

My family first became aware of sarcoma when my sister Andria was diagnosed with osteosarcoma in September of 2006. Andi passed away from on April 28, 2007. She had a short illness; only 8 months from diagnosis to death. Naturally we looked for information, support, and research. But these were all hard to find. Most spoke about it as a children's cancer, but instead she was 28 year old woman taking on this fight. Most of the new research seemed to be done by veterinarians with dogs. As weird as it sounds, it felt comforting that there was this common bond between dogs and her illness. We had a common enemy.

Andi was 2 years older than me. We had the typical sister relationship. We shared a bedroom. We got the same clothes and gifts every year with hers being blue and mine being pink. So we loved each other and fought like wolves. We got our first dog, a mutt named Chubby, in 1987 (ages 7 and 9). He was from the pound. He was timid, sweet, and fluffy. We loved it. Dogs would always be a part of our lives.

In 1999 we got Luci, a yellow Labrador retriever. Our first puppy ever. She had so much personality and had a special relationship with every person in the family. She was 8 when Andi got sick. Luci had been showing signs of getting older and having more health complications. As Andi got worse, so did Luci. It was like she was walking with her down a path to the end. Luci passed away on April 13th; almost 2 weeks before Andi died.

Our other dog, a chocolate lab named Ginger, did not take to the loss very well. She wouldn't eat. Andi insisted we had to get a new puppy. That Sunday, my parents took Andi down to a farm that was selling Labrador puppies. She picked one, bonded with him and my step dad held him to ensure no one else would get that puppy. Jake came home that night, excited to be a part of a family that loves dogs.

Six days later Andi died. Our hearts were broken. But we had this puppy that needed love, training, and guidance. He brought warmth, joy, and humor into our lives at a time when we were lost. It was like Andi wanted to make sure we had him to get us through the early time after her death. During one of her last days, she sleepily kept petting the air. She opened her eyes, confused about where the dog was that she was petting. Dogs were there to lovingly walk her to the end.

Twelve years later, we still miss Andi every day. Jake passed away last month. He was 12; an old guy in dog years. He was losing his sight. Had a cancerous mass growing on his chest. We had found out years earlier that Jake's mother had osteosarcoma. We couldn't seem to shake this monster. Our last gift from Andi was now gone; re-opening the painful wounds of her fight and death. He was Andi's dog, a prince of the kingdom she left for him. And he was loved more than any dog could ever want. I can only hope that his mom and Andi were there to walk with him to the end.

Since Andi passed my family has been involved in any sarcoma event we can find. The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center has an annual walk called "Steps for Sarcoma". It has been going on for 10 years. We have some solace about increasing

awareness and searching for a cure. But the research being done on dogs is even more important. Michele Cohen Marill noted in her Wired magazine article "Why Dogs Now Play a Big Role in Human Cancer Research" that "at least 10 cancer drugs have been developed with input from canine studies". By increasing Sarcoma awareness about all those effected means we can gain greater opportunities to save lives.

