

Jasper's current condition. But this time, she wasn't mentioning euthanasia.

"Have you tried B-vitamin injections or baby food?" I asked Dr. Roberts over the phone, all the while knowing she was aware of all the tricks to keep a dog interested in eating.

"Yes. We've corrected his anemia, but we still can't get him to eat. I don't know if the problem is his declining liver function or the cancer itself," she said. "We can always try corticosteroids." I was reluctant to use prednisone unless there was absolutely nothing else we could do. Its potential side effects included muscle wasting, cartilage breakdown and liver problems, and although it would likely stimulate Jasper's appetite, the risks might outweigh the benefits.

Once again, our list of options was limited, and I realized that in order to help Jasper, I needed to look at his illness in a different way. I began to think about Tino and his path to recovery. Just as I had to move from the old-school training methods to a more holistic training approach, I now had to shift from concentrating on Jasper's tumors to addressing his overall wellbeing; in both cases, I was moving from a focus on the negative to a focus on the positive. At that point, it seemed that Wendy had read my mind and she came up with a better idea.

She decided that, rather than forcing food upon him, she

THE PROOF IS IN THE POODLE

would create a game. If Jasper was unable to go to nose work class, the ever-determined Wendy would bring the class to him. Greg and Dr. Roberts agreed to try her plan, as far-fetched as it seemed. So, in the middle of the busy clinic, with a cat hissing from an upper level cage and a sick Jack Russell terrier watching the commotion, Wendy clicked open Jasper's steel cage door. Greg dutifully wheeled the IV stand wherever his dog took him. With an intravenous catheter and a thick red bandage still in place on Jasper's front leg, he meandered with Wendy and Greg across the room until the three of them stood in the middle of the treatment area, fluids still dripping into his bloodstream.

She took an open cardboard box, turned it over and placed the scented tin container beneath it. "Come on, Jasper," she said. "Go find it." The old golden retriever looked up with a surprised expression as everyone watched: two technicians, the veterinarian, and even the kennel cleaner in the back. For a breathless moment, Jasper showed no interest in the game. But Wendy remained steadfast in her playful, expectant command, repeating it several times. Jasper remained motionless, as if he stood at a crossroads between engaging in or withdrawing from life, a decision that everyone, animal or human, makes every moment. Every moment is a choice.

Jasper sat down beside his family, the plastic tubing of his IV line draped between them. Wendy repeated her command. "Go find

A DOG'S CHOICE

it!” she said. His nose then began to twitch with a newfound spark of life. In a few moments, it spread to his eyes and then to his tail, and then to each person in the room as he looked up at everyone. Ignoring his bandage, plastic tubes, and Greg who was awkwardly perched above him, he walked over to the box and barked with new energy. Wendy quickly offered him a bowl of boiled turkey and pumpkin, rubbing him down along his sides and ruffling his long coat against its grain, playfully pleading for Jasper to eat. He sniffed at the food as his humans held their breath. And then, to everyone’s amazement, Jasper began to eat, gaining enthusiasm with each bite, until he had finally licked his bowl clean. A wave of excitement swept over his small audience, especially Greg and Wendy.

Jasper’s appetite was renewed by the power of his fearless seeking instinct. During the previous two days in his cold sterile cage, Jasper had lost his will to live. And nose work had helped him find his own initiative in life, a force more powerful than any medicine.

Now in his sixteenth month of remission, Jasper still runs into my clinic, a dog that knows how to smile. Other clients see him in the parking lot or in the waiting room, and are forced to forget their problems. They smile, too, at the golden retriever on a mission to spread happiness.