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15 Months in the Making, a Possible Breakthrough in What Ails Blitzen.

Sat, 2015-05-30 18:17 — Robin Olson

Fifteen months ago I wrote a piece that I never posted. I felt too much shame to dare allow anyone to read it. I'm going to share it with you now because I want to illustrate a few important points that I hope will help you if you're facing something similar in your life.

1. Things change. It's the ONLY thing you can count on happening-ever. So. If you're feeling bad, depressed, upset, this is not how you will feel forever. Why is this important to state? **Because when you feel down, you never feel like you will ever be "up" again.** Trust in this simple fact: that your feelings **WILL** change given some time. Perhaps you can get through dark days, as I struggle to work through this myself. *(I do not mean to be glib or make light of the fact that there are people who have serious mental illness and need counseling and medical assistance to get through each day beyond simply trusting that their feelings will wax and wane over time).*

2. The other point is regarding the next health crisis you have with your cat. I've recently experienced a very challenging health issue with my cat Blitzen, that was not possible to diagnose completely, which left me scratching my head, even today as I write this. The goal of this point is that there are times when giving it time is the best thing to do. Taking a step back is sometimes a good option *(of course as long as it's not a life threatening emergency).*

From the dark corners of my heart, here is a portion of that post I didn't want to share:

March 5, 2014

For the past 4 years I've worked very hard to get Kitten Associates^[1] off the ground. The first year I paid for many of the expenses out of my own pocket. I gave up opportunities to work a 9-5 job or to take on taxing freelance graphic design gigs at home because of the amount of time it takes to care for our rescue kittens 24/7/365.



©2010 Robin AF Olson. MacGruber one of the kittens we rescued the year we opened for business.

I do not regret my choice, but over the past year I've only made \$850.00 and I've lived off whatever money I had put aside for a rainy day. I don't go anywhere on vacation. I can't remember the last one I had. I think it was a few days in Maine in 2006. I don't drink or smoke. I stay home. I care for the cats. I write stories that I hope entertain and educate all of you. I work on ways to keep Kitten Associates afloat *(and that has gone well so far)*. My day ends around 12:30AM or later when I finish spending time with and feeding the kittens for the last time of the day.

I help many people find rescues or homes for their cats that I don't even post about or help them find a way to live better with their cats when there's a behavior issue.

I don't get paid a dime for anything I do.

There are people who would say I'm a moron for the financial corner I've gotten myself into. There are those who would say I'm irresponsible for having any of my own cats because as of this moment, for the first time in years, I have a cat who needs medical attention and I have

no way to provide it for him.

I am beyond mortified. I am heartbroken, angry, frustrated and I feel hopeless. I don't understand why someone who works as hard as I do has nothing to show for it financially.

I've made some changes and am working on ways to get my income stream back. I'm pitching clients for work and I've cut back my hours with Kitten Associates (*well, I try to cut it to only 5 days a week instead of 7 but I can NEVER cut back on cat/kitten care*), but finding paying work won't happen overnight.

A few months ago, my 3 year old cat, Blitzzen started doing this funny thing with his paws. He'd lift the right, then the left. Something was bothering him so I took him to the Vet. She found he had a rodent ulcer on the side of his mouth and that his middle toes on his front paws were very slightly swollen. It appeared to be due to an allergic reaction to something—what that something was, would require a lot more testing.

©2013 Robin AF Olson. *First signs of trouble.*

We decided to go easy and try something simple-just some Benadryl. It seemed to help and he was doing all right. We gave him antibiotics for his mouth. I thought he was fine, but it came back. This time we opted for a very low dose of steroids, but within a few days Blitzzen contracted a very nasty URI since his immune system was compromised and he began urinating all over the house and was aggressive to some of the cats. It was a side effect of the steroids.



©2013 Robin AF Olson. *Bad reaction to steroids brought on behavioral problems.*

I took him off the drugs and went back to square one. More Benadryl...for 3 weeks, then 2 weeks of clavamox (an antibiotic) and boy was he tough to pill. It didn't cure the problem. In the meantime I tried to figure out if we were feeding him something or if he was getting into something that would cause this, but why ONLY Blitzzen and not our other cats?

There was enough reduction in his paw pain and mouth for me to try some fish oil because our vet thought it might help. It didn't. Now both sides of his mouth are swollen and tender. He's depressed. Tonight he was seriously limping on his left paw. It broke my heart to see it. I had a very small amount of buprenex on hand so he's resting now, but he needs to get to the vet ASAP. I can't let my cat be in pain like this.

June 16, 2014

The next part of my post is a fundraiser, begging for help so I can raise the funds to get Blitzzen vetted. I estimated it would cost about \$1100.00.

After careful consideration I decided to scrap the idea. Instead I became determined to find the cause for Blitzen's problems on my own. It had been going on for over 6 MONTHS. The paw-raising, the rodent ulcers, waxed and waned. I'd think he was okay then he'd get worse. I decided that his mid-day snack of grain-free canned food would stop. He'd only be on raw food. I knew that it was possible he was having a reaction to his food so now his snack would be raw, too.

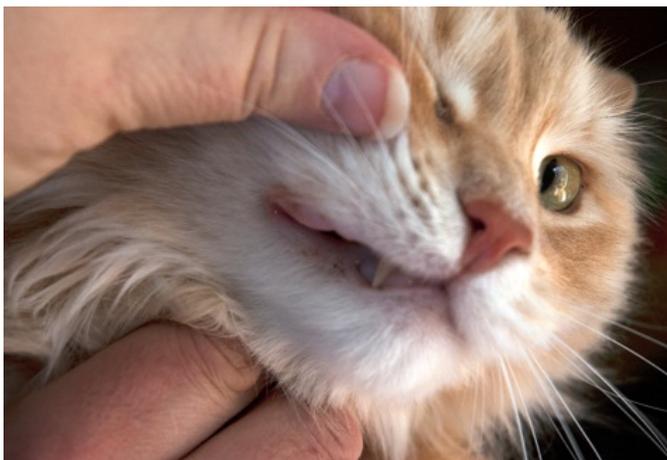


©2013 Robin AF Olson. Dr. Mary examining Blitzen's rodent ulcers.

The other thing Dr. Mary said was that it could be a seasonal allergy-which shocked me since he'd never had this problem before and six months had passed. She said we could do allergy testing, but something was nagging at me that this wasn't the problem.

Since antibiotics and steroids hadn't worked I wanted to give Blitzen time for his body to recover from the medications he'd been on. I did not want to continue doing any tests, like skin scrapings or biopsies until I gave his body a chance to heal on its own.

And then came the day I saw something I'd seen, but not "seen." Every morning Blitzen would go over to the blinds that hang over the kitchen window and chew on the cord that opened and closed the blinds. He'd gnaw on it. I wouldn't encourage him to do it but it never clicked with me that it was anything other than benign behavior.



©2014 Robin AF Olson. [Rodent ulcer on Blitzen's mouth](#) ^[2].

That's when I did a high-speed flashback over the past few months. Blitzen often chewed on the cords of the other blinds as well. The cord would rub on the corners of his mouth, right where the rodent ulcers appeared. Some of the other cats may have been chewing on the cords, too so swapping all that bacteria around made me wonder if between the irritation and the bacteria if THAT was the culprit.

I went on a mission to tie up and move ALL the cords on all the blinds all over the house. The following day I watched Blitzen as he struggled to get to the cords. Over a few days he stopped trying to get at them and some time after that I noticed that he stopped limping and his mouth sores began to go away.

The thing that also seemed to happen was that concurrent with his sores and limping I saw behavior that was indicative of [Feline Hyperesthesia Syndrome](#) ^[3], the same disorder that [Lux the Cat](#) ^[4] on [My Cat From Hell](#) ^[5] was diagnosed with having.

In Blitzen's case, IF he has it, it is VERY MILD. But during the worst of the limping and the sores, he'd also have these odd "fits" where seemingly out of the blue the fur over his back would ripple. **Blitzen would jump up and race across the room in a**

frenzy. He'd stop for a moment and lick at himself quite furiously as if an imaginary creature was making his skin crawl.

Careful observation, even note taking is important when you're trying to understand what's going on with your cat. In Blitzen's case, stopping his OCD chewing behavior MAY have helped lessen his other symptoms. I also made an effort to spend more time doing soothing behaviors, like gently brushing him, but not for so long that he became over-stimulated. He visits me while I'm writing and reaches up to be held. I will stop what I'm doing, pick him up and give him 5 or 10 minutes of cuddling and focused attention. It helps him relax.

Blitzen lives with 9 other cats. It's important, especially for him that he doesn't feel left out. I can SEE it on his face when we're having playtime and he feels overshadowed by the DOOD or Mabel. He sits back and doesn't take part but now that I've been helping him feel more important he started playing for the first time in a very long time.



©2104 Robin AF Olson. Back at the Vet with Blitzen.

We recently weighed Blitzen and the other cats so we can track if any of them need more or less to eat. He'd gained a bit of weight but was still within normal limits. The thing that was more astounding to me was his coat. It was thicker, maybe even a bit longer. Instead of being hunched over he slept stretched out with his belly up in the air. He simply looks amazing.

I'm still watching Blitzen for signs of any of these issues returning. He's had grain-free canned food and hasn't had a reoccurrence of the rodent ulcers (so far knock wood). The other night I saw his back fur ripple and he looked like he was going to have another mysterious attack, so I distracted him quickly, then sat with him and gently petted him, soothing his anxiety. The attack stopped and he recovered very fast. Other than that his other changes have been just shy of amazing.

Now I wouldn't suggest ignoring your Vet, but there may be situations where taking a step back and doing detective work pays off, as it did with Blitzen. He was never in danger of dying from anything we tried or didn't try. I felt like I could give myself time to simply observe Blitzen because he'd recovered enough where he was not in pain and not limping.

What I DID avoid doing was going down a financial rabbit hole running test after test for something that most likely was a psychological problem that blossomed into a physical problem. By making changes in his environment and care he responded positively. He's a much more stable cat now and clearly seems to be much happier.

As for the depression and anxiety I wrote about earlier in this post, I too am feeling much better these days. I AM getting some paying work and I've made some changes in my eating habits that I believe are helping me feel more cheerful and be able to take things in stride.

While I didn't solve world peace, I found peace in my heart. I hope this helps you find your way there, too.

A year later...just about June 2015 Blitzen gets sick again, but what is causing his symptoms to return?

You won't believe what happened next. Find out in our conclusion coming up next!

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Comments

Sun, 2015-05-31 14:07 — jmuwj (not verified)

RE: BLITZEN ^[16]

I've got you beat on the vacation thing, Robin: 1998, to drive a cat to Best Friends in Utah. It was amazing!

I live very much the same as you do, without the significant other, and my feline family are my "own", not in conjunction with a rescue (although all ARE rescues). For me, it's the way I want and choose to live, and I would have a very hard time choosing any other way, because, as loved ones would say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

As for Blitzen, I sure do hope all is/will be well with him! What a cutie boy.

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Links

[1] <http://kittenassociates.org/>

[2] <http://pets.webmd.com/cats/rodent-ulcers-cats>

[3] http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/Health_Information/HyperesthesiaSyndrome.cfm

[4] <http://jacksongalaxy.com/2014/06/18/jackson-on-lux/>

[5] <http://www.animalplanet.com/tv-shows/my-cat-from-hell/>

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