

# KRISTY'S LYME DISEASE STORY

My name is Kristy L. Zelewsky, and I have been a licensed Foster Home volunteer for Illinois Birddog Rescue, Inc. since October, 2009. Illinois Birddog Rescue is a Licensed Animal Shelter organization by the Department of Agriculture in the State of Illinois. The IBR President and Founder is Lisa Spakowski.

I know this is a long letter, but I would like to tell the story of how I came to foster dogs for IBR. In September of 2009, I had to make the excruciating decision to put down my beloved 12 year old Chocolate Lab, Maggie. A few weeks after I let Maggie go, I decided to help a dog rescue in my area in their quest to help abandoned, sick and abused dogs find the love and care they needed in order to have another chance at a decent life. I still had 2 other dogs at the time, KC who is now 16 years old and Quincy, who is now 8 years old, and thought that instead of adopting another puppy, I would help transition a rescue dog into a new forever home. I chose Illinois Birddog Rescue, after researching many rescue organizations in my area, because they had the most amazing website I had seen of them all. They seemed to be more involved with the dogs they saved from certain death in county pounds. The stories they told of rescues and rehabilitation of very sick dogs they had accomplished was very extraordinary. The story of the "Boat Mountain Clan" (<http://boatmountianclan.blogspot.com/>) was so heart wrenching to me, but the outcome was no less than miraculous for many of these horribly neglected Pointers and Setters. IBR didn't just mention Tick Bourne diseases, they shared a thorough and in depth knowledge that could only be gotten by experience in thorough testing protocols and treating animals (always done under Veterinary supervision) of these illnesses. To say the least it was a total eye-opener for me.

As a bit of background, I was raised in apartments in the city of Chicago and it was a treat for me to go camping in the woods of Wisconsin every summer with my family. Many years later, on my own, I decided to continue my love of camping and "getting back to nature" by purchasing my own camper getaway in a remote and wooded area of Sauk County, Wisconsin. I spent weekends and weeks during the warmer months in the past 25 years up at my camper with my daughter and my adopted dogs. Of course, being in the woods, I occasionally picked off embedded ticks from all of us, never aware that these ticks could harbor some very deadly diseases. And my dogs would sometimes get infested with them. I can't say I was very vigilant about checking us all over after a hike in the woods and there were many times I would not notice a tick on one of my dogs until it was completely engorged and or had already fallen off the dog and lay like a small grape on the floor! Flea and tick baths would help when I gave them, and by then I finally started using monthly flea and tick prevention medicine religiously during the summer months, on the same schedule I would give my dogs Heartgard so I wouldn't forget.

The first dog I owned and brought with me to my camper was a Black Lab named Midnight. I got her in Lockport, IL from a home breeder in the April of 1995. She was 8 weeks of pure puppy energy and fun and my daughter and I were madly in love right from the start. Minnie, as we called her for short, was a healthy enough pup through her 1<sup>st</sup> year of life. There were a few red flags now that I look back. She had ear infections, chalked up to swimming as I was told most Labs had. But there was a disturbing side to her personality that started to come through at about a year old. She became very guarding of me and my daughter with people she did not know well. I noticed this behavior for the first time at an outdoor block party with many people around. I was sitting on a lawn chair and someone I wasn't well

acquainted with came over to speak to me. Minnie's hackles went up and I could hardly hold her back on her leash as she rocked forward and growled at this person with teeth bared, basically warned this person not to come any closer! I was completely shocked as I had never seen her do this before; she had always been a happy go lucky, goofy Labrador who basically loved everyone! Then, that following December of 1996, she suddenly became feverish and lethargic and stopped eating. She was only 19 months old. I had not had her spayed and my veterinarian at Lombard Animal Hospital pinned down the cause of her illness to an abscessed uterus, known as Pyometra. Surgery, I was told, was the only option. So Minnie had the surgery and was home a few days later recovering. She was on antibiotics for another week or so and it seemed that she was getting a bit better every day. But, that did not last long and in the next few weeks she seemed to regress back to the lethargy and she was not eating and I started to notice her eyes seemed to be getting a cloudy. I immediately got her back in to see the same veterinarian and was now told that she had some form of glaucoma caused by pressure in her eyes and I needed to see an eye specialist. The appointment eye specialist vet at Arboretum View Animal Hospital in Downers Grove was made immediately. This veterinarian said the pressure in Minnie's eyeballs was causing her retinas to detach and that one of the eyes was probably not able to be saved, but the other eye would be OK if the pressure was relieved, so she prescribed steroids in order to save her eye. I remember they gave her an injection of steroids at that time. I do not know if they sent me home with more. I do know that my other vet gave me more antibiotics, just in case another infection was causing her eye problem. The steroids seemed to work for a few days. Minnie seemed to be getting back to her own doggie self, although she needed help to get around because she was basically blind. She had her appetite back and was responding more readily to me and my daughter by wagging her tail. But a few days was all Minnie got of this relief. I woke up that morning to a dog that was panting for air and I rushed her back to the Vet. An X-Ray showed her lungs were filled with fluid and she was drowning in this fluid. Antibiotics were immediately administered intravenously, but this could not save Minnie. I really thought at this point I should have given the vet the go ahead to end her suffering, but she was not even 2 years old! Why did she get so sick, so young? She died in an oxygen tent a few hours later. The veterinarian was nice enough to call his old Professor at the University of Illinois at Champaign Urbana to ask what he thought happened. The Professor asked for tissue samples and it was determined later that she had a fungal infection called Blastomycosis. My vet was nice enough to explain to me that Minnie was very immunocompromised and that is why she got sick. He said that Blastomycosis treatment was very harsh and that she may not have lived through it anyway. Looking back from what I know now, I can make an educated guess as to why Minnie got so sick Blastomycosis in the first place and wasn't able to fight off infections. She had been bitten many times by ticks at my camper. No one ever told me about tick borne illnesses, but had I known, I would have insisted on testing and treatment if needed.

After Minnie died, I didn't want to get another puppy, but it wasn't too many months before I got talked into adding another family member by my then 11 year old daughter. That is when I called my deceased dog Minnie's original breeder to tell her my story. She told me she was about to have another litter of pups and that I would get first pick, if I liked. A sweet little Chocolate Lab female we named Maggie was our choice about 12 weeks later. I also adopted another pup a few weeks after Maggie came to us. A sweet little 8 week old Chow/Keeshond mix we named KC. So we were a 2 dog household for the next 8 years until I adopted a third pup, Quincy, an English Setter from Wright Way Rescue in Southern Illinois.

Maggie was a pretty normal and healthy dog with a very sweet disposition. I called her Waggy Maggie because she was just so friendly to everyone! Maggie did have ear infections all the time pretty much from her puppyhood, and my vet always said it was pretty typical of the breed. I was always cleaning

her ears and when things got out of control I would take her to the vet for help. Maggie loved to swim and trips to the dog park by my house and the camper during the summer allowed her this indulgence quite often. She also started having the occasional urinary tract infection and just like the ear infections, antibiotics always seemed to help. At about 6 years old, Maggie came up lame on her left side, and my vet said she most likely ruptured her ACL and sent me to a specialist who advised TPLO surgery. The TPLO surgery went routinely, but Maggie's recovery was very hard for her. Maggie had a terrible time with swelling of the affected knee. The anti-inflammatories did not help and she couldn't tolerate the pain medication which was in a patch on her body. I think she suffered for at least a week after that surgery. When Maggie's other knee had the same issues the following year, I decided against TPLO and went with the conventional surgery to repair the ACL. That seemed to go a bit better, but swelling was also an issue after this surgery, too. Every X-ray done on Maggie's legs in the years following both of those knee surgeries showed worsening arthritic condition, especially in the TPLO knee. I remember my Veterinarian, Dr. Angela Clark at DuPage Animal Hospital (in Villa Park), telling more than once after follow-up X-Rays were done on Maggie's hind end, how concerned she was with the deteriorating condition of the knee that had the TPLO surgery. It was just heartbreaking.

For the next few years, Maggie was getting around fine, and had no other major issues except for the occasional urinary tract infection or ear infections, which was promptly treated with antibiotics from my veterinarian. But, one morning, just before her 10th year with me, she had an acute episode of severe hind end weakness. She just could not get up from a lying position. It was like watching a baby fawn struggling to walk for the very first time. She had very little feeling in and control of her back legs. And I know she had done nothing extraordinarily strenuous to bring this on. I brought her to the vet that day. X-Rays were done and showed nothing to cause this to happen. I was referred to the orthopedic specialist at Arboretum View in Downers Grove, and they could not determine what was wrong either. No slipped disks or cancerous growths. She was given a few days of Prednisone and Rimadyl for pain. After consulting again with my vet at DuPage AH, I was told that chiropractic therapy and monthly injections of Adequan would help. I found a canine chiropractor in Lisle, Dr. Ness. He saw Maggie weekly for a few months until another terrible episode of severe hind end weakness happened again. Dr. Ness was afraid he was doing more harm than good and told me that Maggie should have an MRI of the spine, just to rule out a hiding tumor or any other abnormality. I was referred to Vet Specialty in Buffalo Grove for the MRI procedure. The imaging veterinarian came out during the procedure to consult with me. She brought me in to see the pictures they had of Maggie's spine while she was still under anesthesia. She told me that she thought a small area of inflammation was most likely cancer in her opinion (She was afraid it might be a fast growing cancer and her prognosis was very grim) and that she needed to get a needle biopsy to make a definitive determination. At this point I was totally distraught and agreed that we needed to know. She also said that my dog had tumors on both adrenal glands and a diagnosis of Cushing's Disease was made at that time. She told me that the results of the imaging and report would go back to my vet at DuPage in a few days.

Back to see my vet a few days later, I was told that none of the images they took and sent over looked like cancer. They said they did not know why the imaging vet would have told me such a thing. When the biopsy came back as negative, they were not surprised, I was elated. I did more research on physical therapy and found a new, Holistic Veterinarian, Dr. Joe Whalen DVM, CVSMT, and his assistant Mary Collopy, CVT, CCRP at Chicago Animal Rehab in Chicago Ridge. I brought Maggie to weekly therapy appointments many miles from my home, for almost 9 months. This included underwater treadmill therapy, acupuncture and ultrasound therapy and daily doses of Rimadyl and Tramadol. The Doctor Joe was nothing but very optimistic and I had high hopes that I had finally found something that would help

Maggie get stronger, keep her on her feet and extend her life a few more years. But, as much money as I spent, and as hard as I tried to keep my girl going, Maggie's spinal inflammation, weakness, and mobility issues got gradually worse. By the end of the 9 months of therapy, Maggie was unable to get to her feet at all and she seemed to be distressed at my trying to get her up and moving. Even Dr. Whelan was at a loss as to why the therapy was not helping Maggie and her condition was deteriorating. This was the point I had to face the fact that I had tried everything for Maggie. It was the most heartbreaking decision I could make to let her go. At 12 years old, Maggie's mind was still there, she still wagged her tail when I spoke to her, but she could no longer walk.



Maggie with Kristy's daughter Ally- the day they had to let her go.

A few months after Maggie's passing, in October of 2009, I took in my first foster dog for Illinois Birddog Rescue, a field bred English Setter named Viola. Viola was a young dog, about a year old, who was found as a stray in rural Illinois, and ended up at a high kill County shelter. I was told that they find many hunting dogs as strays in the countryside during and after bird hunting season in the fall, dogs that get lost by wandering off or are abandoned by their owner because they are not doing the job they were trained to do: Point game birds. Illinois Birddog Rescue takes all newly rescued dogs, no matter where they come from, directly taken to a licensed veterinarian for evaluation and testing. Viola was no exception. She was given the usual battery of tests for HW and fecal for parasites, but what sets IBR

apart from most other rescue organization, Viola was also given a complete CBC Chemistry and an IDEXX 371 Tick Panel. These tests are always done as routine for all dogs, and now cats that IBR rescues.

My first impressions of Viola were her inability to focus on me and lack of exuberance in meeting other animals and people. She seemed sweet enough when you could get her attention, was never aggressive and did not show fear in any way, she just showed very little emotional response to her environment. She would stare vacantly at the walls or couch or chair and it was difficult to get her attention. She seemed depressed and sad. She had absolutely no focus for field work and I am sure she was abandoned because of this. She would also sleep more than my other 2 dogs. She was very thin and was not interested in eating her food, so I force fed by hand to get the nutrition she needed into her starving body! After many days, she eventually started taking the food from my hand, but feeding her took time because she was so uninterested in eating. The tests came back a few days after the blood work was sent out and Viola showing positive results for Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Her titer was at 1:400 and Lisa Spakowski told me that as most rescue groups use 4DX snap testing, this disease never would have been found without the test IBR did. I was completely surprised by this only because I had never thought to ask my veterinarians (and I saw so many for Maggie's issues not including yearly check-ups!) to test my dogs for these illnesses. At this point I told Lisa about my dogs and their history of tick bites all the years we went camping in Wisconsin. Lisa recommended I get both dogs, (they were 12 and 4 years old then) tested with the IDEXX 371. My vet told me she would do a 4dx snap test and if that was positive, she would send the blood to IDEXX for more thorough testing. Low and behold, the 4DX snap tests showed an immediate positive for both dogs! That day, when I asked Dr. Clark if she thought my poor Maggie had symptoms that would have given an indication of Lyme, she agreed that it was a fairly good analogy considering Maggie's chronic arthritis and urinary tract infections. If I had only gotten a Lyme test for Maggie years earlier, maybe she would not have suffered so much. Maybe she just needed antibiotic treatment all those years of chronic arthritic weakness! Looking back, I can remember weeks when she had an easier time getting around and it always coincided with her being treated with antibiotics for urinary tract infections! Oh how I wish I had found Illinois Birddog Rescue a few years sooner!



I cannot tell you how thankful I am to have found Illinois Birddog Rescue when I did, and how grateful and indebted I am to Lisa Spakowski for her comprehensive knowledge and advice on Tick Borne illnesses. After many years of arthritic knees which included Baker's Cysts that burst, Depression, unexplained migraine headaches, terrible hot flashes, Hypothyroidism and finally a Breast Cancer diagnosis, Ms. Spakowski convinced me to get tested by my personal physician. The ELISA test that I was initially given came back "Negative", but Ms. Spakowski convinced me to get another test from a Doctor that treats Lyme patients. This test was a full IgM, IgG Western Blot that was more detailed than the Elisa test I was first given. This test came back positive and I started treatment with Doxycycline. I also had co-infections testing done at this time which luckily came back negative. My daughter, Allyson, (diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue, chronic headaches, and Mononucleosis) was also tested with the Western Blot IgM, - IgG and it also showed a positive result. I then implored my sister to get my niece (diagnosed with Lupus, Celiac Disease, and Rheumatoid Arthritis at the age of 19) and a nephew (Asperger's, OCD, Leaky Gut at the age of 5) tested. Both of these children had spent much time at my camper and both had a myriad of unexplained health issues and symptoms that were diagnosed and treated piecemeal by their personal physician. Both of these children tested positive for Lyme disease, also. Without Lisa Spakowski's insistence on all of us being testing for Lyme Disease and co-infections, I do not know what the final outcome would have been, over time, for all of us, including my now 16 year old Chow-Keeshond Mix, KC, and my 8 year old English Setter, Quincy, who are both still alive and doing so amazingly well by having gotten the proper diagnosis and treatment they needed.



I would also like to report that my 10 year old DSH feline, Buffy, rescued as a kitten from a farm in Indiana, was also diagnosed with Ehrlichia after I insisted on testing. I also owned her sister cat, Princess, who died at the age of 4 from what my vet explained as a Liver Disease known as Hepatic Lipidosis compounded by an acute Diabetes that my vet was unable to control with proper insulin levels. Was it Ehrlichiosis that killed Princess? I can only guess now.

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