



Mike Hensdill/The Gazette

Calvin Owensby holds Precious, a puppy born with a fifth leg. Owensby had asked for help to pay for a surgery for the puppy, but instead sold the pup to a show featuring unusual animals.

Five-legged puppy joins freak show

Instead of surgery, Precious sold for \$3,000 to owner of Coney Island show

By Nick Tabor
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Precious, the five-legged Chihuahua puppy from Gastonia, was 12 weeks away from getting her extra leg amputated, thanks to an anonymous donor, when Calvin Owensby received a call from the owner of a Coney Island freak show Monday afternoon.

Now Precious will keep her fifth leg forever. She'll join a two-headed cow, a two-headed snake and 25 other unusual animals in John Strong's Shows on Coney Island.

Owensby sold her for \$3,000.

"I'm sad. I'm really sad. But we're going through hard times," Owensby said. "We don't want to do it but we have to."

Owensby was laid off in December, and he hasn't found a job since then. He said he and his fiancée will use the money to pay bills, though they may also use some of it for a vacation.

Sideshow owner John Strong said he has wanted a five-legged dog for several years.

"You don't find a five-legged dog just anywhere, you know," Strong said. "Normally when they come up they cut the extra leg off within the first three or four months of their life."

Precious was born four weeks ago with a fifth leg protruding from her stomach, between her hind legs. The extra leg has six toes.

In an article *The Gazette* published last week, Owensby said he didn't have enough money to pay to amputate the dog's fifth leg. The story struck the heart of *Gazette* readers and several called the Pet Hospital in Bessemer City, offering to help pay for the operation, said Robert Neunzig, the Pet Hospital's head surgeon.

Another reader contacted Owensby and said she would pay for the amputation herself if he took Precious to the Eastridge Pet Hospital in Gastonia.

Owensby took the dog to Eastridge Monday morning, where X-rays revealed an extra piece of bone growing near the base. Veterinarian Clint Lowrey couldn't account for it, but he said it might be a "remnant of a tail."

Lowrey said he would attempt to amputate the leg in a few months, after Precious grew large enough. The leg's presence probably does not indicate internal health problems, he said, but he expects it to at least cause discomfort.

That same day, Owensby returned a message from sideshow owner John Strong. Owensby agreed to sell the dog that afternoon.

"I had no idea how much he'd offer me," Owensby said.

Owensby and his fiancée will travel to New York this weekend to display Precious in Strong's exhibit for the Fourth of July.

Afterward Owensby will keep Precious with her mother for another two weeks, to make sure she finishes weaning. Then Strong will drive to Gastonia to pick her up.

Strong has already given \$1,000 to Owensby, and will give him the remaining \$2,000 when he takes possession of the dog for good. Strong said he treats all his animals with care.

"It costs you so much money you couldn't replace it, so why would you treat it bad?" he said. "The dog's going to have a loving home and be cared for, and a lot of people get to see it and enjoy it. It's a win-win proposition."

Strong said as many as 10,000 people may see Precious this weekend. He charges \$3 to view his 27 live "freak animals" — Precious makes 28 — and the 250 pickled, stuffed or mummified animals in his museum. He calls it the world's largest collection of unusual animals.

Owensby said he feels confident that Precious will receive good care.

"We're gonna miss her. We got attached to that thing," he said. "I know a lot of people are going to get mad. But if they were in my shoes, they would do it too, I guess."



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