

PRAA and Annata's story

PRAA and secondary ME, I remember those words echoing around in my head and trying to grasp what on earth they meant, clutching a 33 day old puppy at my vets. Little did I know this would be by far my biggest challenge ever, and if I knew then what I know now, I would have been TERRIFIED!

PRAA is not common, and not hereditary, (however it is known in some breeds more so than others). During development in the uterus, the fetus has a right and left aortic arch, generally the left aortic arch forms the main artery that extends off the heart and travels to the abdominal region. If the right aortic arch develops into the aorta, the esophagus becomes trapped by a ligament that extends from the pulmonary artery (vessel that pumps blood to the lungs) and the aorta. This stricture is removed during surgery allowing food to pass through the esophagus to the stomach. With PRAA an incision is made on the left side of the chest through the ribs to expose the stricture band that constricts the esophagus. The constricting band/stricture is isolated and tied off then cut, fibrous tissue that may be constricting the esophagus is dissected off the esophagus.

This is the Story of Wazzat ANNATA (the first born Xoloitzcuintle in Australia)

The birth of the first Xoloitzcuintle last year in Australia was a well anticipated event, albeit just the one, it was indeed an exciting time for us, who after six years of waiting, trying every imaginable option that had met with failure, we finally had a little luck. All was going well until around 28 days, I noticed Annata the puppy was not swallowing milk and it appeared to be coming out from her nose and mouth, almost like there was something stuck in her throat. I attended a vet at three in the morning after she had a choking attack that just wasn't right, they put it down to guzzling and her being a pig. A few days later I attended my usual vet after she had lost weight and just wasn't doing well, she would constantly regurg milk and become very distressed. The vets diagnosed possible PRAA (Persistent Right Aortic Arch) with secondary ME (Mega esophagus) and aspiration pneumonia, I was given some Vet options and teaching hospitals to attend (varying in price up to \$15,000) but I chose a vet who had treated the family dogs for many years instead. After the two hour drive, my vet arranged with the specialist vet we could attend immediately and operated on Annata that day, she was 33 days old.

It was touch and go and she was resuscitated on the table straight after surgery, she was taken home that night and no doubt kept the vet up all night, he did comment everyone in the units where he lives will now know the sound of a Xoloitzcuintle. Annata was operated on and came home the next day, she had developed aspiration pneumonia which is common when regurgated milk/ food can travel back to the lungs. Syringe feeding such a tiny puppy was in the least terrifying, I worried I would overfeed, underfeed, was it too hot too cold. Within a few days Annata was back to being a cheeky puppy, despite a huge line of stitches stretching almost her whole body, (and on her show side too!) She seemed happy and active and as always very hungry.

But somehow we managed through to the ten week checkup, at the vets a Barium meal is ingested and this shows the esophagus and the process of the food travelling through. I could tell when the vet came out of the exam room, it wasn't all good, he explained although the stricture had been removed the esophagus had not grown in keeping with the dog and was basically still a 33 day old sized esophagus (1 / 2 mm) . We had spoken about could he dilate the narrow part using a balloon catheter, however as the part of the esophagus was paper thin he was afraid it would tear with pressure, so we decided to wait and recheck at 6 months, with a view to surgery to cut and repair the paper thin area at 12 months. During these first 11 months Annata has required constant care and three hourly slush feeds during the day from 7 am to 10 pm, (all dependent upon how many regurgates we have during the day.) We feed her normal food, kibble soaked and blended, beef and lamb that is minced then cooked then blended (we learnt after two blenders that an Industrial blender was the only way to go) My husband prepares the slurry feeds each week in a process where Annata comes running to the sound of the blender and is all ears and eyes in anticipation! Annata leads a normal life, she just can't have kibble, bones, chews or anything that will not either crumble or slide down her throat, she also manages to eat Kangaroo poop with no adverse effects, she needs to be watched constantly, muzzled or crated (which she detests). Occasionally she will steal a chew from another dog, commandeer a bone and I won't know she has eaten this until meal time when she eats her slurry. Tell tail signs are when she gets all glazy eyed, arches her back and her throat swells

up like a football, this is the food getting blocked up behind the obstruction narrow point. Sometimes food can pass this and sometimes it can sit in the esophagus and rot, a few days of rotting food, in regurgitation is not nice I can assure you. I am now used to picking through the regurgitation to see what it is she has ingested, and usually it is my fault for not closing a door, not being quick enough, however it's hard to not let her be a normal dog with the big kids. The funny thing is she can easily eat Prawn Crackers (her favourite) and Arnott's Shortbread biscuits, as they both just melt in her mouth, in fact I get into trouble if I touch Ananta's shortbread biscuits! We hit the 12 months where we were too decide if we wanted the vets to operate to see if they can fix the focal narrowing, if it is still thin and something goes wrong that's it, Goodnight Annata, there is no room for mistakes. I tossed up with the idea of a stomach feeding tube, but that's not an option for such an energetic dog, I ask myself am I being selfish by having the operation? Can I just keep going with the constant care and three hourly feeds, doggy day care or a dog sitter (thank you Gaye North and D for Dog Bunbury) I do get angry at times as it's 100% full on, I can't even close the toilet door. On the odd occasion I get to the shops and marvel at everything I am that anxious to get back to Annata it spoils the trip, I've often asked myself if I need counselling being this attached to the dog and the dog to I.

So when the 12 months approached I told myself when we get to the end of this journey I want to say "We gave this journey all we could, where, when and how it will end is beyond us, but we gave it all we had."

12 months came and we booked to see the vet Dr Ross STAADEN, when Dr STAADEN came out to examine Annata, he was met by three Xolos (Pitaya, Taha Daha and Annata) I kid you not, his words were "Which one is Annata?" I was so proud, puffing my chest out I said "This one I" I said pulling her forward, Dr STAADEN was impressed and stated he had not seen a dog with her eating problems in this condition, I know he didn't expect to see us back at all. After checking worldwide for information on the operation we were both unsuccessful in going any further and as the four layers of esophagus had to be cut and re stitched together (think four strands of hair) I could not take the risk of losing Annata and Dr STAADEN said we were doing a good job so why risk her life.

Some may say it's a cop out, a lot say I waste my time as she is of no value to the Xolo gene pool or the breed, but they are WRONG and that's very sad because Annata has given hope to so many through her battles, and spread her mischief all over and gained quite a following worldwide, I KNOW I would not be able to cope if anything happened to her as I made the wrong choice, so we just battle on, as best we can with the support from our friends and family.

Would I do it again people ask, I've been told I am silly for persisting with the dog after all what good is she to the breeding of the Xolo here in Australia, people fail to realise I bought this dog into the world and in my belief as a breeder I must do ALL I can for her for as long as possible. Annata has made many friends around the world, we have given advice and help to others with PRAA and what we believe is a little bit of hope in what at times can feel like a really bad ride. Annata even made it to Crufts in the photo competition, where Diana Andersen of Animal Images won third place with a photo with her dam Pitaya. Annata has been on the television multiple times and in countless papers, she even found the time to gain her Australian Championship title, thus becoming the first ever Aussie bred Xolo to title. I share her story with anyone who is interested as we know one day it will just be a chapter of a brave determined little dog who wouldn't give up and gave hope to many.

Most will never know as I am bound to privacy by the owners of other PRAA dogs not to tell their story, but I can proudly say Annata and her story have saved many here in Australia, and I am so glad that by telling our story some others will benefit and can tell others, whilst realizing not all can be saved, it's nice to know that people will have a go because of a little battler who gives it her all, thank god, no other dogs have had the same esophagus problem as in the none growth after the stricture removal. We are still searching to find someone from anywhere in the world with this problem after the operation.

Its tiring and its changed my life so much, but it's also taught me a lot in lessons I never would have learnt had I not had Annata, thankfully I have a wonderful husband who allows me to devote my time to the dogs and in particular Annata (his favourite and his ultimate Best in Life Winner)

This year 2016 on June the 6th Annata will be two years old, we are hoping to have mastered the sit for this momentous occasion, we have mastered back paw (well when Annata deems it necessary) This little Xolo has helped so many, what an incredible lesson she teaches us all and I believe was sent for a reason.

Each day is a bonus.....









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