

## ***Tara's Collapsing Trachea***

***By Lee Swanson***



***My name is Lee Swanson and I'd like to tell you Tara's story.***

***Tara is a Yorkshire Terrier who was born on 31 October 1997 in Paragould, Arkansas. She was rescued at 6 months of age. Tara lived in a chicken coop in a breeders back yard from the time she was 4 month's old. Her only source of heat from the bitter cold of winter was a tiny heat lamp that did little to keep her warm. The breeder decided to sell Tara because she was too small to breed, so, on 26 April 1997, Tara left her prison cell in a chicken coop and became part of my family.***

***The day I got Tara, I realized she was in a lot of pain. I took her straight to the Vet's office for a checkup. The vet checked her mouth and discovered that Tara had a double row of teeth and her mouth was severely infected. Tara had a condition called caps. That is where the baby teeth are sitting on top of the adult teeth. The Vet pulled her baby teeth and the caps and cleaned the infection in her mouth and gave her a shot. We were sent home with a bottle of antibiotics for her as follow up treatment.***

***Once Tara had been treated by the vet and started feeling better, I had to figure out how to get her home to Maryland, where we lived. I had a plane ticket, so I put Tara in my large purse and together we got on the plane. Tara slept the entire flight home and no one even knew she was in my purse. Please remember this was 1997 and prior to 9-11. I don't recommend anyone try this today with the security we now have in our airports!! When my husband Ern picked me up in Maryland, I said nothing. I waited until he was putting luggage***

***in the trunk, and I was seated in our car, then I took Tara out and sat her on my lap. When Ern got into the car, he looked over and asked "What is that?" I said "Meet your new daughter!!" Ern took one look at this ball of fur and fell promptly in love. Since that day, Ern has spoiled her terribly!!!***

***Tara was a joy growing up and she had a wonderful time learning all about her new environment. She was a fast learner! Ern was retired, so he had lots of time to spend on the potty training and all the other good stuff he taught her. Tara takes a long time warming up to people and didn't care for kids at all but she loved her new Mommy and Daddy.....especially her Daddy!***

***When Tara turned 5 years of age, the coughing started. Her cough was only slight at first, then it eventually progressed to honking. The honking was very similar to that of a duck quacking. People would constantly ask me why Tara sounded like a duck and at the time, I did not have any answers. When I questioned the vets about Tara's honking, none of them could give me any answers either.***

***Over time, Tara's honking turned into episodes similar to that of bronchitis or asthma attacks. She coughed constantly during these attacks. My vet gave us Torbutrol, Aminophylline and Prednisone to help keep Tara calm as the episodes seemed to be triggered by excitement. Tara would go for months before the next attack. These attacks seem to occur when she got upset, over heated or excited. Each attack became more severe than the previous attack. Several times during a two year period, Tara had to go into the hospital for oxygen treatments. Her nostrils were so closed up that we wondered how she got enough air to breathe. These episodes took their toll on Tara. She became tired all the time, she lost a lot of hair, and she seemed to be getting skin infections that were difficult to clear up. I would bathe her every 3 days in an effort to keep the skin infections under control.***

***We did not find out until Tara was 7 ½ years old that she had a collapsing trachea. We were on a trip in Arizona, and while we were traveling, Tara had another attack. We had to find a vet and she was hospitalized once again for being unable to breathe. Her collapsing trachea condition was diagnosed from an x-ray that was taken while she was in the hospital for an oxygen treatment. The attending vet also gave her Baytril and that eventually cleared up her skin infection. Once we had a name for Tara's condition, we then had to focus on treating or fixing her problem. We were told by the vet that research was ongoing in the collapsing trachea field, but surgery was very risky and her chances of surviving the surgery were 50-50. The vet told us that Tara had to be kept quiet with***

***medication to avoid further episodes. The vet also told us that he thought they were doing Collapsing Trachea surgery at University of Tennessee.***

***Tara recovered from her episode in Arizona and did not have another one for a long time after we got back home. I guess Ern and I were both hoping that the collapsed trachea had healed itself, but we now know that was not to be. One day, the neighbor's dog got loose and Tara got extremely upset when confronted by this dog. The confrontation caused Tara to have another breathing episode and once again, Tara got sick.***

***We were desperate by now, so I got on the Internet and I found information on Collapsing Trachea at the University of Tennessee. The information was provided by a Dr. Bohling, who also provided a link to a Collapsing Trachea support group. I was able to contact the support group, who in turn, put me in contact with Sue Schwarten, an Administrative Specialist who works for the University of Tennessee (UT). Sue contacted my local vet for me and asked him to send a referral to UT for Tara. When my vet did not call and schedule an appointment as requested, Sue was able to work with me and she was also able to get Tara an appointment at UT. It was a happy day when Sue called to tell me that Tara had an appointment with Dr. Bohling!! Once Tara's appointment was scheduled at UT, Dr. Bohling personally called me to get more information on Tara's condition and to explain the surgery to us. I felt so confident putting my Tara in his hands.***

***Tara had to be admitted to the UT vet hospital on an emergency basis, 4 days before her scheduled surgery date. Tara had become severely dyspnic with cyanotic episodes according to the vet. Translated into language we can all understand, Tara had another bronchitis like attack and couldn't breathe very well and needed oxygen. Her gums were turning blue from the lack of oxygen. An endoscopic evaluation showed she had a collapse of the cervical trachea and early portion of the thoracic trachea. Tara had her surgery and individual ring prostheses were placed on her trachea. The thoracic trachea was not severe enough to stent at this time; rings cannot be placed in that area. Rings are placed in the neck area so that the dog can bend his/her neck. Stents are solid tubes that are placed in areas where there is no bending of the neck required. Stents are usually used when there is a collapse below the neck area.***

***The day of the collapsing trachea surgery was a horrible day for us, we worried about Tara being on the operating table. The feeling I had was identical to when we had had her spayed years earlier. My***

***memory of her spay surgery was still so vivid in my mind - I recall telephoning the Vet's office every ½ hour to check on her back then!! When I felt they were not actually checking on Tara after her spay surgery, I marched right down to that vet office and insisted that she come home with me as I could take better care of her!! The vet insisted on keeping her overnight, but when I told him he was going to have to provide me with a bed, as I was not leaving, he decided that it might be better if Tara went home!!!! Even though Tara's collapsing trachea surgery was much risky then when she had been spayed, I felt comfortable knowing Tara was at UT and in Dr. Bohling's capable hands.***

***Tara came through her collapsing trachea surgery very well and I was able to pick her up the following day. Dr. Bohling gave her just a local before I picked her up to make sure everything was working, as it should. She had one stitch in her neck area that would need to be removed in 7 days. Tara came home with a pain and anti-inflammatory medication called Carprofen that she was required to take for 5 days. Additionally, I was instructed to keep her calm. The pills were easy, calm was not so easy!! Tara slept all the way home but when we got home she got very excited and wanted me to put her down. Tara has a fur sister named Baby Girl (aka Cricket) and as soon as Tara saw Baby Girl, she ran over and jumped on Baby Girl's back. This was Tara's way of blaming Baby Girl for her entire ordeal!! Later, Tara wanted to eat and did so without any problems at all.***

***Tara slept well her first night home, and the next morning she was ready to play. Every morning, Dad and Baby Girl have a play session with the ball. Tara wanted to play too, except her toy of choice was her nylabone!! So Dad and Tara had a little play session before I took her outside to do her business.***

***Tara had some swelling in her neck after surgery. We had to put both cold and hot compresses on her neck to help the swelling. I didn't have anything small enough or flexible enough to go around her tiny neck. We tried several different items from the freezer, from ice cubes in a baggie to frozen peas. What we found that worked best was a slightly dampened washcloth chilled in the freezer!! Heat compresses were much easier, we simply used a cloth heated in the microwave.***

***The hardest part or Tara's recuperation was keeping her from jumping on and off furniture. Tara was a good girl though, and she would stop and let us lift her up and down when we told her to stay. A knock on the door always caused a ruckus from Tara. Her little***

***bark sounded like a squeak toy but she would settle down as soon as the caller greeted her and gave her a love.***

***When Tara first came home from the hospital, she started going potty in the house. We discovered she had a urinary tract infection and I was able to put her on antibiotics that we had available for a previous episode. I recommend that all patients check with their vets, as the pet should probably come home with an antibiotic after surgery to ward off possible infections.***

***Tara had a cough for the first 3 days after surgery. She had one bad night where she coughed a lot and a day later the cough went away. When I gave her the first bath after surgery, she accidentally got water up her nostrils and the water caused her to do some coughing. I believe that happened because her nostrils had opened up after surgery as compared to before surgery when her nostrils were almost completely closed from her breathing problems. Tara was not used to have her nostrils open and being able to breathe without difficulty!!!***

***We will always be very careful with her neck area but today she is jumping, playing, running and acting just like she is supposed to without distress of any kind. She has become friendly with people and most dogs. Her hair is growing back thicker and shinier than I have seen it in a long time. Tara is running, playing, taking long walks and not coughing or breathing hard. The scar on her neck is totally invisible. Of course we still try to keep her as calm as we can and not allow her to overdo but sometimes that is impossible.***

***I do believe that all the prayers that Tara received from so many people all across the United States along with the special care she received at UT is what bought her through her ordeal. The staff at UT care very much about the animals in their keep. During her hospital stay, Tara was carried around by the staff 24 hours a day because she had such a hard time being left in a cage. Tara's fear of cages stems back to her time as a puppy living in that chicken coop in Arkansas. When she wasn't carried around by the UT staff, Tara slept in a puppy buggy that Sue provided for her to use. The best part of all is that Tara's guarding angel was watching over her before and after surgery providing hugs and lots of kisses - Thank you Sue for being there when I couldn't.***

***Three and a half months have passed since Tara had her surgery and sometimes we almost forget she ever had a collapsing trachea. She is now a normal senior dog that often acts like a puppy! Tara and Baby Girl have a new sister named Tia and the three yorkies all get along great together. They have adopted our slower laid back***

***way of life. Ern and I purchased a Motor Home that we call our rolling dog house. The rolling dog house is just for our yorkies. Now we can all travel together. Tara, Baby Girl, and Tia have there own driver, cook, maid and bed warmers traveling with them, what more could three tiny Yorkies ask for in life?***