

# Beginning to Smile



### LARRY'S BABY "TEAK"

Today is the anniversary of the day that my oldest brother Larry's dog died. The dog was named Teak. Larry should have named that dog Bruiser or something you would name a mean dog. At least that's what I thought back then. Teak died just two years ago on December 12, 2003. Teak was very special to me and my whole family, for that matter. He was the only living thing that we had left of my brother. Larry was murdered on April 21, 1998, at 38 years young. He had never been married and was without children of his own.

Teak was definitely a watch dog. He protected Larry. Whenever I went to Larry's house to visit, if there wasn't a place to park in the front of the house, I had to park in the back alley. I then had to walk through the back gate to get to Larry's house and back door. That was a problem because Teak was kept in the back yard. Teak would growl, bark, guard the back door, and show his teeth to us until we either left or until Larry would hear us in the yard and open the back door and calm Teak by talking to him just like a baby. We could then visit my brother. Larry always said that if we talked to Teak as we walked to the door, then Teak would butter right up to us, but I didn't want to take that chance! As a matter of fact, my oldest daughter Cynthia tried talking to him with no success, until after Larry knew we were there. We could only pet Teak after Larry was aware of our presence. I believed that Teak was a one-man dog, and that one man was Larry.

On the night that my brother was murdered three doors down from his house in that same alley, Teak broke his chain and jumped the fence. The dog catcher was going to take Teak to the dog pound but one of Larry's good neighbors, Dreama, talked him into chaining Teak up to the

fence next to Larry's house where Gene, another one of Larry's friends, lived. Gene said he would feed Teak and take care of him. Gene was like family to Larry and to Teak too. Gene and Larry were roommates for many years before Gene moved next door in a house that Larry owned. We knew Teak would never hurt Gene because he knew Gene. I was going through so much with losing Larry that I sort of forgot about Teak. Besides, I knew that he was being cared for by Gene who I knew he loved.

My dad was making Larry's house payments, so to help Dad out I said I would move in and pay rent. The day we went to Larry's house to clean, as soon as we parked in the alley, it dawned on me. Teak!!!!!! This was his home! He hated me and the girls unless Larry calmed him down first, and Larry was gone now. I thought to myself, "What am I going to do now?" My dad needed me to help out, and it only made sense that I help out. "What now, Big Shot? What are you going to do now?" I didn't know how I had gotten myself in this mess, but I had. I couldn't say anything to Dad so I decided I would have to make friends with Teak or let him bite me. I took a big breath and prayed for a miracle. With the help of God, I knew it was possible. My girls and I got out of the car, and Teak didn't even bark at us. As a matter a fact, Teak was wagging his tail! We walked through the back gate. Teak still didn't bark at us. We were talking to him about Larry and how much we missed him, and how he must miss him too. The girls wanted to pet him right away, but I told them not yet. I walked over to him just outside of his chain length, and I petted him! I then let the girls pet him too! He was very gentle with them! Cynthia was nine years old at the time, and Angelica was two years old. A miracle indeed we had received!

Teak took up to anyone that came in the yard from that point on. Anytime we came to the backyard for any reason, we had to stop and pet Teak. He wouldn't have it

any other way. You could have two arms full of groceries, and you still had to stop and pet Teak. He was a changed dog. I think dogs are a lot smarter than anyone gives them credit for. I think Teak knew Larry was gone, and he would have to butter up to somebody else. Teak knew how much we loved Larry. We even grew to love Teak.

The State notified my dad about six months later. They were going to make Dad sell Larry's house, so we had to move back into an apartment for a while. As soon as I got a house, Teak came back to live with us. My youngest brother, Darrell, built Teak a new doghouse, and we brought Teak to his new home.

He lived in his new house for about three years, until he started getting sick. One evening we came home to see he had dug a hole for himself, and he was laying in it. Teak wouldn't get out of the hole, not even to eat. Cynthia, Angelica, and I went over to him and tried to get him to come to out, but he just laid there yelping. We began to think he was stuck in the hole. We tried to help him out, but he snapped at us when we touched him. We told Ken, my fiancé, what had happened. Ken went outside and determined that Teak had some sort of pain in his back hip and leg area. It was then that I remembered Larry telling me that when Teak was a puppy, he was hit by a car and the vet had done surgery on him.

Ken got a sheet, and he carefully put the sheet under the front part of Teak's body. Then he and Cynthia lifted Teak up and walked him around the yard. I told him to bring Teak to the house, but Teak didn't want to come. He wouldn't go past 20 feet. He wanted to go in his house. Cynthia and Ken helped him inside his house. Teak then ate his dinner. We put some Tylenol in it; we were hoping that if it was arthritis setting up in his hip, then it would ease his pain. I was worried about how we would get Teak out of his

house. Ken said if we had to we'd saw the top of his house and help him in and out of his house and then set the top back on afterwards.

The next day Teak was out of his house and walking around! He seemed fine for a few days but one night Teak was lying on the cold ground, instead of in his house. I went outside and tried to talk him into getting inside his house, but he wouldn't budge. He was whining like he was in pain. Ken was already in bed, so Cynthia and I tried to help him up. He had no desire to get up so we covered him up with a blanket. I didn't sleep all night; I kept getting up and checking on him every two hours. At 2:00 a.m. when I checked on him, he had moved about ten feet, and by the time I went to work at 6:20 a.m., he had moved ten more feet. I talked to him; I told him to hold on because I didn't want to lose him. He was the only living thing left of my brother. I covered him up and told him that I was going to take him to see the vet when I got home from work.

After work, I could see Teak in the back yard. He had moved another ten feet, and he was covered back up again. Something didn't seem quite right; I was hoping that my instincts were wrong. We got out of the car, and before I could stop Angelica, she ran to Teak. He was dead! Larry's baby was gone! My heart was breaking, just as it had the day my brother died. That dog had sentimental value to me. I loved him!

I tried the best I could to comfort Angelica; she was very upset. When Cynthia got home we told her about Teak, and she, of course, wanted to see him. Ken had just gotten home too. He already knew that Teak was gone. The four of us walked back to say goodbye together. When Larry died, and Teak buttered up to me, I felt a little better, but now I felt that pain, that emptiness, all over again. I felt like another part of me had died. How much of me was left? I

had to pull myself back together; I couldn't give up. I had two lovely children to raise. I stood there wishing that I hadn't put so much faith in Teak. I wasn't prepared for this. I felt like Larry's spirit lived inside of Teak and now that Teak was gone, Larry's spirit was gone also.

Ken broke the silence; he spoke of how Teak was no longer in any pain and how he was in heaven now. Cynthia spoke about how she would miss going to see him every morning and the protection she felt with him near. Angelica spoke about how she would miss playing ball with him and petting him. I spoke of how special Teak had been to me for the past five years. I used to talk to him the way I used to talk to Larry. Nobody really understands the pain of losing a loved one who has been murdered! My brother was my best friend. I felt that Larry's spirit had died forever. My eyes began to tear up. Ken then said that the next day he would take Teak to be cremated, so we could always have Teak with us.

I feel Larry's presence sometimes still today, and I know I always will. It's a comforting feeling. Yes, I still miss Larry from time to time, but in my heart, I know that he'll always be with me in a greater way than he was when he was alive because now he's watching over us 24 hours, seven days a week. We try to keep Larry's memory alive in the hearts of his nieces and nephew also. They were so young when he died. Every November *Victims United* in Butler County has a candle vigil which my family attends. On the anniversary of the day that Larry died, our family and friends place a cross where Larry was murdered. Larry's memory will live on in our hearts forever. As for Larry's baby, Teak, he lays forever by our side.

~ Karen Smith-Flick

## NOVOCAINE, WHISKEY, OR PAIN

Not too long ago, I had an abscessed tooth and had to have it taken out. The week before, the whole side of my face had been swollen from infection. It felt like my eardrum was going to explode. The infection was getting worse and making me really sick! I went to the emergency room with thoughts that I would get something for the infection and for the pain. The emergency room doctor took care of me and sent me home.

As the week went on, the swelling started to go down, and I slowly started to feel better. It took a few days for the medicine to kick in and start working. As my appointment got closer, I started to get nervous. I had been to the dentist only one time in my life. My parents did not have much money or insurance when I was younger, so I was very inexperienced in having dental work done.

The day of my appointment came, and my wife decided to go with me in case I didn't feel like driving back and also for support. I sat in the chair, and the nurse pushed a button in the back that tilted me like I was lying down. The dentist walked in with a needle about three inches long. My hands went tight on the armrests as I asked her what she was about to do with it. Then the nurse walked in with a tray full of metal tools that looked very painful. I assured them that all of this was not really necessary, that I just wanted a tooth pulled. The dentist then told me she could pull a tooth with a numb mouth, or she could just give me a shot of whiskey and start yanking like the good old days. I then decided to sit back, shut my mouth, and let her do her job.

The dentist and her assistant were very gentle and took very good care of me. After it was done, they crammed a wad of gauze into my mouth so the bleeding would stop

and told me to sit there for a few minutes. I then started to calm down; I thought to myself, "This was not as hard as I thought it was going to be." I had it licked, and it was not really a big deal.

Lying there I felt the need to sit up. I asked my wife to set the chair up, so I wouldn't have so much blood going down my throat. She asked me how to control it, and I told her I didn't know. I said, "Just start pushing buttons." When she did, the head of the chair slammed down, and my feet went way up in the air. She then started to laugh hysterically. I was gripping the armrests while trying to stop my body from sliding out headfirst. I said, "Can you please find it in yourself to stop laughing and go get some help?" Finally she went out into the hallway and looked for a nurse, pointing at me while asking for help (still laughing). The nurse started laughing out loud, and before I knew it, there were about five or six of them losing control by the door. A nurse came in and brought the chair back up, and still we couldn't stop laughing. My wife told me that her side hurt that night, so I told her she shouldn't have laughed so hard.

I took my son to the dentist last week and was recognized as "the Chair Man." The next time I go to the dentist, I definitely think I will have a much easier time.

~ Scott Myers

### MY LITTLE RED BEETLE

It was one of the most exciting days of my life! Back in 1983, I won an approved loan for my first brand new red car; notice arrived on a Tuesday stating that the closing would be on Friday. On Friday morning, somebody from the loan company called and told me the closing for my car was changed from Friday to Monday. I was worried and disappointed. Unfortunately, at that time the economy in Mexico was unstable, and the money value fluctuated everyday. Precisely that weekend, the money market dramatically fell, and the dollar doubled in value. Consequently, the cost of the car increased to twice the original price.

The loan company contacted me and said that they would only loan me the amount established before, and if I still wanted the car, I needed to come up with the difference in cash. I was sad, but not discouraged. I asked some of my cousins if they could loan me some money to complete the amount required; they did, but I still fell short. I thought, "What else can I do?" I had some collectible items, and I could sell them. I felt so sad; one item in particular had a lot of sentimental value to me because it was one of the last gifts my father gave me. At that moment I had to decide if I should keep the gift or forget about the car. My heart said not to sell the item, but my mom said to me, "Your father would be so happy to see you smiling and driving the car. You really need transportation. It is not a luxury; it is a necessity." I sold the collectibles. Finally I had all the money necessary, and I was ready.

Days later, on the way to the closing, I took the subway and fell down stairs, about 22 feet. I was injured and semi-unconscious. Someone screamed, "Call the ambulance!" Immediately, in a matter of seconds, I remembered I was

carrying a large amount of money in a plastic bag inside my underwear. I thought if somebody found out, they could steal the money from me. I quickly got off the ground and took the next train to my destination and closed on the car.

In Mexico, when you buy a car, the buyer must wait three days to be able to insure the car and process the paperwork. For some reason I had a bad feeling, so I fully insured it. I remember my mom, sisters, and brothers went with me to pick up my new red beetle on my saint day, December 12<sup>th</sup>. When I saw my red beetle, I felt an indescribable emotion; my heart started to beat so fast I thought it would break; I could not believe it!

My family and I were invited to celebrate New Year's Eve at our friend's house, and I parked the car on the street. My friend and I were having fun dancing and celebrating the New Year when my friend's neighbor walked in and screamed, "Guadalupe, your car has been hit!" I opened the window to see my car. It was dark and foggy. Frantically, I went running down the stairs to see my damaged beetle. I felt furious, angry and depressed. I was so relieved my car was able to get fixed.

Months later, my sisters and I went to the movie theater and parked the car on the street. After the movie was finished, we looked for the car, but the red beetle was missing. I felt my heart breaking, and I felt miserable. The insurance company found the beetle sixty days later. I needed to go to identify it. What a surprise! It had no tires, no engine, no seats, no wheel, only the skeleton with the serial number on it. I started to laugh! What else could happen to me?

Fortunately, since I bought the car, it went up in price. The insurance company paid me more for my beetle than I had originally paid. The insurance company paid the

remainder of the car loan, and the difference came to me. With the remaining money, I had the opportunity to go to Paris, France, to study French. I couldn't have gone without this money.

I never, never will get a red car again, even if it is free!

~ *Guadalupe Ramos*

---

## CURIOSITY

This is so boring. He keeps telling me to lie down on this stupid floor. I'd like to see him lay down on the floor for once. He should let me have the bed. Yeah, that would be great. How come he gets all the good stuff to eat? I get the same stuff, every day, in the same stupid blue bowl. He better not put that sandwich down. It looks so good. Stingy old man! He didn't even save me a bite. Can't you shut that box thingy off? Come on, play with me! It'll be fun. You can throw the ball; I can go get it and make you chase me to get it back. It'll be fun! Come on! Pay attention to me! Maybe if I nudge your hand a little..... Uugh!

Whatever. I'll just find something else to d- Wait a minute! What's that? I smell it! What's th- oh! It's that pesky squirrel again! I'm gonna get it! I'm gonna get it! (BOOM!) Ouch, that clear stuff hurts. Why haven't you gotten a doggie door like I asked? How many times do I gotta say it? Hey, come on! Let me out! It's getting away! Stupid squirrel! Always digging holes in my yard. I dig the holes! Who does that squirrel think he is anyway? I'll show him. One day, I'm gonna get that doggy door. Then he's really in for it. Where did I bury that bone anyway?

Hey, I bet if I grab that clicky thingy for that box he always watches he'll play with me. Got it! Mmmmm. This thing is pretty good. This is better than those smelly things from his feet. Yum, yum. I just chew on this for a while until he- OUCH!!!! Not the newspaper again. I thought I hid that thing. Maybe I should just go lay down on the floor for a while.

~ Misty Dawn Gannon

