

One Beardie's Adaptation to Blindness from Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome (SARDS)

Nimala had a magical ability to do anything ever suggested to her with joy and style. She finished her Grand Champion title before she was 3 and was roaring through titles in agility and Rally with cheers from delighted friends and teachers. Then one day when we were diddling around in the garage she seemed to be bumping into my leg when I turned. I thought it was poor light. We went outside but it wasn't better, it was clear that she couldn't see. I later learned that SARDS had struck her. She didn't catch it or pick it up or get exposed to it. It crashed into her and took her eyesight. She was totally blind before I could get her to our vet.

Nimala and I have had a learning curve experience that didn't make any time for reflection. The first awful shock was seeing her careen off the deck to the ground trying to stay up with a dog in the yard. I still feel guilty of not realizing she needed help with space, every space there is in her physical world.

She never whines or whimpers. She barks as loud as our other Beardies, to be sure she is heard too. She is now fearless about racing to her crate for meals, and flying off that same deck and in control of where she'll land. She tries hard to be in the middle of everything and usually is.

Among the astonishing things I didn't anticipate is how Nimala can sense where everything is in her physical world. Even when the furniture is moved a bit (always warned not to move it!). She senses walls and doors and furniture legs with great accuracy. She has diagrammed the dimensions of her very large backyard so that she can have a vigorous trot without running into fences, rather than just mosey aimlessly about. That took her weeks, it's a huge yard, and she still works on some of the more obscure areas.

To diagram the yard space in her mind she walks small circles in one area, then makes the circle a little larger and so on until she meets an object, fence, bird bath, deck. Then she ramps up her speed and tests her mental image. The usual patterns which dogs make from puppyhood are still there, but greatly enhanced. Knowing the sound of a particular glass lifted from the shelf alerts her that there will be ice dropping into it and she's right at the fridge before the third cube drops, her hearing even more acute than before.

In the house she opens gates by persisting then goes through to rooms she hasn't visited in a long time. Once she's done it she can remember all the turns, each of the stairs, every corner. Her determination is enchanting and inspiring and sometimes very funny.

Going out to other places is not fun for her but riding in the car is sublime. She knows it's the vet clinic before the back of the car is open. She trembles a bit and doesn't want to go forward but she does and is her sweet kind self when she's inside on the table.

The oddest thing I've adjusted to is Nimala's need to be very close to me as much as possible. She doesn't want loads of attention, she just wants to be nearby. I am her due north now, my voice, my sounds tell her where she is. It's a profound experience, unique and a loveable responsibility.

(Editor's Note: This remarkable story is shared anonymously. Readers having a Beardie diagnosed with SARDS are encouraged to enter their information in BeaCon's open health registry to build knowledge about the problem. Go [here](#) to register and enter information. SARDS is on the drop down list in the health problem section. There is a FB group for SARDS).