

Greta, The Remarkable Radiologist

Jim and Carol had two wonderful miniature schnauzers, Greta and Heidi. They had a set of larger dogs in their younger years, but as they aged, Jim's health had been declining, and he was having a harder time walking the larger dogs. Once the two labrador retrievers had passed due to old age, the older couple looked around for dogs that would both protect them but would also be easier to control out walking. They were grieving for Sassy who passed shortly after Nicky did, likely from grief, as well.

Their friends all had suggestions from small dogs like chihuahuas, Yorkshire terriers or a teacup dog, but none of the small breeds appealed to them. Since Jim tended to fall, the smaller dogs were also a trip concern for them since they were both rather tall and both were wearing bi-focal lenses by this time.

Jim was not necessarily a dog person but was accustomed to having the dogs at home. Carol loved her dogs and had two dogs at a time before he even met Jim and felt much safer, as Jim used to travel frequently, leaving her home alone. Nicky, one of the black labs that they had before, was very protective and was one of the reasons that Carol felt secure when Jim was away. One night that Jim came home from one of his business trips after Carol and the dogs were asleep, as he carefully, quietly crept up the stairs, Nicky wanted to stop the "attacker," She leapt to meet him at the top of the stairs. She was in mid-air when she recognized Jim, but she couldn't stop herself and they both toppled down the stairs backward. Thank goodness, Jim appreciated that Nicky would have stopped anyone coming to harm Carol.

As they looked for medium-sized dogs, reviewing cocker spaniels and similar sized breeds, Carol remembered her beloved Duffy growing up, who was a beagle. Jim did not like the idea of the beagle because their bark was very loud. Looking through the newspaper looking at dogs that were available, they chose miniature schnauzers for their inclination to be close to only two people; their tendency to be very protective, but not aggressive; their bark that would warn anyone trying to enter the house that there was a serious dog there, yet not the more piercing bark of the beagle; and the size would be just right.

The girls grew in loving home and were just ideal for their new parents. Greta took to Carol and Heidi, to Jim. Everything seems ideal with the four. Jim and Carol each had a Lazy-Boy recliner in their family room, and Greta fit right next to Carol and Heidi next to Jim. This was their every night ideal. Unfortunately, just after the girls' first birthday, Greta became very ill, and they almost lost her. The veterinarian diagnosed pancreatitis and kept Greta at his office to treat and monitor her for several days. When he called Carol on the third day, the news was not good. Greta was not responding well and was homesick on top of being ill. He recommended taking Greta to the veterinary school at Cornell University to see if they could heal her. Since Jim and Carol lived in Rochester, New York, Cornell was ninety miles away.

They picked Greta up from the veterinarian's office and rushed her to Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine. The veterinarian confirmed that Greta had pancreatitis and that he was not in good shape. They did not offer a positive outcome, but they would do their best to save her and return her to health. Carol cried all the way home. She loved Greta so dearly.

After six days, Cornell reached out to Carol with fantastic news. Greta's condition had greatly improved, and they believed that she was going to be well. They could pick Greta up the next day, but with a list of things that she could no longer eat. Carol and Jim were ecstatic and rushed to pick Greta up and bring their sweet dog home. Heidi was elated to see her sister back at home, as well. After some adjustments, including changing their dog food, things settled back down, and life was as normal as it could be.

Carol was a Registered Nurse and Jim was a Managing Salesman with a large territory. With they were months from Jim's retirement, he suffered a catastrophic stroke and could not return to work. Thank goodness, Carol had plenty of experience working with stroke patients, but it certainly was traumatic for her to have her husband being the patient. The girls both got much more protective and attentive to Jim and Heidi followed him everywhere he went in the house. For a while, he was not able to walk well and couldn't walk the dogs, which was his twice-daily routine.

Jim re-learned to read, talk and walk over the next year and a half, but things settled back into their new "normal" life. Carol extended her retirement dates and Jim had to adjust to life at home. He had been a Mason for many years, but traveling for work had slowed him down in being a Mason. He spent time working as a Mason helping the homeless and grew into a role as a Shriner, which he enjoyed tremendously.

Carol had needed to have mammograms every six months for many years. Both her mother and her mother's mother died from breast cancer and her mother's sister had a total mastectomy. Every time that Carol had a mammogram, she held her breath until she got the results. About 6 years after Jim's stroke, Carol got a call from her doctor that she needed to come in for an ultrasound of her breasts after "something odd" on her mammogram on right breast.

As anyone would, Carol was a wreck until she finally got into the office for the ultrasound and her anxiety escalated until she heard the results. To her great relief, the doctor's call told her that everything was fine. Unfortunately, Carol had a suspicion that something was, indeed, wrong, but she didn't find anything by doing self-examinations, so she would have to wait until her next mammogram four months away.

Greta had always been close to Carol, but Carol did notice that Greta was cuddling more and laying in her lap more. What came to Carol's mind was that something may be wrong with Greta. She and Jim took the girls to their regular veterinary checkups, and there was no sign of anything wrong with either dog.

The four months dragged for both Jim and Carol for her next mammogram. They were both on pins and needles to get the results. The results were liberating for them both. The doctor said that the radiologist reported nothing concerning on the mammogram. Even with the results, Carol had a nagging doubt about the results and felt within her that there was cancer in one of her breasts, she just couldn't prove it.

After this mammogram, Greta began to follow Carol everywhere she went, in the house and outside. When Jim and Carol would sit out on the patio, the dogs usually ran around and played with each other. Now, Greta would sit at Carol's feet and would follow her inside to the bathroom, then back outside to sit at her feet again. Once Jim and Carol would settle in for the evening in the family room, both dogs would sit by their person in the Lazy Boy chairs, but Greta began to stiff around Carol's right breast on the side. Carol would pet Greta and tell her to settle down and lay down beside her, but Greta was insistent.

A few more weeks had passed, and Greta had started to push her nose into a specific spot on Carol's right breast, just along the outside. One evening when Greta was doing this, Carol got a sharp pain where Greta was digging with her nose. She did another self-examination when they went into bed, but she did not feel anything in her breast or her finger, and she reminded herself that the radiologist found nothing. Carol was questioning what may be going on, but forced herself to remain calm and reassured by her doctor's report.

Within a few more days, Greta was absolutely adamant that she needed to get into Carol's breast in the exact same spot on her breast. She began digging with her paw. Carol felt a very strong pain and it felt as though something hard was inside her breast. She felt hot tears of pain, anger and worry. First thing the next morning, Carol called her gynecologist's office for an emergency appointment. This was on a Thursday morning, but they could not get her an appointment until the following Tuesday afternoon.

After getting off of the phone with the doctor's office, since Greta had pointed out the spot, Carol again did a self-examination and did feel a lump in her right breast. Jim heard her crying in the bathroom and came in to discover what Carol had found. Together, they thanked and loved on Greta as they were outraged with the mammogram results that failed to diagnose the lump.

Having heavy hearts all weekend, Jim went with Carol to the doctor's office. The doctor, herself, felt the lump and immediately called for another ultrasound. Both Carol and the doctor insisted that another radiologist read the results and found the lump. The doctor immediately called for a biopsy. The doctor, Carol and Jim were all determined to get to the bottom of this lump right away and to start taking care of it instantly.

The lump was, indeed, breast cancer. One of Carol's lymph nodes under the arm had the beginnings of the cancer there, as well. However, due to Greta's insistence, Carol had a positive outcome. She has more concerns going forward about the possibility of finding

additional tumors, but she knows that with Greta around, she'll know sooner and have the best possible chance of surviving.