

Dog's Love An Uplifting Tail For E. Pa. Woman

By Bruce R. Posten
READING EAGLE
SINKING SPRING, Pa. (AP) - Last spring at a crowded Reading Pet Expo, Renee Pinkard pushed her daughter, Vicki, then 19, in a wheelchair.

Renee's intention was to give her daughter a stimulating outing, but Vicki suffered pains in her chest from not drinking enough water and felt dizzy from just sitting up. Her head pounded from all the commotion.

That's when she spotted tiny Ali, stuffed in a red shoulder bag, her bow-tied, pig-tailed head bobbing up and down, her eyes shaded in sunglasses.

Neither headache nor chest pain nor dizziness could stop Vicki from smiling.

She had met a therapist with a pedigree, if not a medical degree.

Meeting Ali, a Yorkshire terrier, led to meeting her owner, Dalynn Boyer, 50, Yorkie breeder and co-owner of Spoil 'Em Rotten Pet Boutique and Grooming Salon in Laureldale, who that ultimately led to meeting sassy, spunky 17-month-old Tanner, another Yorkie.

But more about him later. "From years of experience, I know dogs have a magical way of making people feel better and I could see immediately that was exactly what was happening with Vicki," said Boyer, who said she stopped to talk to mother and daughter.

She soon learned of a teenage girl in pain and depression because of a so-called "invisible illness."

Diagnosed with a type of dysautonomia called Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome, Vicki, now 20, suffered a host of symptoms - dizziness, rapid heart rate, a drop in blood pressure, chest pain, nausea and fatigue - and became so debilitated it took her two years to finish her senior year in high school, mostly at home.

Dysautonomia, with symptoms that may come and go, often invisible to the untrained eye, is a complex condition caused by a dysfunction in the autonomic nervous system. The system regulates unconscious functions in the body such as the cardiovascular, endocrine, gastrointestinal and metabolic systems.

Sufferers may find themselves, over time, often limiting their lifestyle in order to compensate for the condition. Medications are used to treat symptoms, coupled with physical therapy to improve the body's condition. A day-to-day struggle to feel well can end up being a long and arduous journey.

Complicating Vicki's situation was another diagnosis of Ehler-Danlos Syndrome - Hypermobility Type, a genetic connective tissue disorder characterized by joint pain and hypermobility (joints that move beyond their normal range with little effort and can easily dislocate), stretchy delicate skin and fragile vessels.

"Sometimes my joints hurt so much I can barely roll over in bed," Vicki said. "I started with three or four medications, but I'm up to 10 now and, of course, there is the need to keep up with physical therapy, even though I tire very easily."

"When I met Dalynn and her Yorkies, I was beginning to feel my illness was out of control."

Renee Pinkard said her daughter had a hard time getting motivated to do her therapy at the time of the meeting.

So, on the spot, Boyer made Vicki an offer. She set up a challenge.

"I promised I would give her a Yorkshire terrier if she did her physical therapy and got stronger," Boyer said.

"It was a challenge that motivated me," Vicki said. "I knew if I had a dog that needed to go out, I would need to get up no matter what amount of pain I felt."

And she did. She exercised and wound up visiting Boyer and her two shop partners, Judy Swanson and Vicki DiArchangeo, two other Yorkie breeders.

Socially isolated from her peers because of her illness, Vicki gained three new dog-loving companions who inspired her to learn about animals and re-engage with life.

Last June, Tanner, a tiny Yorkshire terrier, no more than five pounds and a little more than a year old, greeted Vicki at Boyer's shop, wagging his tail, greeting her affectionately as if he already belonged to her.

"Tanner was perfect for Vicki," Boyer said. "I just feel he was destined to go live with her. I didn't want to give her a puppy that would be too energetic, so Tanner was the one. When Tanner met her, they just clicked."

And Tanner has been therapeutic for Vicki, helped her exer-

cise, inspired her to play and to take walks. He has helped her to find energy somewhere inside herself to enroll in two college courses next semester.

She, in turn, has taken him to training classes, taught him to sit, lie down, dance.

"I really want to get him certified as a service dog, so I can take him anywhere even if all he can do is remind when to take my pills or get me up for breakfast," she said.

Once one of Boyer's five pet dogs, Tanner is intelligent, gentle and loving, a show dog worth \$2,500 before he broke his leg jumping a doggie fence. Ironically, that happened around the same time Vicki was most depressed, before she met him.

"When Tanner was born, he came out by C-section and wasn't breathing well at first," Boyer said. "He worked so hard to get his first breath - I call him my miracle dog. It might be my wild imagination, but I think he was meant to be Vicki's dog."

Maybe. But even if a dog is adorable and tough, his value drops with a broken leg in the real world - \$1,500 is his price tag now.

But what is he worth to Vicki in her world.

"Absolutely everything; he is priceless," she said.

Celebrates Sixth



Kadin Kuhn celebrated his sixth birthday November 22.

Parents are David and Tasha Kuhn of Harrisonville. Grandparents are Glenda Swartz of McConnellsburg; Mel Collins of Hustontown; Linda Kuhn of Oklahoma and David Kuhn of McConnellsburg. Also helping him celebrate was his little brother, Isaac.

A birthday party was held in his honor at Chuckie Cheese in Altoona.

Kadin wishes to thank everyone for making his day special.

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