



Kate and Shadow, before he became ill, get a visit from little Spunky.

CASE No.1

As sick as a dog

By **Kate Hallissey***

I KNEW my dog Shadow was sick when he didn't eat his breakfast one morning.

Normally he would finish the cat's breakfast, eat his own (his record was eight seconds) and then sit by the breakfast table with cow eyes, waiting for any bits that might fall his way.

But he just stood at his bowl, looking up at me in a lost kind of way.

Mum's roses had been attacked by possums so Dad bought some possum poison as he'd had no luck with a trap and said he wasn't going to feed them any more rosy red apples.

We thought the poison would be safe as it was placed in bait stations a couple of metres off the ground. Also, it was a gel which meant it wouldn't spill

* Kate Hallissey and her parents, Paddy and Teresa, moved to Maungaturoto, Northland, in 2002. There Kate's menagerie of animals began to grow. Shadow, a former SPCA dog, arrived in 2004 and the poisoning incident occurred in 2007. Kate, who will be 13 in June, is hoping to become a vet or work in a job involving animals.

The vet scratched his head and said they were somewhat in the dark because any dog they'd tried to treat for poisoning had died ... Shadow's lovely white fluffy fur began to fall out and the exposed skin started to turn black.

on to the ground where the cat and birds could get it.

Mum and Dad figured Shadow must have eaten the poison but were puzzled as to how he'd got it. It wasn't till later in the day that they discovered the empty poison container in the garden.

It must have been blown out of the bait station by the high winds we'd had during the night.

The container was exactly the same as a margarine container and not only was it empty but it also bore one of Shadow's trademarks: it had been licked clean.

He always did this to any food containers that he came across or might be secretly slipped his way. His favourite was vanilla ice cream. Salmon tins were also quite high on the list.

We'd been told that retrievers were food motivated and certainly Shadow was no exception. The inside of his bowl was blue and we'd often call out at dinner time, "Don't lick the blue off, Shads."

I also called him Rats Guts and Mr Smelly, especially if he'd been in the paddock after the cows.

The vets were also puzzled when we took Shadow in. They poked him. They prodded him. They looked in his

eyes and in his mouth. They took blood and they listened to his heart. They took his temperature and, boy, did that make him sit up.

For months afterwards when we took him to the vet he'd sit with his back hard up against the wall. He hated that thermometer and we'd all laugh. But there was very little to laugh about.

The vet scratched his head and said they were somewhat in the dark because any dog they'd tried to treat for poisoning had died. We rang the manufacturers of the poison and they said all their research was done on possums, not dogs and, after all, the purpose of the poison was to kill.

There was one thing the vet was certain about and that was that Shadow would have to stay at the surgery for the next few weeks so they could treat him and monitor his progress.

They shaved one of his legs, put him on a drip and locked him in a cage. He looked terrible and I fought to keep back the tears.

Why did he have to stay there? It would be cold and lonely and I knew he'd just hate it. He loved company. ▶



Shadow, showing the devastating after-effects of the poisoning, with a chicken friend called Lucky.