

**Roxy and Cancer**  
**By Rita Miller**



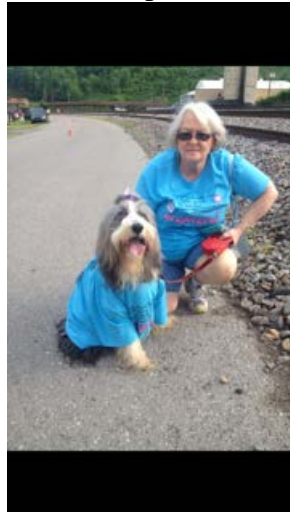
Roxy and Friend at Local Show in 2012

I had never heard of a Bearded Collie until I got Pearl and learned she could be a Beardie. We had 9 years together with lots of good and bad times. Pearl had issues from day one but that didn't matter - I loved her and looked over her faults. She died in August 2009 from Babesiosis and complications due to a tick bite.

Pearl's death left an empty void in my life as by then I was hooked on Beardies. I began the search for another and filled out an application for Rescue. I was given someone's name and phone number; she had a rescue dog that needed to be spayed and medically cleared first. Finally I picked up Roxy on November 22, 2009; it was my deceased mother's birthday and what a way to celebrate. We decided to meet half way on the WV/Ohio border at a KMart. What a day of mixed emotions, happy, sad, scared, excited all in one. When I got to see Roxy, she gave me a big lick; she seemed ok with us and was happy to get in my car for trip to her forever home.

When I called to transfer Roxy's microchip to me, her number was listed as a cat. I had to get the chip's number verified; we learned that shelter had swapped her number and a cat's number. So we laugh and say Roxy has an alias as a cat.

Behaviorally Roxy was timid, not a big eater, and rarely a counter surfer (and then for chocolate). When she arrived, she was very thin and I needed to hand feed her as it was the only way to get her to eat. She loves to go for a car ride; she knows the difference in my clothing - if I'm dressed for work she pays no attention when I leave. If not in work clothes, she watches my every move and will head for the car to be first in. She's been in local pet shows, parades, and other community activities including a water stop for the local Marathon.



Roxy and Rita on the Marathon Path

Roxy never was sick except for an occasional ear infection though I noticed she would not let me fool with her ears or her mouth. If I tried to open her mouth or mess with her ears she would snap at me and act like it hurt. So I learned not to force her to open her mouth. Each year my vet would clean her teeth and I would remind him about her mouth and ask him to check and make sure everything looked alright; I was told it was.

Around October 2012 Roxy's left eye got red and looked inflamed. I took her to my vet who gave her eye drops for conjunctivitis. It improved but then flared up again. We tried several rounds of eye drops. Sometimes the eye pressure was up so that was treated to. Around December a lesion appeared on the eye. I had noticed that Roxy was snoring more and breathing sounded like she was snorting. The vet thought this was just an age thing.

When the lesion appeared I wanted a second opinion. Treatment was a debridement on two separate visits and a grid keratotomy. Although the lesion responded well to treatment, the redness returned. Different eye drops were tried and sometimes the eye pressure was high and that was treated.

In March 2013 Roxy was at my local vet for yearly teeth cleaning. I asked them to check her mouth and they thought there was an abscess in the back area. She was given another antibiotic. My focus was mostly on the eye treatments and I didn't give much thought to the mouth abscess. It seemed with all the antibiotics for the eyes, the abscess would have cleared up though.

I arranged for a second opinion at Ohio State in late April. The examining vet was not the one originally scheduled as we'd been late due to bad traffic. I was disappointed and did not feel the vet was listening to what I was telling him. He said she was having a reaction to all the previous

meds so he prescribed a steroid eye drop and oral antibiotic. I did followup with the local vet because it was a 5 hr drive one way to the consultant. Several phone calls between vets changed treatments that didn't help; steroids caused diarrhea. With no improvement we were back to Ohio State and a different consultant by early June.

He was very concerned with the swelling around the eye and the red area in her mouth. Then the consultant mentioned she could have a retro bulbar orbital tumor which caused pressure on the eye resulting in the longstanding swelling and redness. He also told me if his suspicion was correct it would be malignant. I asked how would we know for sure; the answer was a CT scan. I told him about her snoring and snorting. He got down on his knees and put her nose near his cheek and closed off one nostril at a time. He told me that he felt the air supply in the right nostril was decreased. Chest xray and lab work were normal; treatment options for cancer were discussed. We drove home.

That drive was very difficult. I had thought that it could be serious if she had to lose her eye, but if it had to be, so be it. But CANCER. I felt guilty too that if chemo or radiation could help and I could not give it to her (this was a physical impossibility given that I work M-F and the treatment facilities were a long drive away and treatment would be frequent), I was being unfair. I shed so many tears trying to decide what to do and what would be best for her.

A week or so later, the CT was done after repeating the lab work. After the procedure the vet came out to discuss the findings. It was worse than thought. The tumor was not behind the eye but covered most of the right jaw area. A biopsy was done; the results (later) suggested a mesenchymal cancer. We looked again at the CT Scan which showed how big the tumor was and what areas was involved. He told me the tumor had destroyed part of her jaw bone and that he felt the tumor was what was holding the jaw together. The tumor was invading area under the eye and that is what is causing the eye to look swollen and bulge. The nostril is also being blocked and this is causing some breathing issues on that side of the nose.

He also discussed chemo and radiation again. But this time he told me it would only buy her a few weeks. When I ask him if it was his dog would he do it, told me no. He also mentioned surgery but from the size of the tumor she would be so disfigured and they still could not be sure that they could get all the cancer. At this point my only option is providing her with palliative care. Make her as happy and comfortable as I can. Keep her pain free and when the time comes I have a tough decision to make. Medications were prescribed and home we went.

At the end of July Roxy has kept her weight up well; she takes 5mg of prednisone daily, and ¼ tramadol twice a day. We walk ½ to ¾ mile each morning before I go to work and each evening. Roxy continues to hold her leash in her mouth so the jaw/mouth pain must not be too great.

I find the eye is more puffy and this really scares me because I don't know what to expect with that. Her nose breathing is harder but she still does what she wants. I make sure that she eats often and whatever she enjoys. She doesn't like grooming at home now so I've taken her to the regular groomer to help; when I picked her up he told me while bathing her he had a hard time not crying. This meant a lot to hear him say this. I feel he is a very compassionate person and

that is one reason I trust my dog to him for grooming. I will stop our story at this time and count my blessings for each day that I have her. White light and prayers will be appreciated.

Late August Roxy is on the same medications, still goes for walks, sleeps more, and is mostly fed by hand.



August - Roxy in Trimmed Coat (the eye/jaw issue is barely visible)



Roxy in September – right eye is very red

Late September Roxy still goes for walks; the jaw pain has increased and her pain medication has been upped to help.