

LOSING DESTINEE

A Mushroom Horror Story

We wrote this in May, 2003, after losing our precious Destinee, CH Silverado Cosmopolitan. I remember vividly every detail of those two horrible days. With Spring approaching, which to me will always be "Mushroom Season", I am prompted to revisit the events in the hopes that this may save someone's beloved dog.

It seems like once a month, we get an e mail from someone who finds this article tragically too late.

Dear Dog Lover,

Here's a short quiz on natural elements dangerous to dogs: Which is more dangerous, rattlesnakes or mushrooms?

Surprisingly, at least in our experience, mushrooms are much more dangerous. Although we do not have autopsy confirmation yet, let us relate a painful story in the hope that other dog lovers can avoid the devastating loss we just suffered.

We had lived on our property for almost 3 years. We bought it for our Weimaraner kids as a safe place for them to romp; 18 fenced acres with no access to roads and isolated enough that if someone did get out, there is little danger of getting run over. We are behind a security gate controlled by a remote & gate code. Service people, PG&E, etc., cannot drive onto the property unless we give them access. We thought we had the perfect safe environment for our family.

Then the rattlesnakes came. We came from property where we encountered the occasional rattlesnake; it is California, after all. After a visit to emergency with Destinee and Ryan and their tangle with the first rattlesnake, then a July 4th weekend that resulted in 5 dogs being bitten, we fenced in a smaller 2 acre area within the 18 - aviary fencing, the works. Last year we only had 1 rattlesnake bite & managed to raise our 2 babies by keeping them inside yet another fence all last summer. The Northern Pacific Rattler, while very toxic, is a manageable threat. They warn if you are too near, they don't always inject venom and the bite is survivable with the proper care. Our dogs that have been bitten are now very snake averse.

Saturday evening after the Camellia Capital KC show, I fed the kids dinner. Destinee refused. This has happened to us several times. Someone has eaten a dumb thing, lizard, half of a bird, whatever. Destinee had no visible symptom-no vomiting, diarrhea or elevated temp. Destinee & I spent the afternoon together on the couch watching TV, snuggling with a steady stream of other gray kids, usually her daughter Trinitee or her Mom, Vanity. I even went as far as trimming her nails getting her ready for the show the next day, which was Mother's Day. I planned to take her to the dog show & take photos of her with her 2 one-year old babies. The contrast of how we spent Mother's Day & how different it was from the one that I planned is still such a painful thought.

We took Destinee with us to a neighbor's house and she slept in her crate while we visited. We checked on her a few times...just resting. That night she decided to sleep on the couch while we all went to bed upstairs. She does this a lot, as she loves her spot on the couch. Michael & I both checked on her at different times during the night...still resting and in no apparent distress. At 5:45 AM the alarm went off for us to get ready for the Sunday show. Destinee was in a coma. We spent the day in emergency & in the evening took her to UC Davis. Her liver was destroyed. Everything, according to the emergency clinic vets and the specialist at UC Davis pointed to a poisonous mushroom, either the Death Cap or Destroying Angel.

If one gram of either is ingested, by the time you see any symptoms, it is too late. The only recourse is a liver transplant, which is not done with dogs yet. The course of the damage caused by the liver being

destroyed & wreaking havoc on every other organ is too painful to relate.

We combed the property & found 4 mushrooms within the inner fence; one had been bitten. It's a miracle we didn't lose more than Destinee. We could have easily lost everyone.

The conditions that made this environment conducive to Death Cap mushroom growth are very wet spring and sudden warmth. If you have deciduous trees, particularly Oaks, you may also have these lethal mushrooms. Comb your grounds for all mushrooms and compare them to the mushrooms found on this website:

<http://members.aol.com/basidium/deathcap.html>

According to the veterinarians involved, the only chance of your dog surviving this is vomiting the mushroom.

This is providing that you are lucky enough to witness your dog in the act. If this is the case, "The Dog Owners Home Veterinary Handbook", suggests inducing vomiting by these methods:

- Syrup of ipecac (1 teaspoonful per 10 pounds body weight)
- Hydrogen Peroxide 3% (1-3 teaspoonfuls every 10 minutes, repeat 3 times)
- One half to 1 teaspoonful of salt (placed at the back of the tongue).

I URGE YOU TO INDUCE THE VOMITING & GET TO EMERGENCY AS FAST AS YOU CAN.

If you suspect your dog ingested a mushroom, but it is too late to induce vomiting, take your dog to the vet to get their liver values checked!

Forty-eight hours after Destinee's death, and with all the introspection, soul-searching and guilt, I've had some realizations. We have had our share of emergencies & tragedies. Our message to the caregivers in these situations has always been the same, be as aggressive as you can be, do whatever you think makes sense. The money is not an issue. To hear the veterinarians at UC Davis say this is hopeless no matter what you do is just about as devastating as it gets.

Our plans to move are already in the works since, unlike the snakes, the threat to the rest of our beloved pack from these mushrooms is too great. One bite of this killer is 100% lethal. We will be looking for a flat piece of land with no rocks or trees. We've had enough Jurassic Park.

Shiffra Steele & Michael Ayers
Silverado Weimaraners

Dog Owner's Home Veterinary Handbook
By Delbert G. Carlson, D.V.M. and James M. Giffin, D.V.M.

PS - Since this was written we have received necropsy results, which point to a mycotoxin, aflatoxin or blue green algae. Even though the diagnosis is not 100% conclusive for Death Cap Mushroom toxicity, Dr. Smarick, of UC Davis stated, "If you ask me for a diagnosis right now, I would say mushroom, mushroom, mushroom. If you ask me for a diagnosis beyond that, I'd have to think about it."

