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Alice the Wonder Dog: One Dog's Recovery from an Unthinkable Injury

By Susan I. Finkelstein

"I named her 'Alice' because she looks like that Muppet on Sesame Street, Alice Snuffleupagus," explains Charlotte Williamson, owner of the chestnut-colored mixed-breed dog that has become kind of a star at the Ryan Hospital—and around the world! Alice's story is so extraordinary that not only have local newspapers and television stations run it, but the syndicated Associated Press story has appeared in hundreds of newspapers both here and abroad.

A Trip to York

On Friday, November 12, Charlotte drove with Alice from Washington, D.C., where she currently makes her home, to spend time with a friend on his 100-acre farm in York County, Pa. When she arrived, Alice was anxious to frolic in the open space, and Charlotte thought the dog needed some "roaming time" after the long car ride. After nearly an hour, and several calls for Alice, the 1½-year-old dog was still nowhere to be seen.

It was then that Charlotte heard faint whimpering nearby—and discovered Alice cringing under the porch, her fur matted with blood, her right eye swollen shut. "I thought her nose was broken, or that she had been bitten by another animal," recalls Charlotte. The dog was brought to a local veterinarian, who promptly recommended that Alice be taken to Penn. The cause of Alice's injury was still undetermined.

Alice Comes to Ryan

"On presentation, she had a wound on her nose and a lower jaw that shifted to the right. She was referred to us in Dentistry for a possible jaw fracture," says **John Lewis, V'97**, a lecturer in dentistry. Radiographs of the dog's head produced shocking results: part of a fiberglass arrow, about six inches long, was lodged in her skull. The three-bladed tip was a half-inch from her brain. The arrow struck her on the bridge of the nose and traveled downward, fracturing the jaw. Dr. Lewis estimates the arrow had been 30 inches long originally, and had broken off when Alice tumbled from the impact. But someone had forgotten to tell Alice what had happened: according to Dr. Lewis, "She was standing and her tail was still wagging."

Surgery was scheduled for the next day, Saturday, when few specialty services are available at the Hospital. Dr. Lewis and **Dr. Steve Mehler**, a soft-tissue surgeon, headed

a quickly assembled team from no less than seven sections (including Dentistry, Soft Tissue, Radiology, Intensive Care, Emergency Service, Anesthesia, and Transfusion Medicine) to work on Alice.

Because of its razor-sharp blades, pulling the arrow out the way it had entered would cause further injury. An incision was made on the right side of Alice's neck to pull the arrow through. After a four-hour operation, all but one piece of metal was removed; excessive swelling prevented extraction of a barb in her jaw. It would have to be taken out when the swelling receded. (On December 17, Drs. Lewis and Mehler successfully removed the third blade during Alice's second surgery.)

Recovery

"She made it through amazingly well," reports Dr. Lewis. "A couple of millimeters one way or another, and the dog would have been in much

"...And her tail was still wagging."

worse shape." One of the lingering effects of the injury, however, is chronic nasal infections for

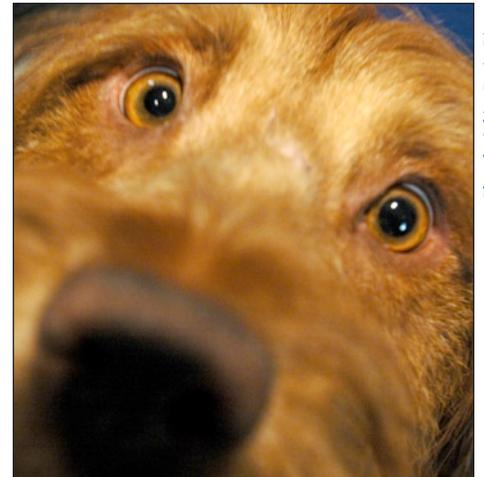


Photo by Sabrina Louise Pierce.

Alice, healed from her surgery.

the dog. Another is blindness in her right eye, although a bit of improvement indicates she might eventually regain some vision there.

How the dog got shot is still a mystery. Charlotte surmises that perhaps the dog was mistaken for a fox, with their similar coloring, and was struck by a bow hunter. Of course, the possibility exists that the actual cause might be more malicious. Charlotte has kept the arrow shaft and blades to have them examined—in an attempt to determine who is responsible. ■



Broken arrow held up to x-ray after being removed from Alice.