

BONES !!

Rebecca Hamilton



Kalina
In her glory and after surgery



After reading an article in the December 2002 edition of National DOG titled "Give a Dog a Bone? No!", I would like to share an experience with you.

In October I can extremely close to losing my Samoyed bitch "Kalina". I have fed raw lamb necks twice a week for the last five years, I used to feed lamb shanks but after seeing how they splinter I decided lamb necks would be safer, how wrong I was.

It was a Tuesday night and I gave my three Sammys their bones as usual. After chewing for an hour "Kalina" finished her bone. She seemed fine. Early the next morning I went out to walk the dogs, Kalina did not look well, she was quite depressed and seemed lethargic. I knew something was up and rushed her to the vet.

My vet examined her, he said her bowel felt very hard, she was probably constipated. They treated her for that and hoped she would pass something. By 6:00pm that night she had used her bowels but not enough, it was decided that she would stay in overnight. Her temperature was normal so it was felt no x-rays were necessary just yet. The vet phoned me early the next morning, Kalina had vomited when they had fed her the night before and she had not used her bowels, it was now time to x-ray. The x-ray revealed no bone obstruction, she was just severely constipated. By the end of the day I was allowed to take her home as she was beginning to toilet normally and was not vomiting anymore. She had to be fed very soft food but I thought within a few days she would be back to normal. She had daily check-ups, her bowel remained soft, she was going to the toilet but she still seemed uncomfortable after eating and would pant for a few minutes after her meal. At this stage I had seen three different vets and they all assumed she was just sore from the constipation.

By Sunday night Kalina had begun to vomit again, she could only get through a small amount of food before turning away from the bowl, she began panting and hunched herself up (she looked roach backed). I rushed her to the nearest emergency centre. She looked miserable but was able to walk into the clinic. The vet that treated her gave her an examination, she was not constipated, her gums were pink and her heart-rate was good. Her temperature had risen to 40 degree, we assumed she was developing an infection, the vet suggested that I could leave her overnight and do some bloodwork but she wasn't critical. She was given an antibiotic injection and I decided to take her home and take her to my vet in the morning.

I spoke to my vet the following morning, he said her temperature was too high and something else must be wrong,

she should have been better by now. I dropped Kalina off, blood tests were performed, they showed an elevated white blood cell count but not much else. She had been ill for five days and by this stage she had developed breathing difficulties. A chest x-ray was taken, it revealed a piece of bone lodged in her oesophagus, this bone was pressing against her heart. If it was left there she would die, the only choice was to perform an endoscope and try to flush the bone into her stomach then operate or if possible pull it out back up the oesophagus. It was an extremely risky procedure, one slip the wrong way and the bone could puncture her heart.

The vets were unable to remove the bone, it was so far down her oesophagus they were unable to reach it, they tried a few different procedures but the bone was firmly lodged there. There was no more they could do.

The only choice now was to take Kalina to the University of Melbourne Veterinary Hospital in Werribee, it was hoped that they would have more specialised equipment to remove it. The bone had been there for five days, pressing against her heart I decided to take her to Werribee immediately. It was 8:00pm at night when we arrived and luckily there were staff available who were experienced in this sort of emergency.

The vet on duty examined Kalina, they told me she was coping very well for how sick she really was, if their endoscope didn't work she would have to go to surgery. It could end up very expensive and she may not survive, I felt I had very little choice but try to save her. An hour later the vet rang, they had the same problem as my vet, they could see the bone but not reach it, the only option now was surgery.

The surgery involved going through the chest, there would be a huge risk of infection after surgery if she made it that far. I decided to operate, an hour into surgery the vet rang, they had reached the bone but the oesophagus was badly damaged, it would cost between \$3000 to \$4000 to repair the oesophagus and her chances of survival were only thirty per cent. It was devastating news, I did not have time to really consider what I would do, she was on the operating table and they needed an immediate answer. If I euthanised her I would still have a \$3000 bill to pay, I decided to give her every chance and told them to continue.

The surgery took three hours, it took a specialist to repair

the oesophagus and she needed to have a gastric tube inserted into her stomach. I stayed up half the night waiting for the vet to call, by 5:00am I telephoned, she had survived surgery but the next three days were critical. I was allowed to visit Kalina later that day, it was a terrible sight for all of us. Tubes everywhere and she was quite distressed and in a lot of pain. Morphine injections had not been strong enough and it was decided to give her a chest block and inject anaesthetic into her chest, this settled her down and she was able to rest. It was very distressing to hear her whimpering and I was beginning to wonder if surgery was the right choice.

Kalina spent six days in intensive care, she developed a mild chest infection but it cleared up quickly. She was fed via the G-tube, no food or water was allowed by mouth as her oesophagus needed time to heal.

The vets could not believe how quickly she was recovering, they said it was remarkable, I thought it was more remarkable considering she is ten years old. After many blood tests she was allowed to come home, she would have the G-tube in for another week after which an endoscope would be performed to see how much permanent damage her oesophagus had.

Kalina spent the next week at home under "house arrest", she couldn't go outside she may have drank some water or eat some grass, she was being tube fed every four hours, many sleepless nights and a stressful time for all concerned. The endoscope was performed the following week, the vets explained the risks associated with this type of surgery. Surgery in this area does not heal well, normally a stricture will form around the oesophagus and can cause difficulty in swallowing. I had decided that if a serious stricture had formed I would euthanise her.

The endoscope revealed a stricture but the surgeon did not think it was life threatening, she would have to live on liquid foods for the rest of her life but otherwise good news. All her food has to go through the blender but after three weeks of no food by mouth she isn't complaining. So far she has had no further complications but time will tell. She is extremely lucky to be alive, my vets have never seen a piece of bone lodged that badly.

A few things I have learned from this awful experience. Always watch your dogs when feeding bones, you will see if something goes wrong. I now only feed large marrow bones, they can chew the large ends for ten or fifteen minutes, let them chew the meat off then throw them out. I am pleased that I decided to continue with the surgery when her chances were slim. I came very close to telling the surgeon to euthanise Kalina, she would not be here now if I had not taken the chance. I was very lucky I was able to afford the surgery (five and a half thousand dollars), many emergency centres require a deposit before they will treat the dog. I have learned my lesson the hard way.

I guess you could say Kalina is one of the lucky ones, unlucky to have a bone lodge in such a dangerous place but lucky to have survived. Many dogs do not make it. I will enjoy whatever time Kalina has left. In writing this article I hope people will learn from my experience.



**Keep your dog 'in the pink'
...naturally!**

**Free telephone consultation
and individual prescriptions
for all canine health issues**

**Bone and Ligament Problems;
Nervous Disorders;
Skin Conditions; Cancer;
Show Dog Treatments**

ROBERT McDOWELL

- Professional Canine Herbalist

Phone: 02 6331 3937, Fax 02 6332 6220

<http://www.herbal-treatments.com.au>