



## **CAUGHT IN A GENETIC NIGHTMARE**

### **PLL- Primary Lens Luxation**

*By Annette Kent, NY*

Aspen is our little, four and a half year old, female Jack Russell Terrier. Like any other Jack, she is playful, mischievous and loving. Before I tell you what happened to Aspen, do keep in mind, we never thought this could have happened to us.

On Sunday, July 22, 2001, we were at a terrier trial enjoying the day when we noticed that Aspen's left eye did not seem right. She was squinting and as we took a closer look, it appeared to have a grayish color to it. Immediately, we knew something was wrong. Fortunately there was a veterinarian at the trial and he examined Aspen. By the look on his face, we knew something was terribly wrong. He said it appeared that her lens was letting go. Our hearts sank. How could this be happening? She was running around and enjoying herself just minutes before. At this time, we still did not understand the seriousness of what was happening to Aspen. We had heard of lens luxation but could not believe that one minute everything could be okay and the next minute your dog could be losing her eyesight. The veterinarian said to not waste any time and get her to a veterinary ophthalmologist as soon as possible.

Fortunately for Aspen, there is an excellent veterinary ophthalmologist not too far from where we live (Long Island, NY) and we were able to schedule an appointment for her the very next day. So, we thought we had everything under control, but we were very wrong. He diagnosed her with Primary Lens Luxation (PLL). In layman's terms it means that the fibers, which hold the lenses in place, deteriorate allowing the lens to fall out of place causing serious eye damage and resulting in blindness. In Aspen's case, the lens in her left eye had already luxated and the lens in her right eye was loose which meant it was only a matter of time and it too would let go leaving her blind. The ophthalmologist said surgery was necessary and it had an 80% success rate. My husband and I stood there in disbelief, how could this be happening so fast?

We went home and needed time to sort this whole thing out, but time was our worst enemy. We searched the Internet getting all the information we could find and we spoke to other people who had experienced PLL but the outlook was quite grim. This horrible defect did not wait for us, it took Aspen's left eye within hours and now she is BLIND in that eye. Needless to say we are still blaming ourselves and feeling guilty because we did not move faster on this. At this point, we could not wait any longer and scheduled her for surgery immediately. Aspen had only one chance left – otherwise she would be totally blind.

The surgery was successful! Her ophthalmologist lasered her retina and surrounding tissues and removed her lens. The reason for reinforcing the retina is so it does not pop out when the pressure drops as the lens is removed and it may also help in “post op” to keep the retina from detaching. In her left eye, he implanted a prosthetic eye that looks good but of course does not give her any vision. As I write this, Aspen is still recuperating. We have been putting drops in her eyes every few hours day and night to lessen the pain and help the recovery, Aspen is improving but progress is slow. It will be several more weeks before she will be herself again. We are blessed to have both a wonderful ophthalmologist and veterinarian taking care of Aspen and we are thankful for that.

Primary Lens Luxation (PLL) is one of the worst genetic defects that can affect our breed. It is so important to have your terriers CERF (eye) tested ANNUALLY so you know exactly what is going on in their precious eyes. If you see anything that does not look right, do not wait, RUN and have their eyes checked immediately. Talk to your vet and let him/her know that PLL is one of the top genetic problems affecting JRTs today. If your veterinarian is not familiar with diagnosing PLL, I would suggest seeing an ophthalmologist immediately. You can find a board certified ophthalmologist on line at [www.acvo.com](http://www.acvo.com).

Since this whole ordeal started with Aspen, I have learned that presently there are two research studies for PLL underway - one at UC Davis Veterinary College in California and the other at the University of Missouri, College of Veterinary Medicine. For the future of our breed, we all need to support the Jack Russell Terrier Research Foundation. With your help, our Research Foundation can contribute toward PLL research to help it continue. We need to learn more about this genetic defect so we do not keep repeating our nightmare thus causing more and more terriers to go blind.

In Aspen’s case, both parents do not show any signs of eye problems. I am Aspen’s breeder and although her mother is still CERF testing clear, I will never breed either Aspen or her mother again. In good conscience, I will not take the chance of PLL being passed on to more of their offspring or from generation to generation. This was such a devastating experience for us and I would never want to see anyone or his/her dog go through what we have been through. Until we know how this defect is being passed down, it is absolutely necessary for all to work together to fully understand what is happening to our terriers.

The following two websites provide information of what exactly takes place in your dogs’ eyes when affected by PLL. There are [www.eyevet.ca](http://www.eyevet.ca) and the JRTCA’s website [www.terrier.com](http://www.terrier.com) (scroll down to medical). Knowledge is our best weapon to get PLL under control and I encourage everyone to visit these sites.

In closing, I would like to say that this article is written on behalf of Aspen and all those terriers who have suffered from this genetic nightmare – PLL. May research give new insight to its cause and offer a healthier and better future to our most wonderful breed.

*This article originally appeared in the September/October 2001 “True Grit”.*