

In Memory of Sire

Jubilee Adonis, April 4, 1999 – March 5, 2002

Sire was a healthy nearly three year old Airedale, dearly loved by his owner. He was never sick. He was weaned to the raw diet, and his owner continued the diet throughout his life. Her regular vet, an alternative DVM, was a staunch supporter of the diet.

On a Wednesday night, Sire appeared to be sick. He wouldn't eat, and he was vomiting clear liquid. He did not have any bowel movements. Concerned, his owner called her vet who told her to pick up a remedy and see how he was in the morning. By morning, he was vomiting quite a bit of clear liquid. His owner called the vet and discovered she was out of town. So the owner looked to her colleagues who referred her to what they called the best vet practice in her city. She took Sire to that practice, and during the initial exam, she mentioned that she fed the raw diet, BARF.

Sire's symptoms were definitely the symptoms of a blockage, and the vet immediately jumped to the conclusion that Sire must have a blockage of bones. She x-rayed and did ultrasound and found no sign of bones. Instead of looking for gas in the stomach, feeling to determine how sore he was and where the blockage might be (remember, things like socks, towels, plastic bags and more do not show up on x-rays or ultrasounds), she decided that since there were no bones appearing on the x-ray, Sire must have an "overwhelming bacterial infection caused by tainted meat." She admitted him to the vet hospital and put him on fluids and antibiotics.

By Saturday morning, when his owner called to tell me that Sire was sick, Sire had a high temperature and profuse bloody diarrhea. Not knowing that his initial symptoms did not include diarrhea, I assumed that the vet must be treating him correctly and that he had gastroenteritis. Saturday afternoon, the vet told the owner to take him to an emergency clinic for the weekend where he would be kept on fluids and antibiotics. This clinic followed the vet's instructions and did nothing more. No notice was taken of Sire's condition deteriorating; the owner was not allowed to visit him. When the owner picked him up on Monday morning, Sire could neither walk nor stand.

At the vet clinic, he was now tested for parvo, which came back negative. Since no amount of fluids and antibiotics were helping him and he was continuing to deteriorate, the vet decided to send him to a specialty practice for a barium series. The specialist decided not to do a barium series, but suggested exploratory surgery, explaining that Sire might not survive the surgery and that the only alternative was surgery or just watch him die. The owner chose the surgery.

At this point in time, the results of a barium series or surgery would have been the same. Sire died on the table, just as they started to look for what was wrong. He was one month short of his third birthday.

On my request, the owner ordered an autopsy. The vet found a blockage: a piece of a green towel along a length of his small intestine. Bacteria under the toweling had eaten through the walls of his small intestine, causing extreme sepsis in his abdominal cavity.

If the attending vet had not been blinded by her prejudice against a diet that she did not understand, she would have continued to look for a blockage by some material other than bones. If she had found the toweling, she could have surgically removed it, and Sire would be alive today.

Always have a back up vet: As a result of this tragedy, we now recommend (and we have followed our own recommendation) that everyone have a back up vet that they trust as much as their primary vet. We recommend that they use this vet from time to time so that the back up vet knows them, their dog, and their breed. Airedales are stoic and often don't let you know they are sick until they are really sick (and then they may just appear or act a "little off.") We feel that if the vet knows you and your dog and your dietary preferences, what you feed your dog will not enter into a diagnosis during an acute crisis. Your vets will both know that you have very healthy dogs and will remark on their good condition at every visit. Then, if you have an emergency, they will look for the real cause.

This having a back-up vet recently paid off big time for us: With Ezzie's litter on April 5, 2002, one of the puppies got stuck in the birth canal and Ezzie needed a C section to finish delivering her litter of 11. Thanks to what we learned from Sire's tragedy, we had found a back up reproduction vet. Our vet was out of town on April 5th, but the back up vet knew us and held his practice open to take care of Ezzie and her puppies. We feel that Sire saved several lives that morning.