

OUT OF THE BLUE

A Story about a Bearded Collie's SLO Journey

Headlines Rhapsody in Blue, NAJ, OA, HTD-1, HT, PT, HSAs, HIAs - aka BlueBerry

By Barbara Claxton

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BlueBerry came into my life when she was 9 months old and immediately became my teacher. She and I needed a way to bond and agility and herding were suggested as a way to form that bond of love and friendship. So, I was willing to try a little bit of each.

Well, BlueBerry had different ideas and jump forward a few years and you will find us going to weekly agility classes and weekend agility trials and herding practice 2 to 3 times a week and traveling to all kinds of places for herding trials and in the process building a bond of love and friendship that is deep and strong.

In September of 2003 BlueBerry was 7 years old. Around this time she became what I thought at the time was very independent about taking directions in herding. She wanted to go only to the right and not to the left. I thought this was just another way of her pointing out that she had the generations of herding genes not me; still at the time I thought it was strange.

We went with a group of Beardie people to a herding clinic for a weekend and she worked great except for this tendency to try to work all the sheep from the right only. Again I attributed this to her independent thinking.

Shortly after our return as she was jumping out of the van for our morning walk I immediately noticed that her left front paw was all bloody as she reached the ground. In looking I could see she had pulled out a nail and immediately headed to the Vets. Our usual Vet was not in but another Vet cleaned it and bandaged it and we both thought she must have pulled it on something. But...something was nagging in the back of my mind about something I had read recently about Beardie Nail disease, but it was a one time only event so I didn't worry about it. After 10 days of recouping from the nail incident she seemed to be walking fine so we went on with our training. We went to Southern California to practice for a Herding Trial and I thought I could see a bit of a limp but couldn't be sure.

We returned home and the following week we drove the 2-1/2 hour trip to our herding practice. When I opened the back of the van there was blood everywhere and her rear paw was soaked in blood. I couldn't imagine what could have happened with all the blood; on examining her paw I could see it was not cut but she was bleeding from the nails.

I immediately called my Vet and drove the 2-1/2 hours back directly to his office. On the way I kept trying to think what I had read about Beardie nail disease and where I had read it...then it came to me...on the Beardie Health page (www.beaconforhealth.org) they had just done a survey of nail disease in Beardies and that's where I had read about a disease called SLO. We limped into the Vet's office and I told Dr. Joe what I suspected. He examined her nails and got out his medical book that described SLO along with photos of affected nails. We were both convinced 99% that Blue had SLO. He had not seen a case in 12 years.

SLO is Symmetrical Lupoid Onychodystrophy a disease which can cause severe claw problems in otherwise apparently healthy dogs. It is probably autoimmune in nature. It is characterized by the loss of claws from more than one paw --- eventually all claws may be lost. Other symptoms are receding quicks, secondary infections, claw splitting, pain, distorted/twisted claws and lameness. BlueBerry would eventually have all of these symptoms.

The good news we found out was that it was treatable and there was a good chance that it would go into remission and she would be normal and out of pain ...BUT...and it was a BIG BUT...it would take time. We started her on the recommended medications - Tetracycline, Niacinamide (Vitamin B3) and high doses of EFAs (essential fatty acids). A biopsy is usually suggested to determine if it really is SLO but the side effects of the biopsy can be so painful my Vet suggested we just try the medications and if she responded we'd know that's what it is...so we did that. (The biopsy requires removing the last bone in the digit and submitting it for pathology. For this reason few owners choose to submit their dog to biopsy, and diagnosis is presumptive based on response to therapy.)

Now looking back I was able to understand that she wasn't being stubborn by not going to the left but that going in that direction caused her pain...so those first signs in early September became very apparent at the time of diagnosis which was the beginning of December.

If I had not found the SLO support list on the internet I do not know how I could have gotten through those next months. Even though we started all the medications things got much worse. The people on the SLO List assured me that that's the way the disease works...by the time you diagnose it the disease is well on its way and will get worse before the medications take hold and start the healing process. I found that SLO can occur anywhere in the world, and if there can be a plus to all this I made some new friends through our shared experience.

In mid-December so many nails were cracked with bleeding quicks that my Vet suggested we cut them all back at once so she would not constantly be in pain waiting for each one to fall off. We went ahead and did this but the bleeding was so bad we had to bandage her front paws. By this time she was totally lame. I carried her from room to room and outside for potty. She was depressed and too sick to play. She walked a little better when the bandages were removed but I still had to lift her in and out of the van.

We followed up with a Dermatologist at the University Hospital who agreed with what we were doing, but put Blue on a second antibiotic to treat a secondary infection.

She lost lots of weight because she did not want to eat. There was no agility and there was no herding. She loves to herd her sheep with a passion and it broke my heart when we would drive to practice for my other Beardie and Blue was too sick to even want to get out of the van. In the evening I would bath her paws in a special solution to relieve the pain. We would sit on the kitchen floor while I held a paw in the solution and cried and she would lick my tears --- quite a sight we were.

Then slowly one day she wanted to get out of the van when we were at herding practice and go to look at the sheep. And then slowly one day she took off after my other Beardie and wanted to play, and one day

she went outside and on her own jumped over an agility jump then came back to me for a treat while telling me she was feeling better and wanted us to get busy.

BlueBerry was back...so from those first signs in early September 2003 to those healthy nails and a happy Bearded Collie in mid-April 2004 we took a journey together we will never forget. It has brought us closer and Blue is more loving to me then she has ever been.

At our Regional Specialty in April 2004 she was well enough to participate in the Herding Trial though we didn't qualify due to lack of practice and her feeling "too good" and being "full of herself" and too bossy with the sheep. We got to participate in agility and she got her Open Standard Title with a First Place.



4th Annual Bearded Collie Regional Specialty
Dixon, CA - USA
Agility Class

Blueberry
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American Kennel Club
April 15, 2004

[Signature] 2004

She went on that year to get her Herding Intermediate Title with placement at two of those trials a 3rd Place and then a 5th Place at the Bearded Collie Club of America Herding Trial in Ft. Collins in October 2004. Also in 2004 she finished #4 Intermediate Herding Bearded Collie.

As I said in the beginning BlueBerry is my teacher --- thru SLO she taught me courage and patience and determination and that when the pain is gone forget about it and go play.

(Note: Blueberry passed away at the age of 15 from metastatic cancer, probably from the spleen.)