

## Nothing That Can't Be Fixed

*By Pamela Jenkins*

"Oh, no! Look out!" I whispered to myself as I watched the truck in front of me narrowly miss the little black dog on the highway.

The dog cringed away, limping on one leg. It ran to the shoulder of the road and then turned to stare hopefully at my car as I drove past. Something in that earnest stance stayed with me well after the stray was out of sight.

Stray dogs were a problem in the rural community where I lived. My husband, a veterinarian, often spoke about the plight of these forgotten animals. Most did not survive long. If they were not killed on the roadways, they died of starvation or disease.

I kept thinking about the black dog as I drove home. Then I made a decision to do something I'd never tried before. I pulled into the parking lot of the veterinary clinic. I found my husband inside and began to tell him about the injured dog.

"If I can catch it, would you put it to sleep? I hate to see it suffering." He thought for a moment, then answered quietly that he would. He didn't seem very pleased with my plan.

Armed with a blanket and some dog biscuits from the clinic's waiting room, I drove back along the highway. I found the dog once again on the shoulder of the road. I pulled over and parked, grabbed some biscuits and stepped out of the car. When I walked around to where the dog lay, I got my first good look at just how miserable such an existence can be.

The little black dog's hair was missing in patches. Roughened and raw skin showed through the bare places. It was very thin. One tooth caught on an upper lip, giving it a fierce snarl. One eye had been injured. It was so

hungry that it was gnawing on the bottom half of an old turtle shell it held between its paws.

Kneeling down in front of it, I fed it the treats until they were gone. Then I carefully picked up the dog and set it on the blanket in my car.

During the drive back to the veterinary clinic, I kept telling myself that what I was doing was the right thing. This animal had no home, no owner. It was injured and starving. A quick, painless euthanasia was better than the fate that awaited it otherwise.

I glanced down at the dog and saw it studying me. The look in that one brown eye was unnerving.

"Just don't think about what's ahead," I told myself.

My husband was waiting for me when I pulled back into the parking lot. He opened the car door, picked up the dog and carried it into the clinic. Reluctantly, I followed him inside.

Instead of taking the dog to the kennel area, he carried it into the exam room. There, he started looking over his newest patient.

"It's a young female, about a year and a half old. She has mange, that's why her skin looks so bad. Probably hit by a car, but this leg's not broken. Her jaw is fractured, though, and starting to heal itself. This eye needs some corrective surgery and the eyelids need to be closed..."

While my husband continued to examine the black dog, she sat quietly on the table. Her gaze never left my face. Why was she staring at me? Did she understand why I had brought her to this place?

His examination completed, my husband turned to me. He looked at me meaningfully and said, "There's nothing here that can't be fixed."

I looked once more at the dog. She was still watching me with her single brown eye. I felt heartsick about this dog's sad life, and the decision I had to make.

It's been twelve years since that day. I think about it often, especially on days like today when I'm sitting in the yard watching my hens peck around in the grass. My orange cat stretches lazily from a sunny spot on the patio. The summer's last hummingbirds are fussing about the feeders.

An old dog leans against my leg. She lays her grey muzzle, once so black and shiny, on my knee and looks up at me. I give her silky head a pat. Now I understand the expression in that solitary brown eye.

And I answer her, "I love you, too, Daisy."