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Best Friends

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Response & Responsibility

Excerpts from recent interviews on Best Friends Radio, which features news, call-ins, interviews, and round-table discussion.

You can listen to the full interviews and other stories online at www.bestfriends.org.



Dogs and Cancer

Laurie Kaplan is the author of *Help Your Dog Fight Cancer: An Overview of Home Care Options*.

Best Friends: When you talk about “helping your dog to fight cancer,” what should be our expectations about how much longer the dog will live?

Laurie Kaplan: Well, you’ll improve your chances. It depends on what type of cancer. There are dogs who don’t make it that long. And there are lots of dogs who make it much longer. So be optimistic. Assume that your dog is going to be lucky and live longer than predicted.

My dog Bullet had lymphoma, and lymphoma is terminal. There is no cure for it. The best you can hope for is to put the dog into remission through chemotherapy, and just keep your fingers crossed that that remission lasts a long time.



B.F.: So how did Bullet do?

L.K.: The average survival time for dogs with lymphoma that go into chemo and respond to chemo is one year to 18 months. Bullet survived four years and four months in remission. And he was cancer-free when he died of kidney failure at the age of 13.

B.F.: Well, that’s a real success story. Now, you’ve put together a basic diet for dogs with cancer.

L.K.: The basic cancer diet means no carbs or low carbs. Cancer cells thrive on carbohydrates, so you don’t want to feed that. (Most of the dog foods on the market contain a lot of carbs, so they are not really the best option.) And feed high N-3 fatty acids. The reasoning behind that is that cancer cells cannot metabolize the N-3 fatty acids. So you’re feeding the dog, not the cancer.

B.F.: With Bullet, did you work with a traditional vet or a holistic one?

L.K.: Mostly with a traditional veterinarian and the medical oncologist who did Bullet’s chemo. Once or twice a year, I took him to see the holistic vet. My general practitioner and the oncology doctor didn’t know much about holistics, but they were open to it. They were always eager to hear what I was doing with diet and supplements because they wanted to pass it on to their other clients.

B.F.: Any way to tell your dog may be developing cancer?

L.K.: There are 10 signs of cancer. It’s a list that was put together by the AVMA [American Veterinary Medical Association]. You can check your dog’s body for any lumps or bumps. Lymphoma and other cancers are generally first discovered when you feel enlarged lymph nodes. If you take a child to the doctor with a sore throat, he will feel the child’s neck for enlarged lymph nodes, and they occur in the same place on dogs. They’ll feel like walnuts under the skin.

B.F.: How many of those 10 signs did you see in Bullet?

L.K.: Just one: the enlarged lymph nodes in his neck. Usually with lymphoma that’s all you see. The dog is healthy, active, eating well, no problems. All you see are these enlarged lymph nodes.

B.F.: What can we do to prevent cancer in the first place?

L.K.: The most important thing to do is spay and neuter. Mammary cancer is the second most common cancer in dogs, and the instance of it goes down drastically if the animal is spayed. Testicular cancer also goes down when you neuter a male dog.

B.F.: What about diet and general care?

L.K.: Three things: chemicals, vaccines, and particular foods. Lawn chemicals are thought to be the number one cause of lymphoma in dogs. Next, there is lots of activity in the veterinary world to sort out the protocol for how often we should vaccinate, because over-vaccination is thought to cause cancer. Annual vaccines are now thought to be too often.

And, of course, foods. You have to try to find a healthy food, or cook for your dog.

And one other thing that is very important is medical insurance

for pets. Bullet's insurance company, VPI, paid for about \$11,000 worth of his treatment.

B.F.: You've started a special fund to help dogs with cancer.

L.K.: It's called the Magic Bullet Fund. A portion of the proceeds from the book goes directly into that fund, to help people who have dogs with cancer but cannot afford treatment.

It's at www.helpyourdogfightcancer.com.

On the Streets of Asia

Pamela Constable is a Washington Post journalist who's recently returned from south Asia. She is the author of *Fragments of Grace: My Search for Meaning in the Strife of South Asia*.

Best Friends: What's it like coming back to the United States after being in Afghanistan and Pakistan and other countries?

Pamela Constable: It's always very difficult. A lot of it has to do with the excess and comfort and coming back to a society and a culture where you can do anything, you can get anything, you can buy anything, you can have anything. Everything works, people are very spoiled, people are very insular. It's hard to explain to people in a society like this just what others go through in places where life is very, very hard. It's always a shock to be reminded how much people waste here, how much choice they have, how many options.

B.F.: You're always helping animals in your travels. Tell us about Rafi, the little dog you came across who'd just been hit by a car.

P.C.: Rafi was this feisty little dog. She was hit by a taxi up in the northwest area of Pakistan. I picked her up and took her back to the capital to my veterinarian. She had a broken leg and a broken jaw, and I kept her for some months, and she got better and better. She became my dog, and I eventually brought her home. She rules the roost – it is definitely her house.

B.F.: And who's the white cat?

P.C.: Oh, that's Mom! She was also from Pakistan, a wild cat. I used to feed her in the neighborhood, and we became closer and closer. When I came back to the States, I brought her back as well.

She's incredibly independent, but when she ran into Rafi, whom I'd brought back previously, they recognized each other like old chums, and they've been inseparable ever since.



B.F.: You talk about going around with satchels of Meow Mix and food and vitamins like you're feeding all the animals in Asia! They're not really pets as we think of them here. Are they all mainly street dogs and cats?

P.C.: Yes. In countries that have wealthier professional middle classes, you will start to have the culture of pets, but in places like Afghanistan where there's no money at all, that have been destroyed by war, and where certain animals are considered unclean and there are a lot of taboos, you're fighting a multiple battle to try to get people to take an interest in them.

Unfortunately the only animals that get really good treatment in a country like that are animals that have commercial value. Either they're carrying something, they're pulling something or, most unfortunately, they are animals that are bred to fight, which includes dogs, birds of different kinds, even goats.

What people like me do in these countries is regarded at first as sort of odd by the locals. It takes time to overcome cultural taboos that are very strong. But if you spend time with people and with animals together, they can't resist. Sooner or later everybody falls prey to a sweet animal.

B.F.: You were in Afghanistan at the time of the Taliban, and you talk about how the Taliban banned dog fighting. That puts us in the uncomfortable position for a moment of thinking, well, good for them!

P.C.: Well, not only that, but they also banned drug trafficking. I mean, they actually did a number of good things, for which they never get credit, although the reason they banned dog fighting was not because it was a blood sport, but because it was a gambling sport.

B.F.: Tell us about your Animal Rescue Project.

P.C.: Well, it was just something that I really wanted to do. I'd always kept a lot of animals when I was overseas. My office in Kabul was basically a zoo, with many, many animals that I'd found in the street, stashed in different rooms and in different states of recovery from various wounds and illnesses.

So when I was getting ready to leave, I got together a team of Afghans and set up a project to treat animals that were injured or ill, and then try to find them homes.

That's been going now since September, and we've done quite well. It's pretty small scale, but it's definitely a going concern, and it's very exciting to me.

B.F.: How do you fund it?

P.C.: In the beginning, I funded it myself. Various friends and several organizations [are helping] to keep it going. I did a Christmas appeal and a spring update. And I'm going to try to do a mailing every season to people who are interested.

B.F.: What do you want people to take away from your book?

P.C.: I hope they'll gain some new insight into places that they may be afraid of, or hostile to, or vaguely curious about, and to discover that, in fact, things and people aren't all that different in strange parts of the world.

And the second thing would be that even in the worst possible conflicts and struggles, you can always find people who are kind, you can always find moments of grace, you can find small epiphanies that really do give meaning to life.

You can contact Pam Constable by e-mail at ConstablePam@hotmail.com for more details on her shelter and how you can donate.