

3's a Charm

*Family dog beats the odds,
bouncing back from mishaps*

By CYNTHIA LOVAN

When Sherrie and Jason Pride went to Equis Farms in Nicholasville, Ky. to pick out a Jack Russell terrier, the breeder warned them about the curious nature of these dogs. "The breeder told us, 'These dogs will get into trouble and get hurt and die. On the horse farm they are so nosy and tenacious they end up getting trampled,'" remembered Sherrie Pride. In spite of the dramatic comment, the Prides took home an adorable puppy named "Skip" to join their family.

Skip first gained notoriety as a dog prone to near disasters when on Derby Day of 2001, he was hit by car in front of the Pride's home. "My neighbors had been telling us that we didn't let him run often enough," said Sherrie. "We had a yard sale and I was cleaning up. I decided to let him run around a bit." However, Skip made his way into the street and was hit by a red truck as Sherrie and her mother watched in horror.

"Unfortunately, every time Skip has been hurt, I was there to see it happen," said Sherrie.

Skip's front leg was severely broken and he had internal injuries. Skip survived but had to have his front leg removed. "In a few days he could do anything he could do before like run upstairs or chase his tennis ball," said Sherrie.

The accident made a big impression on the Pride's son, Evan, who was almost 3-years-old at the time. "My little boy still talks about 'that big red truck'. It has influenced him to stay away from the road," Pride said.

Soon locals began catching sight of the three-legged dog on outings. "He got the heart of a lot of people. A local photographer took his picture and put a large print of it in his store window. After that everyone in town knew us as 'Skip's family,'" said Sherrie.

Life for Skip and his new family was uneventful till one day the dog's curiosity got him into an unexpected jam. "I was showing Skip to a new friend of ours in St. Matthews and the phone rang. I was distracted and he took off behind the house." Sherrie knew there was an area behind some fences that children

"It was a lot of work, but it was worth it ... Even my friends at work were pulling for him. (Skip) is special."

Sherrie Pride
physical therapist



Photo by Barry Westerman

Five-year-old Grant Pride, a student at Holy Trinity Parish School, enjoys some playtime with his dog Skip. The dog has survived at least three near-death experiences. Skip has recovered after being hit by a car, mauled by another dog and being knocked unconscious by tree branch.

played and quickly surmised Skip would head in that direction. She and the friend jumped in the car and followed that way.

They found him near Browns Lane with his head poked between two posts of a privacy fence. What they didn't know was that Skip wasn't just spying behind it, his head was actually stuck and an aggressive dog was on the other side. "The dog started attacking his face. I was pregnant but had to get down and pull him out by his back legs. When I saw him, half his face was ripped off," said Sherrie.

After another emergency trip to the vet, Skip again bounced back quickly. "The dog had chewed down to his gums but the vet Vicki Carr sewed his face back on and in a few weeks he was recovering."

But Skip's run of bad luck was not over. On Super Bowl Sunday of last year, it looked like his number was finally up. Jason Pride was working in the yard to remove a large heavy piece of dead tree branch that was threatening to fall in the near future. When the limb went down, he didn't know that tiny Skip had entered the yard below. Once again, Sherrie shrieked in horror as Skip stared sure death right in the face. The branch landed directly on him.

"He looked completely dead," said Sherrie. "His eyes were dilated and he was making a gurgling sound. We rushed him to the animal clinic thinking that we would have to put him to sleep."

Skip was cold, his heart rate had gone down and his oxygen rate was low. The



Photo by Barry Westerman

Five-year-old Grant Pride (glasses), 7-year-old Evan Pride, and 2-year-old Spencer Pride watch their dog, Skip, fetch his favorite toy, a tennis ball.

limb had inflicted a severe head injury. However, the vet warmed him up and the little dog still hung on to life.

"He couldn't lift his head. One eye was crossed, his ear was paralyzed and his tongue was hanging out," said Sherrie. Somehow Skip continued to survive and went home a few days later.

Throughout the ordeal he always wagged his tail. The only words he would respond to were "Skip," "squir-

rel" and "ball."

"He was getting dehydrated and food would fall out of his mouth," Sherrie said. "Our bills were getting high. I knew it was the worst thing that the tongue didn't work." It was causing huge issues for the small dog as he attempted to eat.

With no improvement in sight, the family made the difficult decision to have Skip put to sleep on Valentine's Day. "We decided to give him a little last sup-

per," Sherrie said, "When he saw the cheese he got up on his feet and stumbled across the room. I ground up his dog food and he started to try to eat. We decided to give it another week."

Luckily for Skip, Pride is a physical therapist at Baptist East Hospital. When it came time to get him back on track, she had the right experience under her belt. She even consulted a speech therapist about Skip's disabled tongue.

Sherry used her knowledge of physical therapy to help Skip regain some of his skills. The Pride family kept Skip in a bathtub until he could get back to his usual routine of going to the bathroom outside. "He would walk around in circles and spin and look pitiful. He got hurt a couple of times in the process, tumbling around," she said. However, Skip didn't seem disturbed by his difficulty walking in a straight line.

Eventually, Sherrie's work paid off. "We got him a little ball, he started sitting up, now he does everything," she said. "It took a lot of work but it was so worth it."

"We had to forgive ourselves for making the decision to put him to sleep. We were lucky he didn't have to balance the checkbook. But it has meant so much to my kids, my family and my neighbors. Even my friends at work were pulling for him. He's special."

How does rehabbing an injured dog compare to working with Pride's human patients? The dog is easier. Sherrie said, "Some cheese and a tennis ball...it would be great if it would be that easy to motivate people!"



Raptor's Delight

*Bald eagles are a barometer of
our country's environmental health*

"They (raptors) are at the top of their food chain so when things start happening to them it is going to start happening to us."

Eileen Wicker, Executive Director of Raptor Rehabilitation of Kentucky, Inc.



Photo by Barry Westerman

Four-year-old William Wicker marvels at Aquila, the 12-year-old rescue eagle at RROKI, held by his grandmother, Eileen Wicker executive director of RROKI.

By **CYNTHIA LOVAN**

It is New Year's Day. While other people are thinking of New Year's resolutions and shedding holiday pounds, Eileen Wicker is watching "Number 191" shrink to a small speck as it flies away in the steel blue January sky above Paducah, Ky.

"Number 191," an impressive bald eagle rescued in October 2005, is the latest success story for Raptor Rehabilitation of Kentucky, Inc. (RROKI). Thanks to the work of people like Wicker, executive director of RROKI, January is now prime time to spot many other bald eagles in the Kentucky sky.

"Number 191" was found in a ditch with a dislocated bone in its neck that is critical for flight. "We think he was hit by a car," she said. "We didn't think he had a chance."

The eagle was given a number instead of a name. "We don't want to think of them as pets," Wicker said. "They are so independent, so majestic. They fight us the whole time we are caring for them."

Of the nearly 300 birds of prey, including owls, eagles, falcons, vultures and hawks, cared for by RROKI last year, around 95 percent were injured by human obstacles placed in the natural environment.

Roads, cars, towers and destruction of habitat are a just a few elements that impact the raptor population. RROKI has a success rate of around 62 percent; however, "We as humans have put so many obstacles in their way," Wicker said.

Work by groups like this one has helped slow an alarming decline in the bald eagle population. Captive breeding programs that release birds into the wild have helped. However, Wicker cites the banning of DDT as the main reason we can now spot many bald eagles over Jefferson County and throughout the United States.

Wicker's mission is about more than saving injured birds, it is about teaching local children the importance of understanding raptors' roles as barometers of our environmental health.

"They (raptors) are at the top of their food chain, so when things start happening to them it is going to start happening to us," she said.

This is a concept many in our society may not always grasp. Wicker said that in 1962, ornithologists and environmentalists began sounding an alarm when they noticed the Peregrine falcon population had

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Photo by Barry Westerman

Aquila visits local schools to teach children the raptor's role in our understanding of the environment.

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decreased from 7,000 to a mere 327 nest sites. The decline was linked to the use of DDT.

In spite of their warnings, DDT was not banned in the United States until 1970 after it was found in human breast milk. Wicker said that although it is banned in the U.S., "It is still legal to make it here and export it to be used in third-world countries." Hence the importance of environmental laws. Also, new questionable pesticides have surfaced.

Children are the future lawmakers of the world, and Wicker, with the help of resident RROKI rescue bald eagle Aquila and other raptors, tries to educate them on these harsh realities. "Kids learn a respect for these birds, that they are important to our earth," she said. "We are such a disposable society. They learn there are other things on earth other than people and what happens to birds happens to us. People think this stuff (pesticides) goes away, but it goes into the ground water and into our environment."

Bald eagles are more than just a symbol of our country, they are an indicator of the health of our planet.

Eagle Watch Weekend

Description: Get a close-up view of the majestic eagle at Kentucky State Parks' Eagle Watch Weekend. Aquila, whose name is Latin for eagle, and is unable to fly, will be among the native bird-of-prey species the public is invited to learn about.

Time, date and location: Educational programs at 9:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Sat., Jan. 28 at Lake Barkley State Resort Park. Pre-registration required. **Contact info:** Register at www.parks.ky.gov or call 800-325-1708 by Jan. 20. **Cost:** Boat tours are \$40 per person. Van tours are \$20 per person.

ABOUT RROKI

RROKI was formed to rehabilitate injured raptors, raise orphaned raptors and increase public awareness about the importance of the birds.

RROKI is the state's largest bird-of-prey center, caring for nearly 300 sick, injured and orphaned birds of prey annually. The group is an all-volunteer, registered 501c3 nonprofit organization.

For more information contact Executive Director Eileen Wicker at 491-1939 or raptors@iglou.com. Educational information, interesting links and photos of rehabilitated raptors and baby raptors are available at www.raptorrehab.org.