



September 2006. It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. Kim and I got married on September 3rd, it was a wonderful day shared with dear friends and family, but with all good things the day passed by too quickly. Asta died on September 26th. The happiness at the start of the month was tempered by the sadness at the end of the month. All things must



balance out.

January saw Kim and I having celebrated our first Christmas together. She has a lot of Christmas spirit; every surface of the house has to be decked out in red or green. There were lights, ornaments, garland, villages and a tree. My suggestion of putting lights on the grapefruit tree and calling it a Christmas tree was frowned upon; there are rules you know. There was also much baking of Christmas cookies.

Our family got into a nice daily rhythm. Kim would get up first and let the dogs out. I'd walk the beagles and crate them before going to work and then Asta and I would head off to doggie daycare. He never had been crate trained, really the whole house was his crate and he never had to learn to have an eight hour bladder. At age thirteen it wasn't time for him to learn. In the evening Kim would pick up Asta from the vets and then go home and free the beagles. We would then meet at the gym and workout.

Having survived a winter together with no fatalities or serious injuries it was time for us to think of making a lasting commitment. In February we started thinking about a wedding. I sketched out a framework and the specifics came together quickly, then I let Kim know I was genetically incapable (damn Y chromosome) of planning a wedding. I could give moral support, but other than the picking out of a tux and finding someone to marry us it was all beyond me.

Meanwhile in February Asta started throwing up at doggie daycare. The blood work came back fine and the first diagnosis was stress. My reply was Asta spent his days sleeping in a hammock, how stressful could that be? He went onto Pepcid and that worked, but after six weeks I felt he should no longer have a sour stomach and stopped the Pepcid. Soon Asta started to throw up at home. I feared stomach cancer and set up an appointment. First there was the X-ray and the stomach looked OK, but the X-ray was not conclusive so I requested an ultrasound. The x-ray did show lots of white spots on the bones confirming he had arthritis; the two vertebrae before the tail were so bad they were fused together.

The ultrasound didn't show cancer, but Asta's heart was enlarged and pushing on his trachea. In February he had a heart murmur of a one on a one to six scale. In March it was a four. Doc didn't think we needed to medicate the heart yet, I put Asta onto some dietary supplements to help his heart function.

Kim and I went back to Martha's Vineyard in February. We stopped off in Boston for the running of the brides in Filene's basement, but didn't find a dress. Unlike 2005 when we spent the weekend with the little car on the island this year we just spent a night on the Cape and rode the ferry over. That makes five years in a row I have run that 20 miler. Kim likes shopping at the Black Dog tent sale that weekend.

Then in March, Kim and I both ran in the New Bedford Half Marathon. For Kim it was a test before her big spring race in May. For me it was a last check-up before this year's Boston Marathon.

The week before Boston saw us at the Merrimac Trail Race. It is a ten miler on an out and back course. I consider it the road course of the trail running circuit, by far the easiest trail race I have run. Kim also came to run. I got to the water stop at 2.5 miles, caught a root and badly twisted my ankle. I knew that my day was over; Kim went by a few minutes later and saw me sitting by the side of the trail. She stopped and I told her to keep going that people were passing her. We run for different reasons and she really didn't care about her finishing place. I carefully walked back after all the runners had passed.

I didn't run another step until about an hour before the start of Boston. I wrapped my ankle well and jogged through the 26 miles. I didn't hurt my ankle, but I doubt I helped it either. A week and a half later on only my second run since Merrimac I twisted my ankle badly again, this time on a jeep road in the Westford Reservoir and I had to get a ride back from a ranger to Kim's car. She had to drive my Z3.

I didn't run again until Seven Sisters, the hardest trail race that I run on the circuit, a very hilly and technical course (very rocky, the rocks are the right size to twist an ankle on). It was silly to run the race, I was careful and started out slowly, but somehow ran the middle parts of the race faster than I normally do.

We hiked part of the course in November; Kim won't be running in this race. It wasn't until August that my ankle finally healed.

Meanwhile I encouraged Kim to try new things. She took spinning classes at our gym. She owned a hybrid bike (the worst of all worlds, slow on the roads, heavy but not beefy enough to mountain bike with). I convinced Kim to save up for a road bike. She spent more than she planned, but loved the freedom and speed a road bike gives. Her bike weighs 17 pounds and is fast. We started riding on Wednesday nights with a group from Cycling Concepts where she bought the bike. Eventually Kim became comfortable with clip-on pedals, getting cleated shoes and pedals for both her road and hybrid bikes.

Then there was her quilting hobby. She saw an embroidery attachment for her Viking Husqvarna sewing machine in a store. She looked at me to play the heavy and say "No it is too expensive", instead I said, "Get it, it'll make you happy". Those were her big purchases for the year.

Oops except for a new refrigerator. The old one wasn't that old, but one day I had clumpy milk and it was 50°F in the refrigerator. It was the only appliance left from before last years kitchen remodeling. Kim likes things that all match so we started e-mailing each other refrigerators from the Sears website. I had scared her a bit by talking about spending too much after the road bike and the embroidery attachment. She e-mailed me barely larger refrigerators than the one I had bought when I was single. They were 30 inch wide freezer on top units. I e-mailed back a 36 inch side by side with ice and water in the door. She said she loved crushed ice. I asked why she was wasting my time with refrigerators she wouldn't be happy with. I did say that if she could hold the line on spending that we could replace my ten year old top load washer and drier with new front load machines in 2007 like she had to leave behind in Omaha when she sold her house.



In June I did my usual double of competing in the Mount Washington Road Race on the Saturday and the Mt Greylock trail race on Sunday of Father's Day. Last year Kim had her broken collarbone and at Greylock sat on the blanket I keep in the hatchback for emergencies. It is a ratty old blanket. She decided to make a new picnic quilt before Greylock this year. Asta loves quilts and would lie on the quilt while Kim was trying to sew. Lacey was worse, at one point she jumped onto the quilt while Kim was sewing it on the dining room table. Kim finished stitching the quilt on the drive to Mt Washington. We had a picnic lunch at a rest area on 95 with the completed quilt.

Because of the price of gas I let a number of races fall off of my must do list. I did not do the New England Road Grand Prix, but I did do the entire New England Mountain Racing Circuit and earned the title Mountain Goat for my second time in three years. Asta was a regular with me at the races while Kim stayed home with the beagles.

As seems to be a tradition we went hiking on July 4th. Last year it was Mt Frissell the highest point in Connecticut. This year it was Bear Mountain the highest peak in Connecticut.



It was a hot day and with Asta's condition I carried him up most of the way. At the summit the weather turned and it started to pour on us. The beagles kept looking back as if to say, "I'm wet" or "I'm dirty" while Asta the trail animal just kept motoring back to the car. Age is all in your head.

The Raft Race went off well this year. After years of resting on our laurels we finally built the second Seapig, the sister hull to the one we built in 2000. The race committee tried a new course this year. It is the first time since we took over from the former regime that we had a finish line accessible from land.

We took the Triceratops out of our basement to race

again. The Lee Jet boat was a no-show and almost by default Triceratops had won before the cannon went off.

With the summer winding down I started to focus on the wedding that Kim had been working hard on since February. The wedding went very well. It was small; just over forty people were in attendance. It had a nice intimate feel to it. My frugal nature makes me skimp, but over time I have learned how not to be penny-wise and pound-foolish. We hired an excellent DJ; he has lots of experience and really kept the event flowing. Our photographer was also excellent (she's a quilter like Kim so they hit it off well) after this letter is mailed Kim and I need to design our wedding album next.

My biggest joke was that it was raining on Sunday morning before the wedding, the leftovers from a hurricane. I knew we would be able to have our wedding outside because the first line of my vows was "Kimberly Sue, the sun shines on us today." It was a close call with the weather, but the sun was shining.

Kim's biggest joke from the wedding was how everyone kept coming up to her and saying "I've never seen Todd so happy." So Kim drew the obvious conclusion and came up to me and said "You must have been miserable before you met me." My revenge came after the pictures were developed and her computer programmer co-workers looked at the pictures and said how beautiful she looked at the wedding and how it didn't look like her at all. ;-)

The honeymoon went well. First we spent a couple of days in Bar Harbor, Maine. I strongly recommend going to Acadia National Park, renting bikes and riding on Rockefeller's carriage paths. We did about 30 miles on our first day and were back at our hotel for 2:00. We hiked Cadillac Mountain just after sunrise the next morning and then drove to Baxter State Park that afternoon. We stayed in a lean-to along Roaring Brook and hiked the Saddle Trail to the summit. The next day Kim was tired and concerned about her phobia of going above tree line. I was tired too and didn't want to leave her for a couple of hours on our honeymoon so we hiked the Owl. A nice hike, but not worth an eight hour drive on its own. By the time we got back to the car Kim asked if we could just go home, we had packed a lot into our honeymoon and we were exhausted.



As happy as I was on the honeymoon, Asta wasn't far from my thoughts. On August 21 he had walked two miles, his farthest walk in a while. I remember telling the deaf dog, you'll have a resurgence this fall, you'll be perky when the weather cools. Instead the night of my bachelor party even though we were grilling steaks and boiling lobster, Asta just laid in his bed listless. I was happy he survived while we were getting married and while we were on the honeymoon. He had slowed down a bit, but seemed fine after the honeymoon, sluggish but OK. Then one day he couldn't make it up the front steps, after that he was wobbly and had to be carried up and down the steps. I had blood work done, his white count was up, it was time to medicate his failing heart, his heart valves were badly deteriorated. Once he

started taking the antibiotics he perked up for a couple of days then he lost his appetite, I couldn't get him to eat the same thing twice.

I left Asta in Kim's care when I went up to the Lake Winni relay. Everyone asked where Asta was. I still had hope, but said he was on his way out; our little friends don't last long enough.

The antibiotics still had a week to go, doc checked Asta's blood again and while the heart medicine was taking the load off of his heart, his kidneys were starting to fail. Kim and I took Asta to JB Williams

Park. It was hard to believe a month earlier he had walked himself into the water over his head and now he could barely stand.



The next day Kim had to go into work early. Asta fought his medicine, I got onto the scale with him and he was down a full pound from the day before. I could see he was uncomfortable, the next day he would have been suffering. He was such a sweet soul; I never wanted him to know what suffering was. I called Kim and she came home, I called doc and let him know it was Asta's time. He let me have the last appointment of the day. I e-mailed Joyce, Asta's breeder and thanked her for letting me have had such a wonderful dog. I carried Asta up Talcott Ridge and looked over the Farmington Valley. The sun was shining, there were birds of prey riding the thermals, there was a wind and I told Asta as long as he could feel the wind he was still

alive. Kim and I then took Asta to the Founders Bridge, the site of many happy walks for me and Asta in the winter.

We went home. Asta was so weak he just lay there. I carried him into every room saying, "This is your kitchen, this is your dining room." Then I walked him around the yard, I set him down in case he wanted to pee on any important spots, but he was too weak.

We drove to the vet's with the windows down. I held Asta's nose up to the window and said, "Feel the wind". I let Asta down and he walked one last time across the vet's parking lot and summoned all his remaining strength and balance and lifted his leg to mark his territory, alpha male to the end.

Doc was great, he had a quilt on the examination table and a lamb's wool for Asta to lay his head on. Doc let me know, Asta's eyes were cloudy his vision was failing and soon to be gone; the mucus on Asta's nose was a sign the kidneys were failing. Then he listened to Asta's heart and said the beat was already getting irregular. His human timed it right to the end and Asta left surrounded by friends.

Asta's story isn't over; he just no longer has an active roll in his story. I had him cremated individually and the ashes returned. He died having high pointed 29 states. I hope to take his ashes up all 50. In October Kim and I hiked Mt Marcy, it was cold and icy, snow in the air, but Asta's ashes now have one state done and 49 to go.



He was the right dog for me at the right time, too good of a companion to ever be replaced. Kim is going to let me get another dog, another Wire Fox Terrier. This one will be a good friend, but not the best buddy Asta was, a different dog, not a duplicate. Miss you Small Dog.



In November I ran the Thanksgiving Day race in Manchester for my 30th time in a row. To celebrate I made Turducken for Thanksgiving. A silly concept Turducken is.

It was quite the year, getting married and planning for the future. I'm in no hurry for the future, let everyone else rush around, we'll just take our time.

Best Wishes for 2007,
Todd and Kim
and the Beagles, Snoopy and Lacey