

Poindexter and the Christmas Ornament

By Dorry C. Pease

He arrived at our home on Christmas Day and couldn't have been much bigger than a large button. Under the tree wrapped in a towel or two tucked in a canvassed woven basket, he stared up at us with a definite doggy grin. Watching him, my mind flirted with the image of a large brown bear cub with spots; his feet dwarfed his body by three. I named him Poindexter. I'm not sure why, he just struck me as a Poindexter. However, yelling, "Poindexter" when he squatted on the rug wasn't working, so I shortened it to Dexter.

Dexter quickly grew into his heritage of Saint Bernard and Blue Tick Hound. Long legged, three feet high with a Saint Bernard head, he came up to my waist and was handy for receiving an easy pet now and then. Dark brown eyes shaded with black tipped with white always looked sad. The lid of his right eye drooped just a little, half a wink. The long length of his body covered with brown and blue tick-white coloring showed the part of him that came from the hound side. He had three major goals, eating, licking and sleeping. He weighed eighty-five plus pounds and stayed busy most of the day accomplishing his three goals.

It was the eating, uppermost in his life, which led him and me to an eventful forty-eight hours over this last Christmas holiday. I think we both learned a lesson.

Dexter, being only a little over a year old, found our Christmas tree an interesting addition to our household and, after learning it didn't have to be marked, settled in to enjoy the holiday excitement complete with visiting family members from far away places.

With little people under his paws and lovely food aromas dancing around the air, he was in 'dog' heaven. His huge body sprawled in the

middle of the living room while kids crawled over, around and under him. Just getting a lick in now and then made him happy.

Every Christmas, our grandkids made beautiful Christmas ornaments from items found around their homes. Hand decorated these were grandma and grandpa's presents with each year marked on them for posterity. This year's ornaments came from marshmallows, styrofoam balls, sequins and fifty plus regular straight pins. They were big, bright and uneatable. After unwrapping them at our annual family Christmas, I hung all four ornaments in various places of honor on the tree.

Much too soon Christmas weekend was over and we waved good-bye as our children and grandchildren headed for their own homes. Grandpa and I, exhausted, watched a little TV and then headed for bed.

My sleep ended when Dexter climbed onto the bed, choked a couple of times and threw up. Sitting up, I looked at him with sleep-clouded eyes and groaned. I knew what the warm, wet spot on my bedspread was. Confirming my opinion was a pile of glop and dangling from his lips several sequins, a piece of Styrofoam and one straight pin. It wasn't hard to put the picture together. Down in the middle of Dexter were the other fifty some straight pins.

He choked and gagged. I rushed to the phone in my nightgown and slippers, called our family vet who asked after I had blurted out the worst,

"Are you sure that's what he ate?"

Since I could smell marshmallows on Dexter's breath I felt confident, but I ran to the tree and confirmed only three of my grandchildren's ornaments left. One was missing; well not really, I knew where it was.

My vet told me to take Dexter to the animal emergency room. I grabbed one of the uneaten ornaments, threw on my coat, yelled to hubby where I was going, unceremoniously dumped Dexter into the front seat of the car and squealed out of the driveway.

I walked into a clean well-kept waiting room with dark wood benches against the wall. Two other animal parents huddled together with a ragged, tabby cat on their lap. I wondered what had happened to bring them here in the middle of the night. I dropped my eyes and moved to the counter to sign in. There I saw the banner.

HELP KEEP OUR PETS SAFE
PUT TOYS AND ORNAMENTS AWAY

Guilt ridden, I sat in the corner with Dexter.

Even antiseptically clean, a pervading sense of animal hurt penetrated the environment. At two o'clock in the morning, the fluorescent ceiling lights created a yellowish-white shadowy feel, at least with a trembling dog at my feet it did. Not stemmed by the caring attitude of the staff, a feeling of hurt and unhappiness prevailed as the vet walked towards Dexter and me. She knelt down and crooned over Dexter.

"Why don't you tell me what happened?" she said standing to look at me.

I explained about the ornament, growing smaller and smaller until I found myself a little child who stared up at the big 'teacher' and confessed to the horrible sin.

"It was my fault; I shouldn't have left the ornament where he could get it." I whispered in a very tiny voice. Full-blown guilt jumped up even while the back of my mind rebelled. Hey, I wasn't the one who ate my grandchild's ornament.

Smiling she said, "I'm sorry, we do need to take an x-ray. It won't cost much, but I need to see if the pins are still in his stomach, since..." she paused to look at me.

Oh oh, I thought ..."You didn't think to go through his vomit to see how many there were." I beat myself up, how could I not have thought of doing that? "Of course," I muttered and nodded my head, besides, how much can a doggie x-ray cost?

She soon returned and held up the x-ray to be sure I can see the fifty-four pins still in my best friend's stomach. My heart lurched, how could I have been so careless?

"We'll get rid of those nasty old pins in that great big stomach, won't we boy?"

She reached over to pet Dexter who leaned into the scratching until his legs slipped out from under him and he fell on the floor. Dexter got a "serves you right" look from me, but paid no attention as he lay on his back, legs in the air enjoying the belly rub. It occurred to me that Dexter didn't seem to be in a lot of pain. Not the same for me, my guilt grew; my insides hurt.

The vet determined on what she called a high-tech solution to Dexter's problem. She suggested that Dexter swallow some shredded up cotton balls and then "we" pour Hydrogen Peroxide down his throat to induce vomiting.

"Theoretically," she chirped, "the shredded cotton will wrap around the pins, and, when Dexter is doing his duty, the pins will pop right out."

Sure, they will, I thought, like daisies in spring. I said nothing. Then, considering myself an educated pet owner, I asked an obvious question.

"What happens if the pins get stuck in the esophagus?"

She moved back. Ah, I thought, good question, feeling not quite so guilty.

"That's not a good thing," she muttered, followed by words of wisdom, "Of course, if they are stuck at the other end, that's not good either."

Not liking that thought, I agreed to this risky, for Dexter and for me quite nasty procedure.

She looked on, shifting from foot to foot, as I explained to Dexter why this was the best thing for him. He didn't believe me, but, after a half-hour of misery, he gave in.

After he'd chewed on cotton balls washed down with hydrogen peroxide, I found myself waiting another hour while he did what he was suppose to do. Finally, the vet came from the back and brought the 'treasure' to me. Undoubtedly, I was wrong but it seemed as if a slight smile crossed the lips of this vet. She probably thought I deserved everything I was getting for letting this happen to my poor little eighty-five pound pet.

Bravely, I picked through that warm pile, counting pins. As she and I dug, she glanced up at me showing me a bone caked with a brown substance.

"Why look at this, naughty Dexter has been catching birds."

I got the feeling that this was also my fault. I drooped, Dexter on the cot next to us grinned.

Finding twenty of the fifty plus pins meant thirty-four were still in there. I groaned; the vet said, "I was hoping for more than that. However, now you get to take Dexter home and get rid of the rest of those nasty 'ol pins."

I stared at her, I did not imagine it; she grinned at me as she handed me the directions for the rest of my evening. Hardly containing my enthusiasm, I looked at the paper in my hand and wished for this just to go away. Seeing me hesitate, I guess she thought I couldn't read, she read it to me.

"First thing, take the dog home." "That's Dexter," she explained, "and feed him small meals every 2-3 hours for 24 hours. Each meal should contain a dozen or so shredded cotton balls, and a laxative.

"I'll give you some Cat-Lax to add to Dexter's food. It'll help matters along. Its chocolate flavored."

What, not marshmallow flavored, I thought.

She continued, "Then collect his stool, wear gloves, pick through it, and count the needles as they come out."

A thought flashed through my mind; it will be pouring cats and dogs as I searched at five am with a flashlight for the latest pile.

She read. "In twenty-four hours, bring him in for another x-ray."

Great this little Christmas snack was getting expensive.

She announced. "Last but not least, hope."

Climbing back into the car with Dexter wisely in the back seat, I drove home and put him to bed after a hardy meal of bologna, cotton balls, and Cat-lax... chocolate flavored.

Over the next forty-eight hours, twelve meals and too many hand-dipped searches, I counted all but three pins.

The morning of his second appointment, I headed for the vet' office with Dexter in the back seat. He coughed once, and spit twice. Pulling over, I turned to stare at the last three straight pins, slightly bent, on the back seat of my car. I patted Dexter, he smiled and the two of us went home.