

## Sienna's story by Sheryl Ocampo

My husband surprised me with Sienna for my 30th birthday. I returned home from Sydney and he picked me up at Cairns airport with the little 8 week old Chocolate Labrador. Sienna is my first dog, I never had one growing up, and I fell in love with her straight away. Her enthusiasm and energy is unmatched. She is the most wonderful, loving companion anyone can have. She looks at me with the sweetest face and my heart melts every time I see her.

When she was 5 years old, Sienna had been running around us without any problem, suddenly we noticed her legs dropping out from under her. She became weak so quickly, within 2 minutes she was in the car, my husband took her to the vet only a couple of minutes away.

Sienna's condition was difficult to diagnose as her signs and symptoms were not fitting a particular condition or pattern. She was taken immediately to the veterinary hospital in the city. Sienna's condition went downhill very quickly and tests revealed nothing definitive. Over the next two days we visited her regularly. The vets had spoken to us about how we needed to get ready for the worst.

Sienna was paralysed in her right side and both back legs were weak. She struggled to breathe. The vet let me sit next to her and spend a long time just sitting by her side. I never said goodbye. I just begged for her to fight and I reassured her that we would get through it together. Despite her paralysis, I could still see her positive energy. She wanted to wag her tail and snuggle up to me. But she just remained lying on her side, moving only her head.

Every morning I'd call the vet asking for updates. Every time the vets' summary seemed bleak. Not much change, no real improvement. After a few days they spoke about euthanasia as an option. My husband tended to agree. I spent many days crying. My heart was a mess. My beautiful baby girl was dying.

Sienna kept on fighting. Two weeks later with very mild improvement, we were able to take her home. Paralysed in her back legs with a very rigid front right leg, she was unable to get up to feed or drink. She would soil her bed. Her quality of life was looking pretty bad.

I asked for help on the local Facebook pages, for advice, for beds, for sheets, for blue sheets/puppy toilet training mats. The response was incredible. So many people volunteered to help me. I had a so much donated. Most people even dropped them off to us. They also asked regularly for updates regarding her progress.

We started rehabilitation with just using towels or sheets to lift her like a sling under her belly, carrying most of her weight with the sheet. I did this with her every couple of hours.

I also bought Sienna a life jacket and we took her to the local swimming hole, Ross and Locke, in the mornings for some hydrotherapy. I would massage her legs and back, do some gentle movement exercises and gentle stretching. To keep her spirits up, I would take her in the kids' pram and run a couple of kilometres with her around Gordonvale.

After a few weeks she didn't soil the bed anymore. She could wait until I took her out to toilet. She got her control back. After several more weeks she was able to get up independently. Our whole family was so excited, but so was the community that helped us, as well as the vets and nurses.

The dog walking frame that I was halfway through making was suddenly not required. Having another beautiful dog, our German shepherd named Katana was also a great source of motivation for Sienna.

Sienna's rehabilitation is still ongoing 12 months later. We go for walks with the two kids in a double pram, alongside Sienna and Katana. On occasion, I walk too far for Sienna and I end up putting her in the pram, and my two year old daughter sits on top of her or on the hood of the pram. She loves the pram anyway; sometimes I think she just pretends that she's too tired to keep going. I think many people have seen the Chocolate Labrador in the blue pram around Gordonvale.

Sienna's passion and enthusiasm is a great source of inspiration for me. I have always been a lover of all animals, but this beautiful girl holds a very special place in my heart.

