

## Bumper's Story

Submitted by Randy Moseley

It all began one morning in October 2007, a couple of months before my retirement, on the treadmill, doing my usual pre-work bit of exercise and tuning into the local Chicago news. While walking along and trying to wake up at 5:30 am, a story caught my attention. An animal hoarding had been discovered and authorities had summoned a humane society in my town of DeKalb, Illinois to rescue and house the animals until all the legal issues could be resolved. There were over 300 dogs, cats, and birds that were rescued and moved to temporary quarters at a hangar at the DeKalb airport. I was happy to hear the animals were now in better conditions and went on with my day.

Later on that day a co-worker stopped by my office and asked if I'd heard about the hoarding. She had connections with Tails Humane Society, the organization that had rescued the animals. I said I'd seen the news report. She suggested I visit the airport hangar to see the dogs and I resisted, telling her I'd probably want to help all of them and that wasn't possible. Over the next couple of days knowing I'm an animal lover, she kept encouraging me to go see the dogs. So I finally went by. The animals had all been cleaned up, fed and were in individual crates. I walked to one particular cage with a brown and white, freckle nosed cocker spaniel. He cautiously came to the front of the crate and I reached in and scratched under his chin, or his "beard". He immediately wagged his tail and seemed to be in heaven with the scratching. One of the volunteer ladies came up and said to him, "Oh are you finally going to wag your tail?" She looked at me and said, "He hasn't shown any signs of being happy until now." She asked if I wanted to walk him. I said no, that I didn't want to get attached since we already had a cocker spaniel at home. But I did tell them before I left that when the adoptions were open, I might be interested. They put my name and phone number on the paperwork for "dog number 28".

A few days later on Saturday morning, one of the volunteers I know from Tails called and said that the airport needed the hangar back, and Tails was working diligently to have all the animals foster homed for a week until the adoption event the following weekend. Would I be willing to foster "dog number 28" for a week? I talked it over with my wife, Sandy, and we agreed to pick him up with the understanding we had to return him for the adoption event, and if we were interested in adopting him permanently, we could express that intent then, but there were no guarantees. We went by, and picked up "dog number 28" and brought him to our home. He sat in Sandy's lap shaking all the way home. Sandy remarked "poor thing" about what he'd been through. He was fully grown, although only approximately 14 months old and weighted just 22 pounds, slightly over half of his expected weight. He was very skinny, but really a beautiful dog. We brought his crate home with us so he'd be comfortable. We left the crate door open on it so he could come and go, but he was more comfortable staying in it for the most part. We'd coax him out, scratch his beard, and give him treats. He was still apprehensive and would growl at Maggie, our cocker, if she ventured too close to the crate. As he became braver, he would sneak out of the crate, confiscate one of Maggie's toys and run back to the crate. Then he'd guard the toy. This continued on until he had all her toys in the crate, which left little room for him. It was pretty funny. He also only wanted to sleep in an old plastic container that was at the hoarding in his crate. Apparently it was the only clean place for him to lie there and he continued wanting to sleep in it.

The next Saturday came and we had to take him to the adoption event. I felt so sorry for him. He was just beginning to get used to our home and the "good life" and now he was back in a crate in a strange place. He looked so sad. We told the organization that we 100% wanted to adopt him. They said they'd consider everything and let us know by 2 p.m. that day. We went home not knowing if we'd see him again. But at 2 o'clock, the phone rang and the Tails representative asked if we were still interested in adopting him. We said yes and left immediately to bring home our new family member. When we arrived to pick him up I went over to his crate and he was lying in the back looking sad. I said, "Hey buddy, you want to go home?" He looked up, came to the front of the crate and started dancing around and whimpering, excited to see me. I was totally hooked. He came to his forever home that day. I took him out to the back yard and sat on our bench. He jumped up beside me, climbed onto my lap, and sat looking around at all the birds flying around, sniffing the air, and every once in a while, would give me a quick lick on the side of my face. He was very happy. It seemed to me he was saying, "Thanks for rescuing me. I won't be a burden. I'll be a good boy". And he was, year after year.

Having grown up in a crate, he wasn't used to being out and about and was quite clumsy. He'd get excited, start running, and crash into the furniture. Sandy suggested we name him Bumper. So Bumper it was. He continued to grow accustomed to us, our home, and Maggie. But he still wanted to sleep in his crate. One night after we'd gone to bed, I heard him digging, scratching and carrying

on in his crate. Finally, I turned on a flashlight and looked. He was sitting in his crate with his bed on top of him. It was a hilarious sight. He was having a tough time getting settled that night. A few days later we were downstairs and he was in his crate. We went upstairs with Maggie, and as soon as we got there we heard Bumper crying and yelping. I ran down to see what the matter was. It was nothing – he just wanted to join the family upstairs. So that day we taught him how to climb and descend stairs.

He became more and more comfortable. He quickly gained the weight he was lacking, and his hair grew out like it was supposed to since he was now well nourished. We had him groomed, and he was really a handsome boy. He was the easiest dog to housebreak we ever had. His only issue was he liked Maggie's toys so much he would guard them. So we had to put them away. But all in all, he was, simply put, a good dog.

He developed into quite a character. One night we were watching a TV program that was almost over. The phone rang and I said let it go to the machine, we'll call back after the show. When the answering machine recording started, I heard a low moaning sound. I turned and asked Sandy, who was laughing, "What is that noise?" She said "It's Bumper howling at the answering machine." He did it every time from then on. Later on in life, he didn't even wait for the machine. On the second ring, he'd start howling. And he went through many beds because he couldn't lie down without digging on it until it was just right. He'd finally rip the cover and we'd have to sew it up or replace it.

One year Sandy was decorating for Christmas, and she got out two stuffed mice to place on the fireplace hearth. They were battery powered and if you started them, they sang a Christmas song together. One evening we were watching TV and Bumper moved over and sat down between the mice. We didn't really pay any attention to him, but I got up to get a snack, and he growled a bit. I asked him what was wrong, and he made it obvious that he'd adopted the two mice and we were not to get close. I've got several videos of him guarding those mice. He was just miserable as long as he had this self-imposed duty, so we put the mice away. A year later, we tried again. Again he adopted them and guarded them. So the mice were put away for good.

In November 2012, Maggie, our other cocker, became very ill. She had grown old and we lost her about a week after Thanksgiving. Bumper did well, but seemed a bit lost. He'd enjoyed pestering Maggie in the 5 years they'd been together. So less than a week later, we found a new pet, a cocker spaniel puppy, just 6 weeks old. Bumper and Sadie were instant friends, rolling and frolicking around continuously. The puppy could outrun Bumper, but he'd keep trying to catch her. He would lie on his back while she rolled around on him. He was always gentle with her. "Thanks for rescuing me. I won't be a burden. I'll be a good boy."

Bumper continued to be a great pet. A few times a day, he'd come to my chair, sit down and look at me. That was code for "I want my beard scratched". I'd scratch him and he'd have that look like he was in heaven. He didn't seem to want much, just a good place to sleep, and a bit of scratching now and then.

In late 2014 we noticed Bumper would bark at squirrels in the yard and other things in the distance, but when he was in the house and I'd give him a treat, he seemed like he couldn't see it on the floor right in front of him. I'd point it out to him and he'd take it. We had him in the vet and I mentioned this and the vet said that dogs, like people, can get farsighted as they age and not see things up close as well as they once could. So we chalked it up to aging. He was over 8 years old at that time. In March of 2015, we went on a two week vacation. When we returned we noticed Bumper was his usual jolly self, but was running into things all around the house. We were very concerned and called a vet that specialized in eye care for animals. We took him in and they did a test. While his eyes reacted to light and looked normal, we found he had Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome (SARDS). There isn't a cure or prevention. Bumper was totally blind. I was devastated. But the vet assured me that blind dogs can cope very well, as they rely more on scent and hearing to make their way in this world. Sight was secondary. Driving Bumper home, he sat in the back seat and looked around just like normal. You couldn't tell he was blind. And he'd "look" at me with that same expression – happy, contented and sending me that same message – "Thanks for rescuing me. I won't be a burden. I'll be a good boy."

Sure enough, the vets were right. Bumper functioned very well without sight. He'd get confused and turned around on occasion, but for the most part, he made his way around the house and the yard just like when he could see. It was pretty amazing to witness. And he never seemed to be afraid or bothered by his predicament. He was the same happy dog he'd always been. He managed going up the stairs and straight to his bed without problems. We helped guide him downstairs for fear he'd fall, but otherwise he was on his own. At bedtime every night, I'd give him a dog chew treat as we turned out the lights. He got used to this, and every night he would go upstairs ahead of us, and go straight to the jewelry stand where I kept the treats, sit down and "look" at the drawer until I gave him one.

And boy could he use that sense of smell! I keep shortbread animal cookies in a jar in the kitchen. Bumper would be sound asleep and I would carefully lift the lid and silently get a couple of the cookies. I'd walk into the family room and immediately the nose would start twitching, he'd wake up, and come beg for a piece of cookie. That nose was amazing.

On Christmas 2016, our son and his family visited. Our youngest grandchild, Adam, was about 20 months old and liked to sit in the floor and play. Bumper, sightless, came over to Adam, sat down beside him, and in a couple of minutes, began licking Adam's face. He proceeded to lick Adam's entire head, both sides, happy as he could be. Sandy had been a bit concerned about the dogs around the kids, but all those worries vanished with Bumper. "Thanks for rescuing me. I won't be a burden. I'll be a good boy."

On October 8, 2017 we left for a two week vacation. As usual, we took Bumper and Sadie to our vet's office, where they do boarding as well as veterinary care. Bumper got his annual checkup and was fine. On October 12, just four days later, we received a call from the vet. Bumper had suddenly stopped eating and drinking and was laboring to breathe. The vet said he examined Bumper and found a swelling in his throat that appeared to be a mass. He said if it was a tumor, it would be inoperable. He said he'd look at it closer and call us back. We were 4000 miles away from home so getting there wasn't an option. We called back later and the vet said he'd checked the swelling and found that it was an abscess/infection and he was able to drain it, clean it and start Bumper on antibiotics and that this might give him a chance. We were relieved. The vet asked us to call back in a few hours. We called back and the vet said that even with the treatment, the swelling had not gone down and he was still having trouble breathing. He was planning on doing a tracheotomy to assist Bumper's breathing until the swelling improved. But while we were on the phone, his assistant called him in to treat Bumper. He was in distress. We hung up, and 15 minutes later the vet called back. Bumper had passed away.

We were so distraught. He was a great pet and we weren't there for him. But Bumper was being Bumper – somehow it seemed that he didn't want us to see him in that condition. So he went his in own way. "Thanks for rescuing me. I won't be a burden. I'll be a good boy."

He endured so much more than he deserved - being in a hoarding situation, going blind for the last 3 years of his life, and then the sudden infection that took him from us. It just wasn't fair.

Somehow we finished our trip, made our way home and went to pick up Sadie. The vet had Bumper's ashes for us in a nice container to take home. In the days that followed, the house seemed so empty without him. I miss him greatly. I wish I could scratch his beard again. I would like to try to sneak some cookies past him one more time. And I'd love to hear him howl at the answering machine. But now all we have are the memories of a great pet that left us too soon. We had 10 years of enjoyment with Bumper. It didn't feel like enough, but we'll cherish those years fondly, because we were glad we rescued him, he was never a burden, and he was always a good boy.