

Arizona Daily Star

## Sunday Opinion

### *Losing Daisy*

My Opinion

by Jim Kiser

Arizona Daily Star

August 14, 2005

Over the years I have owned several dogs. But I've learned the most from just one of them, Daisy, a Siberian Husky we bought nine years ago.

It was Daisy who, when she was barely 2, taught my wife and me what happens to a dog when it attacks a poisonous Sonoran Desert toad.

We found Daisy lying on her side, frothing at the mouth, with all four legs flailing. Shirley and I wanted to drive her immediately to the night emergency vet. However, the wise person on the other end of the telephone told us not to do that, but to keep rinsing her mouth out with a hose. (A caution to dog owners: The toads tend to come out this time of year, once the summer rains have begun.)

Then, three years ago, a rattlesnake slithered into our back yard, and when she attacked it, Daisy taught us about rattlesnake bites. (I wrote an editorial notebook about it then, with the headline "Saving Daisy". Incidentally, it prompted more reader response than I ever received from any editorial.)

That learning experience cost us \$1057 – a lot of money, but we felt it was well spent. In addition to our saving Daisy, I learned that 25 percent of rattlesnake bites are dry, and in another 25 percent the snake injects only a minimal amount of venom. The only problem, however, is that it isn't smart to wait to find out what dosage the snake decided to inject.

Now, this summer, Daisy – not because of her willfulness this time, but much against her will - caused us to learn about the cutting-edge new world of veterinary medicine.

Did you know, for instance, that there are 139 veterinary neurologists in the country, four of them in Arizona? One, Peter N. Gordon, practices in Tucson; the other three are in Phoenix.

The first signs of a problem came in April, when Daisy had seizures two weeks apart. They were so similar to her reaction to the Sonoran Desert toad that I quickly washed her

mouth out with a hose, and she soon got better. I later learned it was only coincidence. The seizures ended within a few minutes on their own.

Three months passed with no more seizures, but then they returned with a vengeance. We put her on medication, but within a day, she was unable to get up.

It was possible that she was refusing to walk, Gordon told us, because she had lost all sense of balance. Her world was whirling uncontrollably, much as it does for somebody who has spun rapidly around in a circle.

The evidence wasn't conclusive, but it pointed toward a brain tumor, and so we lost Daisy. However, that was not until we had considered options for diagnosis and treatment that, when I was a kid, weren't even available for people.

Daisy could have had a CT scan, using the same type of equipment as at Tucson Medical Center. We could have taken her to Phoenix for an MRI. And had the tests actually shown a brain tumor, well, Gordon could have operated. As with brain operations on people, however, he couldn't have guaranteed the outcome.

Part of me finds this new world of veterinary medicine exciting and humane. And part of me finds it somewhat bizarre. As much as we loved Daisy, she was, after all, a dog, not a person.

There is one important way; however, that veterinary medicine is ahead of people medicine.

As Daisy lay there on a comfortable pad in the clinic, with Shirley and me petting her, Gordon administered an injection intravenously, and she peacefully slipped away.

Anybody who has watched a loved one die a lingering or painful death may well have prayed for such a humane release.

Jim Kiser, the Star's editorial columnist, appears Sunday, Wednesday and Friday. Contact him at [jkiser@azstarnet.com](mailto:jkiser@azstarnet.com) or 807-8012.