

##### Georgetown Vet Aims to Heal War Wounds

 <div> <div style="width: 366px;"><a href="http://www.georgetowner.com/articles/2010/nov/19/canine-veteran/"></a></div> </div> <div> <p>There◊s an understated resilience in Lex◊s eyes. Caught in his soft gaze, the recognition hits that he◊s experienced far more in his lifetime than any human would wish to. The Iraqi War veteran has witnessed the terrors of combat. He has weathered that storm. For a nine-year-old German Shepherd, that◊s saying something.</p> <p>A commemorative Purple Heart recipient, Lex was a Marine Corps bomb-sniffing canine stationed in Fallujah, a city in the Iraqi province of Al Anbar. More than once, the job he and his handler performed out on the front lines saved lives. On March 21, 2007, Lex survived the rocket-propelled grenade blast that claimed the life of his handler, Corporal Dustin J. Lee. Battered but not broken, Lex◊s recovery has been an arduous process. Fortunately, he has not undertaken it alone.</p> <p>Through the efforts of Walter Jones, the Republican U.S. Representative from North Carolina, Cpl. Lee◊s parents, Jerome and Rachel, were able to adopt Lex. This was an unprecedented occurrence in the Marine Corps◊ history. Nine months following the passing of his handler, and in the midst of his second tour in Iraq, Lex faced early retirement. However, upon arriving in Quitman, Mississippi, it became clear that Lex still struggled to walk.</p> <p>Despite receiving treatment at Mississippi State University◊s College of Veterinary Medicine, Lex◊s condition persisted. Still, fortune continued to smile on the veteran. As a result of correspondence between Connie Harriman-Whitfield, Senior Advisor to the Humane Society of the United States, and her husband, Kentucky Congressman Ed Whitfield, Lex◊s situation came to light. The Whitfields, being clients of Georgetown Veterinary Hospital◊s Dr. Lee W. Morgan, had heard of a cutting-edge stem cell treatment he offered that could be applied in Lex◊s case.</p> <p>The only issue was cost.</p> <p>According to Dr. Morgan, ◊They raised some money and I lowered my price. I cut it to what it cost me to do it, and they raised money through private donations.◊</p> In the end, Harriman-Whitfield convinced the Humane Society to contribute \$2,000 towards the Vet-Stem procedure◊s final cost of \$4,400. Lex was flown up, and the three-stage treatment began on November 16, 2010. <p>Dr. Morgan has practiced in Georgetown for nine years and is the only veterinarian in the area to offer the radical Vet-Stem procedure. The first phase of the treatment consists of fat collection. Once procured, the fat is sent to a lab, where the adult stem cells it contains can be isolated. After the stem cells have been purified in phase two, they are returned to Morgan. In the final phase, Morgan transplants the stem cells into the affected tissue, which in Lex◊s case was his hip, knee, and spinal cord.</p> <p>Given the extent of Lex◊s war wounds, his x-rays are a jarring sight. When asked how many pieces of shrapnel remain embedded in Lex◊s body, Dr. Morgan replied, ◊I don◊t know, 50 maybe. This was hard, showing this to the parents, because this was the shrapnel that killed their son.◊</p> <p>The piece causing the most problems is lodged in Lex◊s spine and appears surgically inoperable. But if all goes as planned, once injected, the stem cells should be attracted to the damaged tissue and hopefully differentiate into the articular cartilage Lex has lost.</p> <p>or his part, the war hero seems to be taking it all in stride. Aside from the wobble in his gait and a drain on his back, meant to prevent fluid buildup where the fat was extracted, Lex appeared no worse for wear. He◊d been sleeping well in Dr. Morgan◊s care, undoubtedly due to the vet◊s commitment to alleviating Lex◊s chronic pain. Moreover, Lex◊s kind, gentle demeanor has gone unaffected. He sauntered over to say hello and gratefully accepted a belly rub, before his inquisitive nature

took over and directed him towards the waiting room. ♦You can tell that the owners really love this dog,♦ says Morgan.</p> <p>Cases like Lex♦s are what drove Dr. Morgan to learn how to perform the Vet-Stem procedure, and he is impressed with its success. In one instance, a dog, Lucky, had completely lost use of his hind legs. Following treatment, he regained their full function. Fox News went so far as to film footage of Lucky playing in the beach surf. This transformation is a testament to what the treatment is capable of accomplishing.</p> <p>♦This will be my ninth [surgery] that I♦ve done since last year,♦ says Morgan, ♦and I♦ve gotten complete success in seven of them and partial success in one. It usually takes four to six weeks to see whether it♦s going to take.♦</p> <p>Thus, following Thursday♦s surgery, the Lee family will play the waiting game. The 48-hour procedure is reported to lead to continued cartilage development for up to 24 months. 80% of dogs that undergo the treatment experience slight to significant improvement.</p> <p>Emotions are high because all who have heard of or met Lex empathize with the Lee♦s story. Dr. Morgan is acutely aware of what is at stake.</p> <p>When asked what drove him to help Lex, Dr. Morgan was heartfelt in his response: ♦You can see what the family♦s been through. What would you do? I consider it a real honor to be allowed to do this. This is the biggest case of my life and one of the most emotional ones. And I♦ve been practicing for 14 years.♦</p> <p>Lex is scheduled to head back to Mississippi on Friday, November 19. He will stay with Dr. Morgan until he is ready to return home. This will enable the veterinarian to ensure that there are no postoperative problems. Only time will tell if Lex♦s cartilage will repair itself, but those involved are optimistic. The Vet-Stem therapy could go a long way to restoring Lex♦s health while preserving Corporal Dustin J. Lee♦s memory♦a result befitting these American heroes.</p> </div>