

LIFE-SAVING DOG

# ‘My dog found my cancer’

Boxer was able to alert woman

By Brian Arrington

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Carol Witcher and her dog Floyd Henry at their Walnut Grove Home. Witcher says the boxer discovered her breast cancer. Brian Arrington

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WALNUT GROVE — Three years ago, Carol Witcher’s dog, a feisty boxer named Floyd Henry, put his front paws on her lap.

Instead of moving in for a hug like he usually does, Floyd Henry pushed against Witcher’s right breast.

“It’s tender,” she thought. “Why is it tender?”

Floyd Henry leaned back again, looked at his master and pawed at her breast again.

“That’s when I knew it was a major issue,” Witcher said.

Soon after, Witcher went to Winship Cancer Institute at Emory Healthcare in Atlanta.

It was what she thought and she says her dog knew — she had stage-three breast cancer.

When Witcher told her doctors she felt her dog found her cancer, they weren't shocked.

"They believed every word I said," Witcher said.

It's been known for years in the medical community that dogs' noses are very sensitive.

According to an article on the Stanford University website, doctors have been studying if dogs can detect melanoma and other cancerous tumors, though some have been skeptical.

Dogs have an alar fold, a bulbous obstruction inside the nostrils, according to the Stanford website. The obstruction opens to allow air to enter the upper part of the nose across the mucus-covered scent receptors.

Upon exhaling, the alar fold closes off the top part and directs air down and out through the slits at the side of the dog's nose. This creates a kind of suction that helps the dog inhale more scents while also mixing particles that might help deliver more scent.

Witcher, a 67-year-old dog rescuer, member of the Walnut Grove Downtown Development Authority and a deacon, has been cancer-free since May 2009.

"I knew that I'd be OK," she said. "I would be fine. I have a strong, intense spirituality. A lot of people say, 'God why me?' I said, 'God, why not me?'"

Since she was a child, Witcher hasn't been without a boxer. The breed, she says, loves humans, their masters and children.

"They are a 24-hour-a-day companion," she said.

She has rescued the dogs for years and that's how she found Floyd Henry.

Witcher's best friend as a girl was her boxer Chippy. The two were inseparable. Witcher said she told the dog her secrets by a lake as Chippy sat in her lap.

When Floyd Henry was a puppy, he was given to a Lakewood, Fla., woman as a wedding gift. Bad idea, according to the bride. Her father put an ad in a newspaper to find the dog a new home.

"I kept noting the ad," she said. "It kept calling out to me in such a way that I had to get this dog."

Witcher responded. When she arrived to pick the dog up, she saw Chippy.

"When I first saw Floyd Henry I said, 'Oh, my gosh — Chippy you came back to me for whatever reason.' I was sent by a higher power to save this dog."

But for Witcher, it's the other way around.

"I rescued him, and in turn, he rescued me," she said. "I tell him every day and tell God every day."