

**Peekaboo went blind within 24 hours while practicing heeling  
in the driveway - it was SARDS**

**Christiana Taylor**



**Puppy Peekaboo, Winner's Bitch**

Peekaboo went blind within 24 hours while practicing heeling in the driveway; it was Sudden Acquired Retinal Detachment Syndrome (SARDS). She was just 8 years old. SARDS is a ghastly disease with no coherent treatment or definitive cause. The immune system is the catchall for it, as with many other diseases, and research is confirming this. She was over eight years old, healthy, smart, and beautiful. She was very good at everything she tried and big fun to train. Lola, leader of dogs and people, was six months younger and in charge of everything in her purview, particularly Peekaboo. A fact that became heartbreaking when Lola died from Mast Cell cancer two years ago.

A frantic search for answers, solutions, and treatment led to the discovery of a vet at a midwestern university who reported achieving some sight restoration in two dogs afflicted by SARDS. This prompted my desperate attempt to get Peekaboo's ophthalmologist to pursue the possibility of that approach. The response however was condescending, a total rejection of the doctors doing the research. Now, trials and research suggest various treatments are having success.

Immediately after she went blind at age 8+ yr, Peekaboo manifested several new behaviors, obsessive appetite, weight gain, sleeping more, drinking lots of water and frequent urination. But her energy level was still high.

Lola disregarded Peekaboo's sudden erratic movements, just as she had always ignored Peekaboo. But soon after Lola was gone, I made the heartbreaking discovery that Peekaboo had become lost in her physical world. Her spatial memory was very weak, she repeatedly bumped and crashed into walls, furniture and doorways she'd lived with for 8 years. In retrospect, it was obvious that Lola had been guiding Peekaboo constantly, inside and outside, but showing no evidence of that engagement. In every ordinary play situation, Peekaboo barked wildly and raced around near Lola during tug games, ran with Lola in the pasture, came in and out of doors with her, as she had always done. They drank together from the water bowl. They both pursued cookies, Lola always got the cookie-Peekaboo's were hand delivered. Lola was in nose work class, and I thought Peekaboo could do that, now that Rally, Obedience and the show ring were not options for her. I was astonished that at the first private lesson, Peekaboo could not find the treat despite vigorous sniffing. Loss of smell often comes with the disease.



While Lola was alive, Peekaboo seemed to be coping in her dark world. Now, she is different, and her needs are different. The last year has brought changes that are more daunting. She is losing her hearing, which is common in SARDS dogs, she is struggling to negotiate in the physical world, she sleeps most of the day, is very reluctant to engage in outdoor walks or short runs with me in the back pasture. In addition, she has gone through an episode of platelet crisis, now remediated, and gushes of blood with diarrhea, identified as idiopathic. She has recovered from that, too. Her stamina in each event is amazing, she is a courageous girl. Serious medical events are typical in SARDS. She and I have been lucky so far, some SARDS dogs have shortened lives that may be due to developing disease. Although she was never a kisser or a snuggler, she has begun to try it out-nice for me. Some traits remain, maybe enhanced: her dinner bell rings insistently, cookie pursuit has an edge of authority, interactive game time shows up after dinner-or else. She is a faithful companion; I am thankful to still have her near me.



### Some Resources

Washington DR, Li Z, Fox LC, Mowat FM. Canine sudden acquired retinal degeneration syndrome: Owner perceptions on the time to vision loss, treatment outcomes, and prognosis for life. *Vet Ophthalmol.* 2021 Mar;24(2):156-168. doi: 10.1111/vop.12855. Epub 2020 Dec 29. PMID: 33377263; PMCID: PMC7979495. Free PMC article.

**Results:** “Responses from owners that stated that their dog visited an ophthalmologist and had electroretinography performed (n = 434) were analyzed. The majority of owners (65.4%) reported the time from vision disturbance to complete vision loss as <2 weeks; 19.4% reported >4 weeks. Onset of systemic clinical signs to complete vision loss was >4 weeks in 44.5% of responses. A higher proportion of owners reported some vision recovery with combination treatment (14.4%) compared with monotherapy (3.2%, P = .0004). Side effects of treatment were commonly reported. Dogs with SARDS did not have a shorter lifespan than the reference population but had higher incidence of kidney disease (P = .0001) and

respiratory disease (P = .0004) at death.” *(I was unable to locate the complete article to information about treatment options. E. Sell)*

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