

DOWN HOME: “You’ll be OK”: Uncertain truth

April 10, 2010

Topanga looked at me with her huge brown eyes and said, “Don’t leave me here.”

You wouldn’t have heard her say that. Neither did the woman holding her leash. But Topanga and I knew what she said. And so I bent down and scratched her behind the ears, told her I loved her and assured her she would be all right.

Is it OK to lie to your dog?

The part about loving her is absolutely true. But I wasn’t so sure she would be all right.

Topanga had a bad week. The Saturday before, Joanna and I drove down to Mexia to visit Lindsay, our older daughter, and her husband, Aaron. They live out in the country, and skunks have been crawling under their house and spraying randomly. We decided bringing a dog who never had smelled skunk spray wouldn’t make for a pleasant weekend.

So, we decided to kill three birds with one stone—boarding our dog at the veterinarian’s office, where she also could receive her annual shots and get a haircut. (OK, I apologize for employing the “kill three birds ...” metaphor when talking about a vet’s office.)

Topanga doesn’t mind the grooming. But when she turned 1, a nurse hurt her foreleg trying to apply a tourniquet to take a blood sample, and so she absolutely hates her annual checkup. That was Trauma 1.

In the midst of all this, the vet checked Topanga’s teeth and suggested they

should be cleaned. So, a day or so later, she went back to the vet's for a little canine dentistry. Trauma 2. When Jo picked her up, they recommended new, harder food, which would keep her teeth cleaner.

Topanga loved the new food. But when we bought some, the kernels were much larger than the sample the vet gave us. Turns out, Topanga had been eating cat food, which is much richer and, apparently, tastier. If she stayed on a cat-food diet, sooner or later, she would start to look like a furry footstool with a tail.

So, we quickly switched back to dog food, which Topanga refused to eat for, oh, probably 36 hours. Then she ate a half a bowlful of her original dog food. And that's when Trauma 3 started. I would give you too much information if I described what happened next, but let's just say Topanga got really puny and took lots of baths for several days.

Which brings us back to the morning when I left her crying in the vet's office. As I turned to leave, I wondered if she were really sick and if I would ever see her again. And I got out of there, because I've cried in a vet's office before, and even though they all understand, it's still embarrassing.

Turns out, her only problem was all that food switching. Her tummy healed, and she's OK. Now, I'm reminded that, with all the meanness and animosity in the world, the unconditional love of a dog is one of God's great blessings.