

A Close Call - Poisonous Toads by Tina Dennis, Regency Norfolk

It was a quiet night in South Texas. A cool breeze wafted through the yard, the sun was down, the lights in the yard had come on. I was relaxing on the swing with a glass of iced tea, watching beloved dogs romp and enjoy the respite from the scorching heat of daytime South Texas. Mike was due home from his meeting in a few minutes. A bark alert sounded and all the dogs disappeared barking into the dog run area. I smiled and thought, Mike is home and he would be walking through the kitchen at any moment and join me on the patio for conversation and relaxation. But Mike didn't appear.

Joy, my Norfolk Terrier, came around the corner of the house looking a bit strange. I first thought she had grabbed something away from another dog and was eating it because she pawed at her face. She ran under the swing, and I casually reached down and grabbed her saying "Let me see what you have girl."

Horror! She was foaming at the mouth and pawing at her face, a sure symptom that she had bitten a poisonous toad. I was on my feet and running to the barking dogs. All were in the grass dog run and in the middle of the group of puppies was a huge Bufo Toad (the larger the toad, the more poisonous). Twopea was off to the side, shaking her head and pawing her mouth...a second dog was poisoned.

I grabbed the first puppy and dumped her over the fence, yelling "Back, Back...get away." As quickly as I could, I grabbed the others and dumped them into the other runs, they raced to return as the walk-through gates were open.

I decided I needed to remove the toad. (Touching a toad is not deadly to a human, just disgusting.) I grabbed a piece of plastic from a recycle can and grabbed the offensive toad and threw him as far as I could over the 7 foot concrete fence (we built that fence because toads have no problem getting under 7 foot cedar fences).

Quickly assessing that no other dogs were affected, I grabbed Joy and raced her into the kitchen grabbing the phone as I went. I quickly dialed Mike's cell phone number, praying he had taken his phone to the meeting. Putting the phone on speaker, I grabbed a paper towel, wiped the foam from Joy's mouth, forced her mouth open and grabbed her tongue and pulled it outside of her mouth. I continued to wipe it clean. Mike picked up. I screamed "Toad! Toad! Two dogs poisoned. Come now! Toad!" He said he was on his way.

I then took Joy to the sink, took the vegetable sprayer and sprayed water across her mouth (not down her throat). She struggled in my arms, but this was life or death for her, and I was going to win. I am sure she thought I was going to drown her. Back to the other counter, grabbing a soft dish towel, I again put the towel in her mouth, drying her tongue on top and under it, pulling her tongue to the side and drying around the base of the mouth and the gland area. (You have to wipe the mouth and glands in the mouth to get the poison out.) Joy thinks I am going to kill her and is fighting me. I turned back to the sink and another rinse and another drying.

I raced out the back and put Joy in a

pen and started my search for Twopea. I quickly assessed the other dogs and puppies. No foaming or pawing the face or rolling in the grass, except Twopea. She was in distress. I grabbed her and ran to the kitchen. Same procedure, same fight with the dog. Mike walked through the door. I told him to check on Joy in the pen on the patio, and feverously continued to work on Twopea, rinsing and drying her mouth.

Mike came back in and yelled (that always calms me down) "Calm down." Well, that was impossible...now only time would tell. Had I acted fast enough, how much poison had Joy and Twopea absorbed though their mouth? I set them down on the floor and waited. Would there be convulsions? Should we head to the emergency vet? Mike said I had done the right things and for the next two hours I observed two slightly irritated Norfolk terriers try to make up to me for whatever bad they had done to make their Mom treat them so badly. I tried to make it up to them too, by petting them and telling them how bad they had scared me. But, no convulsions, no more symptoms. We had lucked out.

Bufo toads kill many dogs. They are found mainly below the freeze line in Florida, South Texas, Colorado River basin, Southern California, Arizona, Mexico, and all through Central America. They are large, ugly toads with poison glands in their skin and behind their eyes. It is their only mode of protection. They are night feeders and love well lit areas where bugs are drawn to the light. They show no fear of dogs and seem to know they have powerful protection. If your dog bites them, the poison is released into the dog's mouths and absorbed through the glands. There is no antidote. The first symptom is foaming and pawing the face. The dog will continue to roll around until they go into convulsions. Their eyes will dilate and they won't be able to close them. Their jaws will lock, their breathing becomes shallow (the poison paralyzes the diaphragm), they become stiff and they will die.

I have seen them from stage one to the last stage. I have never lost one to a toad, yet. They can be saved but you have to get them to a vet that knows what they are doing. Mike found one dog during lunch break. Reba had killed the toad (didn't just bite it...killed it...multiple bites). Reba was in the last stage, when Mike found her and he raced to her the vet, calling me in route. The vet administered Valium for the convulsions, and fluids. I am sure there were other drugs for the heart but I don't recall the name. When the Valium started to take effect, I watched my vet pry open her mouth (frozen from the convulsions) pull out her tongue and clean it with gauze and clean the entire mouth cavity. He was careful to rinse it with a syringe (sideways so she wouldn't drown). He tended her scratched eyes and cleaned them of debris and put in ointment. In her open-eyed convulsions her eye balls were coated with grass and dirt. Her pupils were dilated and rapidly expanding and contracting...convulsions. There were bloody feces stuck to her rear. I could only pray for my beautiful girl.

As time progressed, her eye convulsions stopped, she was barely breathing, but her eyes responded and she could blink.

The vet said that was a good sign. Her jaw was more relaxed and she was fighting for every breath. I prayed and watched. Her bowels let go...a bloody stool, as her body fought to rid itself of the poison. My vet said "Good sign, her bowels were working again." She vomited. I had to lift her head to keep her from drowning or inhaling the vomit. But she was able to vomit to get some of the poison out. The vet cleaned the vomit from her mouth and washed it with a syringe. She could neither lift her head or clear her mouth. He said it was a good sign.

Reba fought on and she was released to my care at home still unable to stand, but breathing well. Hours later, she licked a little water from a syringe; she was going to make it. Twelve hours later, she was able to weakly struggle to her feet, and I carried her out for a quick potty and back. She could lap water and I gave her water with electrolytes. It was several days before her bowels recovered completely and she was normal again. My vet told me later, dogs in her shape don't usually make it. But Reba is a game dog and she fought on.

Reba recovered only to find another toad months later and put us through the same emergency. I re-homed her in Kentucky...well above the freeze line. There are no poisonous toad for this very game dog on a Kentucky horse ranch.

The symptoms of toad poison are shaking of head, foaming of mouth, vomiting, bloody bowels, paralysis (locked jaws and stiffened legs), convulsions, inability to blink, followed by death. Sometimes the toad wins and the dog dies. Sometimes, the people win and the dog lives. If you know what to do, you can save your dog's life. Where I live, toads are the #1 killer of small dogs.

***Bufo marinus* - Giant Toad, Cane Toad, Marine Toad**

