

## BEN - back on the hunt for food

- an interview by Annie Wright of 'The Write One'

Ben is a nine year old, large, black, exuberant Labrador who is full of energy and literally jumping out of his skin to get out and about having fun and pursue his favourite pastime of stealing food whenever and wherever.

The good life he has now is very much due to the expert care and attention he received for a life threatening tumour on his jaw from the team at VSG. Bens' owners, Charles and Dianne Woolley live on a two acre rural property on the edge of Takanini in South Auckland and, along with Ben, they have a veritable menagerie of animals to care for. Charles says he has had Labradors all his life and loved them all but Ben is one out of the box, so full of energy and fun, but that all changed towards the end of last year.

"Ben developed a lump on his lower jaw which got bigger and bigger. I took him down to our local veterinary clinic and, when my usual vet was unavailable, Ben was seen by a new vet. He carried out tests and said pretty much straight away that Ben had a caudal maxillary tumour, which would be fatal. He would have to be put down, the sooner the better as he would die within a few weeks." Charles says he was devastated and, after discussions with Dianna, he returned to see his normal vet Glen Burgess at Vet Associates at Takanini. Glen re-confirmed the diagnosis but suggested Charles and Dianna take Ben to VSG.

"He said VSG have teams of highly trained vet specialists very much like a hospital and they have had a very good success rate in treating this sort of condition. We made an appointment and met with VSG veterinarian Mark Robson who explained the condition and all the options regarding operating on the tumour." Charles says Mark immediately requested a set of x-rays and carried out more tests and said he would confer with the VSG surgeons before making a decision to operate. We were told of the costs involved and the likelihood that Ben's face may be disfigured - all the nuts and bolts that we needed to take into consideration before moving forward but he was positive that Ben could be saved."

Charles said he was fully informed about the whole process Ben may go through right down to viewing a canine skeleton as an example - "They were so professional and caring. I felt they took the situation seriously and cared about Ben as much as we did."

Alex explained the goal of treatment is surgical

removal while attaining tumour-free margins. He felt that this tumour could be operated on with success."

He says Ben had a C.T. scan and the results gave hope. Mark then explained about Helixor, which contains mistletoe extract, which is intended to stimulate the immune system. This would be prescribed for Ben post operation. We were given all the treatment costs upfront and asked to think about these."



Surgical site at suture removal 10 days post-op

After going home and discussing the situation Dianne and Charles decided to place Ben in the hands of the VSG team and the process began. Ben was admitted to VSG for three days - he came through the operation well and when the Woolley's went to collect him he was running around, full of energy and fun."

He is alive and well and back to his old mischief - if it hadn't been for the hope and expertise that VSG offered he would be dead now." Charles and Dianna cannot speak highly enough of their relationship with VSG or the treatment Ben received."

We can't thank them enough. We were able to sit down and discuss every aspect of Ben's care, with Mark, Alex, and the VSG team- initially we thought there was no hope for him but we were immediately reassured by the VSG team that there was hope and, more importantly, that Ben would have a good quality of life post operation."

Charles says not everybody wants to, or is able to spend thousands of dollars on vet bills but for Dianna and him it was something they wanted to do and they have no regrets. Initial fears of facial disfigurement have also gone as Ben's fur grew back and he is now as good looking as ever, and once again out on his daily missions to find more to eat.

