



My Canine Hero

Pippin's Story

by Casey Walters

Pippin came from a breeder up North. She produced a couple of litters before she was sold to a man here in Christchurch, via Trademe.

Pippin lived with her prior owner for around five years before he became ill with cancer, entered hospice and then passed away. Unfortunately, he had stopped talking about Pippin and had no family in Christchurch so Pippin remained inside his dark, dirty, flat, alone, for over a month. The family that owned the flat did not know what to do with the snappy, timid little dog he had left behind, so they placed an ad on Trademe.

I was browsing through the dog listings when I was struck by a beautiful Chihuahua, I inquired with the Seller immediately. After a few conversations via email, I was surprised when she abruptly told me that she was sorry, but Pippin was a 'hopeless' case and the family didn't want to euthanize her but they were terrified by her.

My partner and I decided to take her and do what we could. We went to collect her that day. It took a while to catch her and she snarled the whole way home. I thought to myself what have I done? I have no animal training background, what do we do next?

When I met Pippin, I could see she had no self-esteem and was terrified. She did not exhibit any behaviors of a normal dog. She snapped and snarled if anyone tried to touch her, or even looked in her direction.

We groomed her, bought her a crate and new soft bedding to give her a safe place of her own. For the first week or so, I did not push her boundaries. We would get her to interact with our two other male dogs and she seemed to like being walked. It took a lot of patience and care to turn things around. Slowly, she bonded with my partner and kept watch over my interactions with our other dogs. I noticed her begin to follow me, then when I would stretch out a hand she would sniff it. Eventually, I could pat her without a snarl and finally, I was able to pick her up. She finally realized I didn't want to harm her.

Once she was somewhat settled, our attentions turned to making sure her health was in order. Pippin had no immunizations, rotten teeth, she was not de-sexed and had a mammary lump. We had to have this all removed over a couple of surgeries, with the lump, infection set in – It was a close call, but she was able to overcome the illness.

Then in May of 2015 Pippin went into serious liver failure. I was aware, for some days that she was not acting right, but I had taken her to the Vet and they had felt her organs without a whimper from her. After blood results came back at shocking levels, I was advised to rush her to the Vet to begin IV treatment. From there, so began a week of days at our regular Vet Clinic and nights at After Hours. When her eyes and gums began to turn yellow, I knew it was serious

and the Vet confirmed she was jaundice, her liver was shutting down. We were unaware at that stage, what was causing the issue. We were advised that we could press on to no avail, it could be her time. We decided we would continue, having to take out a credit card and borrowing from family, (I was Uni Student at the time and my partner, an Apprentice Mechanic), to ensure that even if we lost her, we had done all we could.

We visited Pippin at After Hours each day. She was skinny, frail and lethargic but seemed content that we were there. I would call the clinic multiple times daily for updates. At this time, she wasn't eating and going down hill. One night, as I called, after a change of meds, I was surprised to hear she was eating and had begun trying to snap at the nursing staff. We made the decision with our wonderful Vet, (Terryne Loney of Harewood Pet Doctors, Christchurch), to go through the expense of having her abdomen scanned. The scan showed a mass in the gallbladder! Pippin was booked in for surgery and our wonderful Vet was able to remove the gallstones blocking her organs.



During her recovery, I was home to give her the medication round the clock, setting alarms to wake up through the night. We stayed in together and to my amazement, she recovered. I also feel this time strengthened our bond and made her trust me fully.

I have to say, when I first met Pippin, my idea was that she was an elderly, grumpy little dog, who would probably live out the rest of her days in our house like a stranger. I intended to treat her well and make sure she would never want for anything, but I didn't think we would ever develop a close bond as I had with my other dogs. I was so very wrong!

What happened to Pippin strengthened our bond, no doubt, but also the lessons she has taught me. Pippin has taught me that animals are capable of a pure, all-consuming, reciprocal love. She trusts me, even though former humans have not treated her right and have abandoned her. She has also taught me that not all angry, feral little beasts are so on the inside, sometimes they just need that patience and understanding. I now advocate for adopting older dogs because of my experience and journey with my Pippin. She has taught me lessons about dog ownership and dog behavior that I can't learn on a course or via a book. I also advocate that you should write your pets into your Will!

Today, Pippin is my little shadow. She comes to work with me, on errands with me, to the park during lunch and sleeps curled up (snoring) on my bed. We even enter the odd Veterans Stakes together! I'm obsessed with her. I adore her and only wish we had met earlier so we could have many more years together. Pippin will be 15 this coming Anzac Day, but for as many days as we have together she will not have to worry about being abandoned, nor does she want for anything. She is the Queen of our household.

Pippin was the catalyst for our decision to found a rescue dedicated to the rehoming and rehabilitation of Chihuahuas (see: www.nzchihuahuarescue.co.nz) she is the beautiful face of our Rescue Trust