



My 16-year old son was in El Salvador visiting his father when he sent me an email telling me he was bringing home a “surprise.” After a bit of probing, he confessed he was bringing home a dog that he found in a cardboard box on the streets of San Salvador. He had wanted a dog since he could talk. As a single, working mother, I always had an excuse why we couldn’t have a dog, and again I picked one of the many excuses and told him no way, no how, we could not have a dog. Then he sent me a photo of Paco. I immediately fell in love with this white ball of fluff with giant dark eyes and the biggest black nose. He looked really sad in the photo and I knew at once he belonged with me. Against all odds, my son was able to get him on the plane and home to Santa Monica. When my son stepped off the plane all I saw was this tiny little white head sticking out of this dirty, ratty thin tote bag. It was love at first sight. Paco has turned out to be my guardian angel, my therapist, my best friend and my protector. My reason for living if I am being honest. (It’s been a rough few years.)

Paco grew from a 7 lb “Maltese” into a 21 lb “Poodle/Bichon and maybe something else” mix. He just kept growing longer and longer and longer and not taller. He’s got these short little legs and this long body. We tried to rename him Brody but somehow Paco just stuck. People always smile when they hear his name. Paco is the most loving, gentle, smart, sensitive dog I have ever had. (I grew up with dogs my entire life, but I never had a dog as an adult. It just seemed like too much to take on. Boy was I wrong! I should have gotten a dog years ago....) Paco shows his emotions on his face: he literally smiles, frowns, looks sad, laughs. His smiles are the best. And they are his most common expression. He is such a happy dog. Paco is a circus dog. He loves to run like a lunatic! At first, he would run in the backyard for close to an hour, non-stop, doing circle 8s, leaping over toys, the hose, flowers, anything. He would also run inside the house from room to room to room performing his nightly routine. 6pm on the dot.

Because of the economic situation in 2010, I lost my job as the company I worked from went bankrupt. My son got sick as well. Faced with a mountain of medical bills and no income, I moved from Los Angeles to San Diego, to live with my elderly mother who was facing several surgeries herself. Paco adapted to his new home as there are lot of very friendly dogs in her community. Paco quickly became the ring leader and strangers would walk past us as yell out “Hi Paco!” people I had never met! He is quite famous here in the retirement community!

One day in August I noticed Paco was very lethargic and was hovering under my desk as I worked on my computer. I just thought he was tired from all his normal activities. He stayed under my desk for three days, other than bathroom trips outside. As I was rubbing his belly I noticed his normally pink skin was dark blue and almost black. Then I noticed what looked like little scabs all over his torso. It was a Sunday night. The next day we were at our normal vet and she referred us to a specialist about 30 minutes away. After a few phone calls between the professionals, it was determined that we needed to get to the specialist ASAP.

Paco was diagnosed with having lupus. When she said he had lupus I couldn’t believe it. My sister has lupus. There is no cure. Or so I thought. There is no cure for human lupus but luckily there is for canine lupus. The specialist informed me that had I not brought Paco into the vet as quickly as I did, he would most likely be dead now. His blood platelet counts were the lowest she had ever seen. His own body was literally attacking itself. He was immediately put on 7 different meds, given twice a day. (One medicine alone is \$174 per month!) He was put on “bed rest” which is hard when his normal personality is so energetic, but he was so low energy he very happily slept the day away. I would wake up in the middle of the night and check his breathing to make she he was still alive. He became an entirely different dog. Sad. Quiet. Just like a big white lump. He gained almost ten pounds because of the Prednisone. (The weight gain presented its own set of issues.)

It's been a very scary journey, and one that I believe is coming to an end as he is responding to all the medications. There is hope, and he will survive. He's even started losing some of the weight. Best of all, Paco ran the other day. Not quite like his old self as he only ran for about 10 minutes, but he ran with his friend Marley! He smiled. He played hide-and-go-seek. He picked out all the vegetables out of his dinner. He's starting to become like the old Paco!

Paco truly saved my life and I want to save his. And we're on the right path thanks to Paws 4 A Cure.

Warmly,  
Kelly, Paco's Mom