

## The Story of Odie

From Colleen Fessler

In 2003 my husband Paul and I had to put down both of our dogs. One was a Newf/Lab that we acquired as an owner-surrender in 1995. The other was a Newf that we adopted from the Newfoundland Club of Northern California in '96. Needless to say, 2003 was a tough year for us. The boys went within 4 months of each other. We didn't think we were ready to get another dog but we thought we could handle fostering for NCNC rescue.

In January 2004 Nancy Bynes called, she wanted us to foster a 4 year old neutered male named Six who had been abandoned. Nancy and I made arrangements for the 2½ hour drive to pick him up. As I hung up the phone I thought "Six??? Who would name a dog Six?"

A friend of Six's owner was holding him for us. We had little trouble finding her house. Susan breeds Golden Retrievers. When we pulled up to her place, Nancy said "Oh My God." There on the front lawn was a sight that brought tears to our eyes. Susan was throwing a ball for 5 dogs. 4 beautiful Golden Retrievers went romping after it, gleefully barking and nipping at each other. Coming up from behind came this huge lumbering, skinny, bald dog. He was so weak and uncoordinated that he had trouble staying on his feet. By the time the other dogs reached the ball, Six had covered less than half the distance. He turned around, went back to Susan and leaned his huge head against her hip, desperate for her attention. Nancy and I blinked our tears away, smiled and introduced ourselves.

Susan informed us that Six's owner was in the county jail for his 3rd D.U.I. that year. The dog was left in his apartment alone for 10 days. We think someone came and fed him once. When she took him out of there, the apartment reeked of animal waste and Six had drunk all of the water out of the toilet. His eyes were gooey, the skin surrounding his toenails was infected and swollen and his pads were thin as eggshells. All of his glands were about the size of large eggs. Luckily, Susan was able to acquire his vet records. We learned that for most of Six's life, he had been to the vet frequently for scratching and hair loss. The notes showed that the vet's office had to call the owner repeatedly to come pick up medications, keep follow-up appointments, etc., none of which happened. It was obvious to all of us that the owner's alcohol addiction had an impact on his ability to care for Six. This dog is 30" tall. At one time he was a healthy 157lbs. The day he came into rescue he weighed 112lbs. Almost every bone in his body was visible. He lost so much weight that the skin under his ribcage hung in loose folds. When he trotted or ran we could hear those folds slapping together. Even though he had already been bathed several times he had yeast all over his body and the stench was hard to take.

Overwhelmed by how sick this huge sweet dog was, we stopped by Dr. Gaby Cohen's clinic on our way home. She flushed his ears, drew blood, aspirated one of his lymph glands and took skin scrapings. Six just laid there through all of the poking and prodding. We left with antibiotics, medicated shampoo and just hoped that we were doing the right thing for this guy.

As soon as I got home, Paul met us in the driveway. He was so excited about having another Newf in the house. I opened up the camper shell and Paul's smile vanished as soon as he saw Six. We unloaded him and escorted him into the house, Paul found a big thick comforter for him to rest on, and I sat down next to him. Six laid his head on my shoulder. Soon his head got heavy and I could hear him softly snoring. Paul and I made an oath that his worst days were over.

It didn't take long for us to realize that Six was never leaving our home. It was a time for a name change. We decided on "Odie", not after the cartoon character, but short for "Odoriferous". He took to his new name quickly, leaving behind at least one reminder of his previous life.

I started by feeding him three times a day with a high quality dog food. His ears needed to be flushed twice a day, same thing for eye drops and oral medications. He had to be bathed at least twice a week. Not only did he start to smell after only a couple of days but he would scratch and chew himself until he cried.

Our own vet, Dr. Komenick, did more skin tests and requested copies of his lab results. We were not surprised to find out that he was anemic.

Besides his physical problems, Odie was a mess emotionally. Over the weeks and months that followed we had to deal with his abandonment issues and they were huge. He had to follow us everywhere. If we went to the bathroom and closed the door, or out into the garage he would panic. He would start pacing, panting heavily and

drooling. His body heat would go up and his skin would turn bright red. If he was asleep and I left the room, he would wake up immediately and come looking for me. I knew he needed to sleep so every day around noon Odie and I had nap time. I would grab a book or turn on the T.V. and not get up for an hour. Eventually I was able to start leaving the house without him. I started at 5 minute intervals and slowly worked up.

I started his walks the same way. It was heartbreaking to watch him. Odie didn't seem to know what to do on a walk. He didn't sniff anything or urinate; he just walked with his head drooping. Thank God for my parents' happy, carefree little Sheltie. She really taught Odie what walks were for. He would hear us gushing praise on her for going potty on these walks and eventually he put the two together. He also wasn't used to being out in the yard. He didn't know how to play with people or relate to other dogs. Nancy brought her wonderful Newf bitch Stella over for extended visits. At first, he would try to chase her but he was so weak and uncoordinated he would simply trip and fall over. Stella is a terrible flirt and in time, with her egging him on, he learned to play. Paul and I taught him to retrieve and started taking him to the river so he could learn to swim.

People were another matter. They scared him, especially men carrying things. We were especially shocked by this behavior one morning at home. Paul was outside clearing a section of our yard for landscaping. He came to the sliding glass door balancing a shovel across his shoulders. Odie went nuts barking and growling. He was shaking so bad we could hear his teeth chatter from across the room. Paul put the shovel down and Odie immediately came over to him. After a few minutes of petting and talking to him, Paul picked up the shovel. Again, Odie took off for the far corner of the room shaking like a leaf. What in the world had this poor dog gone through?

Taking Odie out in public was heartbreaking. I always bathed him to cut down on the odor but the baths did nothing for his appearance. People would see us coming and intentionally cross the street to avoid any type of contact. We saw people take one look at him and pull their children in a different direction. Paul got angry when he overheard two teens whispering "Did you see that dog? He's got mange".

Then there were the dirty looks. I wanted to scream, " Don't look at me like that. I didn't do this to him!" We found out that the Newfoundland Club of Southern California was selling really cool "Newf Rescue" merchandise. I bought 4 tees and 2 sweatshirts, so that I could wear something "rescue-y" when I took Odie out in public. It really helped. The thing that I wanted most for this dog is to get the human touch and acceptance that he craved and deserved. People still didn't want to touch him and I couldn't blame them. But at least at this point they weren't crossing the street to avoid him.

Back at home, we had to quit kidding ourselves. Odie's scratching was not improving. Some days were better than others, but for the most part he was licking and scratching all of the time.

Even though I bathed him twice a week, he still stunk so bad that you could smell him way before you could see him. I was hoping that as his immune system strengthened, the rash, itching and yeast would lessen. It wasn't happening and he was still miserable. So I started researching yeast and allergies on the internet.

I talked to tons of people in the NCNC and all over the United States. I bought a copy of "The Holistic Guide to a Healthy Dog" by Wendy Volhard. This book became my bible and was the turning point for Odie. As far as we could tell through allergy testing and food elimination trials, he was allergic to all grains, and dust mites. We had to completely take him off all prepared kibble and begin cooking home meals. I had to customize the diet in the book since he couldn't have grain. I also had to cook his meat for him. With his compromised immune system, I wasn't about to risk feeding him raw.

I also talked to three Holistic Vets on the East Coast to help customize this diet. He gets beef or turkey; leafy greens, carrots, yogurt, yams and supplements every meal. Soon his itching subsided to something tolerable and the yeast stopped moving around his body. It was mainly under his chin and tail. His hair started growing in at a better rate. I tried a holistic supplement called para-yeast and for periods of time, it clears up his skin and odor completely. Unfortunately, because his case is so extreme, it comes back. We're probably going to be on "yeast alert" for the rest of his life. When it flares up, he sneaks off to other areas in the house to scratch.

Several months after Odie came to live with us, Nancy got a call from Susan, the lady with the Golden. She wanted to know how Odie was doing. Nancy told her things were looking up. At that point, he was up to about 125 lbs and his hair was growing but he was still itched and smelled. Susan told Nancy that the previous owner had been released from jail and was asking about Six. Nancy and I went around and around about this. Even though NCNC had a signed transfer agreement and legally owned Odie, I was very uncomfortable about any contact with

his previous owner. I used to work in the same jail that he had been incarcerated in. I knew of him and I worried that this might be the first step in trying to steal his dog back. We finally agreed to send "before and after" pictures to Susan. Nancy also enclosed a powerful note that basically (and politely) said please help yourself to a better life before you ever think of getting another dog. She dropped it in the mail.

A couple of week's later Nancy called me. "Can you believe this?" she said. She received another call from Susan. The photos arrived but when she tried for several days to call the old owner, he never answered the phone. Worried, she called his Probation Officer. The P.O. had not heard from him either, so he sent a patrol car out to his apartment. They found him dead. He had died of alcohol poisoning. The Medical Examiner estimated he had been dead about a week before he was found. Wow, how ironic that they found him the same way he had left his dog, alone in an apartment. And how ironic that our pictures of his ex-dog is the reason that they found him?

Odie is now on medications for his yeast and allergies and they seem to be under control. He is enjoying a more normal life, has his circle of "buddies" that he plays with and loves his home cooked meals. A few weeks ago my neighbor Liz and I were walking Odie and her Giant Schnauzer, Campbell, as we often did. I noticed Liz had started to cry. Alarmed I asked what was wrong. She replied "Nothing. I was just thinking about how sick Odie was when you got him". I told her "He's going to be fine, look how far he has come". She sniffed "It's not that. I know how much better he is, he holds his head up proudly, and he runs! He never used to. And it's the way he looks at you. He loves you so much. I'm crying because I'm so happy for him, I never thought he would pull through and be so happy".

The best part of all of this for me was taking Odie to the NCA National Specialty in Monterey. I was worried that he would be regarded as some kind of freak among all those beautiful show dogs. I couldn't have been more wrong. Everyone we met welcomed him with open arms. People got down to eye level with him, petted, hugged, stroked and kissed him. Odie, of course, slobbered them right back. No one grabbed their kids and crossed the street, No one crinkled their nose in distaste or stepped back so they wouldn't have to pet him. Odie got the acceptance that he so richly deserves.