



Garrett's Story

Written by his breeder & Owner Shirley Stanton

This is a long story, but we hope you find it worth reading. If it saves one dog and owner from going through our experience of the past three months, it will be well worth the time you took to read it.

This story is about Ch. Windwood's Heart to Heart, Garrett to his friends. Garrett is a "once in a lifetime" dog. Thirty-five years of careful breeding and sacrifice came together in that cocky brindle and white package. He finished with several Grand Sweeps, a second place in the 12-18 month brindle male class at ABC, and two majors at the Reliant Park series of shows. I talked to Ike Liotto, who handles all my dogs, about specialing Garrett and trying for the Top 20 in 2007. Into this plan came another friend, Evalyn Martin, who loves Garrett as much as I do. The three of us became a team to campaign Garrett towards this goal.

He gave us so many wonderful moments: BOB at the Dallas Boxer Club under esteemed breeder judge Dr. David Abraham, back to back BOB at the Boomer Boxer Club and Boxer Club of Oklahoma, Group One in Hattiesburg, MS, and the last BOB in Monroe, LA under Beverly Capstick with his Boxer Club of Louisiana friends cheering him on. He was in the Top 20 every month until our world came crashing down in September.

His problems started in March of 2006 with a urinary tract infection. When I took him to a vet other than

my normal one, he told me that Garrett had very enlarged tonsils. I finally got to see my vet after the round of antibiotics for the tonsils and urinary tract infection, he had no answers for the abnormally large tonsils. He just told me that boxers do not normally have this condition. It is quite common in poodles. Even though Garrett seemed well and showed in some shows that spring and summer, there was an uneasy feeling that something was not right. Then he had the infection mentioned at the end of this passage, where the joint of his left back leg was swollen. He had a fever and stayed curled in a ball. You could tell he felt really bad. See the fifth paragraph from the end.

On September 17, Ike called to say that Garrett had gotten up that morning sick and bent over in pain. He was taking him to a local vet. The night before, he was playing, ate well, and seemed fine. The local vet immediately sent Ike to LSU with Garrett, saying he might not even make the 30 minutes drive. LSU did a battery of tests, X-rays, and wanted to do an echocardiogram. He had been holtered twice with 0 VPC's and was SAS cleared by auscultation by a Houston, TX cardiologist and by echocardiogram by Dr. Kate Meur at ABC in May. You can imagine our shock when we were told that Garrett now had a grade 4/6 murmur. It just wouldn't compute with us that his heart had anything to do with his illness. The echocardiogram showed vegetative endocarditis, caused by an unknown infection. An abdominal ultrasound showed everything normal except a lesion on his spleen. His kidney levels were frightening. His urea nitrogen levels were 53. Normal is 6-25. His Creatinine level was 2.8. Normal is 0.5-1.6. He was losing protein through his kidneys at an alarming rate. How could a seemingly healthy animal win one weekend and be at death's door two weeks later?

Unfortunately, the specialists at LSU had no answers. I was two and a half hours away, so his friend Karen McCrory, who takes care of him on the road, went to visit him every day. She boiled chicken to coax his appetite. He was not eating and throwing up what little he did eat. Each day he seemed to get worse. I visited on Friday, September 21st. He was so thin, his eyes were bloodshot, and edema had made his head huge and ran down his chest and forelegs. I cried all the way home.

The LSU vet and specialists did not give us any hope throughout his stay. On September 24th, his doctor called me and said that his kidney levels were worse. He also could not keep anything down and was a very sick puppy. She said there was nothing else they could do for him. Even if they found out what was causing the infection, they would not be able to save him. He was too ill and had very little kidney function. She was asked point blank, "Are you saying it would be kinder to put him out of his misery?" She said yes. I was adamant about Garrett NOT being taken straight from ICU to be put down. I also did not want him to die at LSU. That is where he had been born by C-section three and a half years before (another nightmare in itself). Karen McCrory offered to meet me at LSU, take us to her house to spend some time, go with us to her vet to put him down, and then back to LSU for necropsy and cremation. When they brought him out to us, it was shocking to see bad he looked. He was down to 47 pounds from 67 a week before. The front part of his body was full of edema. Even as thin and sick as he looked, he was so glad to see us and his tail started wagging when he saw us. When we got to Karen's, she made a pallet on the floor for us and ran out to get him something to eat, not imagining that he would eat after what LSU had told us. Garrett and I lay on the floor on a comforter. He slept a lot. At one point he opened his eyes and saw me. A look of surprise came over his face and his tail started wagging. I will never forget that moment. He ate a hamburger patty and chicken nuggets like he was starved.

Ike came over to spend some time with his boy. We talked about the wonderful ride we had this year, cried, and said goodbye to our boy. Fifteen minutes before we had to leave for our appointment, Tina Starr called. Karen had emailed her the summary that LSU had given us. Tina begged us not to put Garrett down. It was the meds that LSU was giving him that was making him throw up and feel bad. Ike begged me to let him take him home, and he and Tina would work out a medication program with the local vet. I called my vet for advice, and he told me that a week of antibiotics was not enough to see any results. Garrett needed at least ten days to two weeks worth before giving up on him. He told me that it

was not cruel to keep Garrett alive a few more days if he was not in pain. He said we could reverse the decision not to put him down, but we could not reverse euthanasia. We cancelled the appointment, and Ike took him home. The next morning the local vet took out the catheter, and the three of them put together a program of medication for him. Ike cooked chicken and rice and fish and potatoes for Garrett and stayed home from work to take care of him. He made sure that he was drinking and got his medication. Tina, Ike, and Karen became the "G Team". A few days passed, and Garrett started eating everything in sight. Ike could not fill him up. His edema went away, and he became more energetic. After a week, he came home to me. He has been going to school with me. He has a crate in the vocational agriculture teacher's office. We have lunch together and play around in the baseball field. He has made an amazing recovery considering how sick he was.

We took him from LSU on Tuesday, September 25th and on that Friday, the vet called and said that Garrett had tested positive for Lyme disease. The other tick diseases were negative. The Bartonella tests were still pending. The next week she called again to say he was positive for Bartonella and had an active infection. That was the cause of the endocarditis.

I frantically began to research Bartonella and found that there are 15 strains, 5 of which are in the US. Which one(s) did he have? Bartonella henselae is very easily transmitted by bites, scratches, and fleas. Bartonella vinsonii is tick transmitted and often piggybacks on other tick diseases. As it happened, I had found North Carolina University with their vector borne disease laboratory, and Garrett's blood was there. They were the ones who had done the initial testing. How fortunate! He has a high titer level for Bartonella henselae, but the PCR test was negative. He has a high titer level for Bartonella vinsonii, and the PCR test was positive. It was explained that the titer level means he has been exposed and the PCR test shows active infection. The B. vinsonii very often causes endocarditis. At last we had someone who could give us advice and help us with further testing. It so happened that Dr. Ed Breitschwerdt was one of my vet's professors in vet school and they had a long talk about Garrett and these diseases. Lyme, Ehrlichia canis, and Rocky Mountain Spotted Tick Fever were the ones I knew. Once I started researching, I was horrified at how many there were and how many people I knew that had dogs with these three diseases. Bartonella was a WHOLE new world. Then a rescue of Louisiana Boxer Rescue had a rescue with Babesia, another tick borne disease that I had just learned existed. I know that I have no medical background, but I swear that we have not had these problems until the hurricanes hit Louisiana. But that is just my humble opinion.

We were advised to keep Garrett on doxycycline and amoxicillin for three months. That will end in December. In January we will do the Bartonella tests to make sure the infection is gone. He cannot take a relapse, so we have to treat this very aggressively. At this point, he looks absolutely wonderful except for a slight fullness through the flank area. At his first visit with my vet after he came home, his kidney levels were so much better that we were elated. My vet said that his murmur was much softer, probably a 2. His visit last week showed that his kidney levels have gotten a little worse, so we are putting him on a phosphate binder. It is so hard to go backwards when you have come so far. We are hoping for some quality time with this beautiful, sweet boy and to be able to collect him at some point. Right now we are just taking things a day at a time.

Of course when something like this happens, you rack your brain trying to think...how did this happen... when did this happen...could I have prevented this??? The answers to these questions are still beyond our reach. The only thing I can come up with is the possibility that this started in September of 2006. Garrett had a severe infection: high fever, stiff gait, swollen joints, no appetite, etc. I didn't get to see my regular vet. The vet that I saw was very concerned about Garrett. She told me that it was a really bad infection and put him on Baytril. She drew blood to send to the lab. I asked her at that point to test for tick diseases, and she said that she would. When I took him back for a follow up, I asked about the tick titers from a different vet. She told me that the tick diseases had not been test for and the Baytril would

skew any tests done now. I spent the rest of the year feeling that something was not right with Garrett. Tina Starr helped me test for Ehrlichia and Rocky Mountain Spotted Tick Fever at a later date but they were negative.

I could become very bitter thinking that Garrett might be okay if they had sent the blood for tick tests, but the vets all tell me that there is no Lyme disease here. They probably would not have tested for that anyway. I can't change the past. BUT I can warn people like myself so that no dog or owner has to go through what we have these last months. If you have a gut feeling that something is wrong with your dog, don't let them brush you off. One of the sites that I found was <http://www.vintagegoldens.com/tick.htm> . She has a very profound statement in her first two paragraphs. Don't hesitate to have your vet test for tick borne diseases, even if they roll their eyes at you. It is better to be safe than sorry. These are devastating diseases and **WILL KILL YOUR DOG**. Also, collect your dog while they are young. You never know when something is going to happen to him as he gets older. If he doesn't pass health tests later, you can always destroy the semen.

It is still hard to believe that this has happened to Garrett. I have waited for him all my life. Thirty five years of breeding and sacrifice came together in my beautiful, sweet boy. This has been a humbling experience. Mother Nature can pull the rug from under us any time. **NO ONE** ever saw a tick on him. We took the very best care of him. We all love this dog. He gave 100% to us, I'm sure many time when he didn't feel like it. I will humbly do my very best for him for the rest of his life, however long that may be. We will just love him each day we have him and thank God for every minute that we have left with him, be it days, months, or years!!!!

Garrett's story would not be complete without thanking all the wonderful boxer friends who said prayers for him and sent encouraging messages every day. One of the friends even wanted to do a kidney transplant for Garrett. I think he would have offered his own if they would have done the surgery. Thank you is such a small thing to say to people who have been your backbone through a nightmare. I have had to put down dear boxer friends in the past alone. Having Tina, Karen, Ike, and all our wonderful friends made such an incredible difference.

So, this is Garrett's story. Please learn from his experience as we have. Test your dogs. Those ticks are so tiny and fall off after a blood meal. You may never see them, as it happened with us.

Sadly, Garrett lost his brave battle on Thanksgiving night 2007. Another wonderful dog taken too early.....