Cavalier pup from

England – she arrived in Miami Saturday afternoon, BOAC, and the first thing that struck me was a familiar look in those big brown eyes. I felt I knew those eyes but said nothing. The next morning I found a note on my keyboard from Karen (who had gone to the store for her early Sunday morning grocery shopping). The note said “I think Maggie is back – she mooched my coffee this morning.” The significance was that Maggie the Lab had a ritual of sharing a little of Karen’s coffee EVERY morning. I did not pay it a lot of attention but it did make me wonder if that look of familiarity had an origin.

That afternoon that puppy came out of the garage with the headless gray cat toy in her mouth! We had searched high and low, and had cleaned that garage a number of times in the past four years. I was sure it could not have been a coincidence and she had to know where to look. It still gives me goose bumps, and it was the most definitive example of the concept of continuity. We renamed “Honey” to “Maggie” at that point. Since that incident, we have become convinced, beyond all doubt, that there is something in them that they can share or reincarnate.

I wanted to get these examples out in front before I discussed some of the more “down to earth” (sort of) experiences we have had that helped us discover that these animals are, actually, our teachers. Some were wonderful lessons and experiences and some are very painful, but all seem to be important and valuable, even if it took time to realize it.

Peanut’s Story

In June 2004 we had a litter with five boys. One was about a third the size of the others and we doubted he would survive, as he was too small to even take Darcy’s nipple in his mouth. I looked at Karen and shook my head but she declared that he was “GOING TO SURVIVE” and I had no choice but to try, although my veterinary experience told me otherwise.



I had tube fed puppies to some extent in veterinary practice, but that task was usually the domain of the veterinary technician, the breeder or the rescue person. Essentially, I knew how to tell someone how to do it but had very little practical experience. That was about to change as “Peanut” started getting tube fed about every four hours around the clock. At birth he weighed less than two ounces. His brothers were four to six ounces by comparison and all nursed vigorously.

Peanut slowly gained weight and was actually taking cereal from Karen’s fingers at about two weeks of age. By three

weeks he was able to get enough nutrition on his own and we stopped tube feeding.

He was the most adorable puppy and such a fighter. He was like a premature baby in many ways, but he never did develop the way most do. His testicles never descended, the soft spot on his head never closed, he had an overbite, but most importantly, he had under-developed kidneys. At his heaviest he weighed four pounds. His brothers were all twelve to fifteen pounds. What he lacked in size, he made up for in spirit. He was sweet but persistent. We found it amazing that none of our other dogs ever picked on him. I think they all recognized how special he was and always protected or deferred to him. When they would play, there was a gentleness they surely did not show with the rest of their pack.

Anyone who met Peanut was captivated. He had fans all over the world and when he finally died of kidney failure at age two and a half, we received hundreds of condolence cards and messages. He went everywhere with Karen (he could fit in her purse easily), he would sit quietly next to her at dinner. He was always picky about food but one of his favorites was shrimp fried rice from the Thai restaurant down the street. When I would have it, he came running for his tiny pieces of cut up shrimp. Interestingly, he refused any other shrimp or even shrimp fried rice from other restaurants. Near the end, when he was refusing most food, we used to order extra shrimp in the dish just for him. I am writing this in the quiet at about four in the morning and wondering why my mind went to the shrimp. I think it brings back fond memories of his little quirks and makes me smile and sad at the same time.

When Peanut was being tube fed at about day six, I decided to try my new computer video camera and film the process as I had come to understand it. I later edited it and included the fine details and mechanics of the process. We put it online at our website and later when YouTube began in mid-2005, we uploaded it there. We have other videos on YouTube that have hundreds of views, even one or two with a thousand views. I just checked and “How To Tube Feed Puppies” has over two hundred thousand views! Every few months we still receive a letter telling us how that video saved a puppy or a litter and it makes us realize that Peanut still is with us, doing one of his many jobs. He was born in a year that had seen Karen lose two brothers and a sister and he was her anchor. If she was getting anxious or upset, he would come over and place one of his tiny front paws on her cheek, look into her eyes and things would be better. He was one of the first emotional service dogs and that reminds me of Philadelphia.

We had just been to our son’s wedding in Maryland. Interestingly, the rehearsal dinner was the first time many of us had met and there was tension. Then Peanut popped up





out of his bag and had an effect on most everyone. They saw his sweetness and the tension broke, the party was great and so was the wedding. The next day we drove to Philadelphia so Karen could see where I went to vet school and see the Liberty Bell. We went to Independence Hall and the Federal Park Rangers questioned a tiny service dog but understood and we got to go in and take the tour. By 2006 the Liberty Bell had been moved over to a separate building across the street (for all of you who have not seen the movie “National Treasure”) and we also had to go through security there. The private Pinkerton guards stopped us once again because “you cannot bring a dog in here.” We explained the service dog exception but they radioed to the Rangers “we have a lady with a little dog here,” and before they could finish we heard from every radio, “Oh that’s just Peanut, he’s fine.” So, Peanut got to see the Liberty Bell first hand and we took this photo to prove it.

The challenges and lessons in Peanut’s story seem obvious to me now. Here was a being, who came into our lives at a very precarious time, he was a huge soul in a frail body and in his short time was a blessing to all he met. He continues to live on and save others through his video and his story. Two and a half years seems like such a short time, and it was to us, but he hung in until Karen was stronger and ready to face the challenges again on her own. She saved him and in some ways, he saved her, too.

Joey’s Story

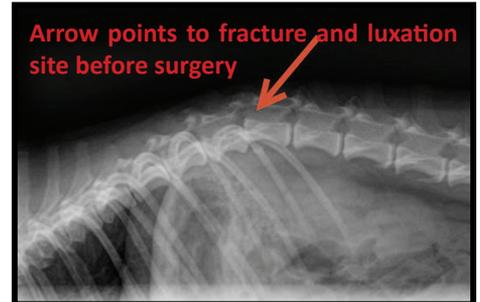
Right after Labor Day 2009, we headed up to New England to visit some clients; to teach at and attend the AHVMA {American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association) annual meeting in Massachusetts. We hoped to maybe catch a day or two of relaxation. The morning after we arrived in Maine, the cell phone rang and it was Herb, my veterinary technician of twenty-five years who lived on our property and sometimes puppy-sat, telling us that he could not find one of our dogs. It had been storming and Shoshanna (our Puppy Au Pair who helped groom and play with the crew) had tended to them the evening before. Leaving Herb unsure whether everyone had been in for the night.

Shoshanna came over and they searched everywhere. Meanwhile, we were frantic, with bad cell phone reception and patients to see in the middle of Southern Maine. Needless



to say, we definitely imagined all kinds of scenarios but never in our wildest dreams imagined had what finally came to pass.

An hour later, when they finally found “Joey,” he had been trapped in the wires behind the old projection TV in the living room. He was in pain when moved, and later found to have a severely injured spine. They rushed him to a local conventional veterinarian and she tended to him immediately. Somehow, he had broken his back and it was dislocated at the T13-L1 (behind the rib cage where the thoracic vertebrae meet the lumbar vertebrae).



Being out of town and unable to get a flight back, we asked her to leave in the intravenous and urinary catheters since dogs in this situation usually cannot urinate on their own. Joey then came home in the care of Herb, who got him settled downstairs and attended to him twenty-four hours a day. Shoshanna dropped everything and moved in upstairs to tend to the other dogs. Karen and I were still pretty stunned.

It was also a nightmare to maintain constant communication with the lack of cell phone availability in the rural areas. Fortunately, Karen’s close friends, Louise and Jeanne, also stepped in, bringing supplies, food, extra cash and moral support to Herb and Shoshanna, while helping to keep us updated. Realize that, as we were driving from Maine to New Hampshire, we would stop in any small town that had cell phone service so we could get an update, as this was the critical twenty-four to forty-eight hours after the injury.

In my thirty-seven years of veterinary practice, I have never seen a dog break its back without it being from some sort of external injury. I can only surmise as to whether it was a fall (he liked to sleep on the sofa – and still does now), a fight (rare but it sometimes happens), or some other freak occurrence. I believe he ended up behind the big TV because he crawled there after the injury, but we may never know unless he chooses to tell us at some point.

By the time we made it to Massachusetts two days later, he was starting to stabilize. Since I had to teach and attend board meetings at the AHVMA, Karen thought it made no sense to fly home alone and disturb him before I could get there. We were treating him homeopathically and he was starting to improve although he was still paralyzed on his back legs. We had reports every few hours, Herb sent photos and we tapped the positive energy of the 300 holistic veterinarians at the conference.

When we arrived home a few days later, he was still stable. We started additional therapy for another forty-eight hours and he regained a bit more feeling in his back legs. However, we also realized that because of the motion at the fracture site, he was not going to heal through natural means alone.

HOLISTIC HEALTH CARE *continued*

Karen took him down to see a friend and surgeon in Miami. He was not optimistic that Joey would survive long or ever regain use of his hind legs or bowel and bladder control, but we all wanted to give orthopedic surgery a try to stabilize the injury site. Surgery went great, as you can see by the post op x-rays below.

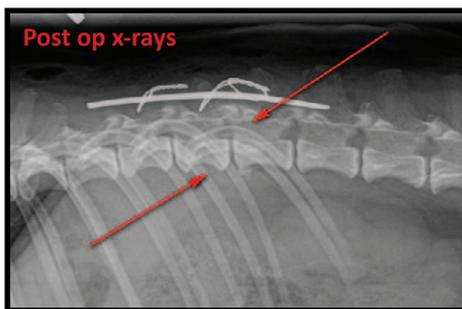
Joey spent the next six days at the hospital both to keep him calm and to allow us a few days to get things situated at home and the office since we had been on the road for a week and were pretty stressed. On his return home, we decided Joey should still stay downstairs since he needed to stay calm. Herb had moved in temporarily and attended him constantly. We continued physical therapy and laser therapy. Respond Systems even made a special magnetic therapy pad that molded to his back, and we continued his homeopathy.

About ten days after surgery one of Karen's friends in the Cavalier world sent us a cart she had used with her paralyzed dog that no was longer needed. Joey used it immediately after he was strapped into the cart. I think he was so happy to move around. We were so encouraged. He seemed so happy, and we felt like a weight had lifted. Joey got to meet with the other dogs in the backyard once again. We have YouTube videos of these events and you can access them from our website www.naturalholistic.com under "Joey's Story."

We also refer cases to a rehabilitation center in South Miami, so Karen took Joey down there for their suggestions as to rehabilitative techniques. They started him on their treadmill even though they had very little hope that he could recover use of his back legs. He actually did great and started using his back legs a little at his first session.

Since the Universe works in wonderful ways, we found that Louise had purchased a smaller dog size treadmill a few years prior for one of her dogs, who had since passed away. Herb and I picked it up the next day and set it up here so Joey could have a home therapy session every day if we wanted. He was doing so well with a loaner cart, we also ordered a custom cart from Eddie's Wheels (we had met them at the AHVMA conference and were impressed with their product).

He went for more therapy sessions and they were amazed at his progress. We had to travel, again, in early November to Savannah for the Academy of Veterinary Homeopathy annual meeting. Joey was still living downstairs with Herb, although he had spent time in the yard with the other dogs. This time we were taking no chances and Shoshanna moved in from the start. Things went fine and we came home to dogs that were even more spoiled (if you can believe that is possible with



our crew). When we returned, we knew Herb had to go out of town and it was the perfect time to transition Joey upstairs with all the others. Then his new cart arrived! I was a little disappointed because he didn't seem to take to it right away but with proper adjustment he started to use it more and more. Then, one night, he took off with the others to bark at a baby possum sitting on the fence at the other end of the yard. He

seemed to forget he was on wheels and had a blast.

He also stood on his own occasionally. It was only for a few steps but he did it! Meanwhile...back at therapy, he began using their special water treadmill. However, he didn't like getting his hair messed up (or some other Cavalier reason), and we stopped it because it was too stressful.

So this is where we stood in the middle of December, three months after the initial injury. He had control of his bowels and his bladder although we did (and still do) expresses his bladder when we take him out, just to be on the safe side.

As I write this, four years after the accident, he does well in his cart and seems to be regaining motion, strength, and muscle tone in his back legs, though he had reached a plateau. Karen and I both saw him stand and take a few steps last month. Healing? Stronger? It is hard to tell. He plays with the other dogs, likes to play tug (both in and out of his cart), tries to mount anyone he thinks might be in season, and we have even thought about collecting him for breeding. We have not figured out how to neuter him since he likes to scoot around and would drag his sutures.

The theme of this article is challenges and lessons. Joey has taught us more about the challenges that people face in this situation than we could ever have learned by only treating other people's animals!

Our good friend Jeanne proofed our original web postings about Joey for us and added, "By sharing Joey and his progress, not only animals but humans can see that with treatment, there IS hope. Miracle is just another name for never giving up." Jeanne, you are so wise!

We wanted to share these experiences to help explain how we view our patients and our own animals. We have many other stories but space was limited this edition so maybe next time we can share some more. 

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