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Of Cancer, Carbs and Cats: The End and the Beginning. Part 3 of 3

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The next morning I got Belle into a cat carrier. The game plan was to pick up Buddy, then get Belle examined. Sam would meet us an hour later with Nicky and we'd all go home in a mini-caravan.

Dr. Mary examined Belle. **No surprise, her teeth are terrible.** Two canines (*fangs*) are hyper-extended and loose. One back tooth is broken. There's a lot of gum disease and irritation; possibly more than those three teeth need to come out.

Belle weighs over 17 pounds. She is obese.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Belle being a good girl during her vet visit.

We updated Belle's vaccinations and I got an estimate of \$700-950 to do the dental procedure. We'd just spent \$2000 on Buddy. There wasn't much left. I'd have to do another fundraiser for Belle and hope we could make it happen soon. Having bad teeth for easily over a year was cruel. **Again, I thought about O.F., ignoring his cat's health, while they were in pain. All it would have taken was a trip to the vet once in awhile and even a slightly better diet would have helped.**



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Adorable Belle.

Sam arrived with Nicky. As always, Nicky was meowing loudly as Sam entered the clinic. I was anxious about the blood test. I prayed it would be ok and that Nicky's numbers weren't too much worse. **In July, Nicky got really sick and had to be on an IV for a few days, but he recovered. His kidney function had gotten worse and Sam had to give him fluids every day instead of 3 times a week. It was a small price to pay if it kept Nicky with us longer.**



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Sam and Nicky waiting for the results.

I was hoping that Nicky's phosphorus levels were high. We could fix that. The side effects of lethargy and weight loss fit, but that was true of a lot of issues. Dr. Mary examined Nicky. He'd lost a dramatic amount of weight. He was down to 14 pounds, when he'd been pretty stable at 16 pounds for years. They ran the blood work and the results were shocking. Nicky's BUN ^[3] and Creatinine ^[4] were so high the brand new IDEXX machine could not factor them. His phosphorus was up. He was very anemic, too. Dr. Mary said we could put Nicky on an IV and

see how he responded. Nicky also had recently, within a day or so, chipped one of his canine teeth. Dr. Mary thought either Nicky fell, or more likely had another seizure we didn't know about and broke his tooth. We discussed giving Nicky fluids for a few days, then trying to do a quick dental to get the tooth out. It would be touch and go, but we'd give it a try, of course. This was Nicky. He'd had many health issues over the years, but we always found a way to shore him back up. Even if we were not sure how we were going to pay for his care, it was going to get done.

So we agreed to leave Nicky at the vet and bring Belle and Buddy home. Sam loaded them into his car and I drove ahead in mine, thinking I'd unlock the front door and be ready to help him get the cats into the house when he arrived. **But even a simple task like that turned into a high stress situation.**



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Buddy getting ready to come back home.

Sam got home safely and I was waiting for them as planned. I removed Belle from the car and began walking to the front door.

No sooner than I got her inside I heard Sam yell my name. Sam NEVER yells. I put Belle down and ran to the car to find Sam scrambling to grab Buddy who was sitting IN THE DRIVEWAY. The cheap cat carrier had fallen apart when Sam lifted it and Buddy fell out.

Thankfully Buddy was too scared to run and Sam scooped him up before he dashed off into the woods. I quickly escorted both of them into the house, making certain Buddy wasn't going to harm Sam or blow his newly minted stitches out and need to be rushed back to the vet.

We got Buddy and Belle settled. They were both upset and cranky, but at least they were both starting to eat something other than dry food. I tried to get some long overdue work started, but the phone rang. It was Dr. Mary. Though she always sounds cheerful and upbeat, her message was not. **She reported that Nicky had just had a grand mal seizure. They gave him more valium. He was resting, but she wanted me to know. I told Sam the bad news, but that was nothing compared to what was going to come next.**

A few hours later, Dr. Larry called. He wanted to speak with me and Sam. He has never asked to speak with both of us at the same time so I knew it was bad news. He said he had looked over Nicky's test results and apologized for interfering with Dr. Mary's assessments, but he had to give us his opinion. He'd been Nicky's Vet for most of Nicky's life. Dr. Larry often joked about catnapping Nicky because Nicky was such a great cat, one he had a special connection with. **We knew that Dr. Larry was as devoted as we were to giving Nicky the best life we could, but what he said next we were not ready to hear.**

Dr. Larry told us that in his many decades as a Vet he rarely, if ever, saw a cat or dog come back from off-the-charts kidney numbers and live very long after they were taken off an IV. On top of that, Nicky also had something else going on. It was either lymphoma or meningioma. Something was effecting his central nervous system, causing the seizures.

When Nicky had seized, Dr. Larry was the one who held him through it and gave him comfort. He told us that with what was on Nicky's plate and all the challenges he faced, that the best thing for Nicky was to let him go.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Final moments with our beloved boy.

Before we could ask he added that, yes, we could take him home for the night, but Nicky was at high risk of having a deadly seizure and dying in a lot of pain. We could take him to the ER Vet and spend a few thousand dollars keeping him on an IV for a few days, then see if his numbers responded well, but again, if it did buy us time, it would not be much time at all and Nicky would be in a cold, sterile place with strangers and die with them. If he survived that, *maybe* we'd be able to bring Nicky home but we'd face the same issues all over again, the same fears about seizures and his kidneys were shot. We couldn't fix that.

We've always known that Nicky would not be with us forever, but we were not ready to say goodbye to him so soon. The world was spinning out of control and we just wanted it to stop. Having to see my old boyfriend and know he was going to die, after the stress of getting his cats, trying to raise funds with no time to do so, trying to get his cats to eat, not fight with each other, not be so horribly depressed...*now this.*



©2007 Robin AF Olson. Nicky and his sister, Nora, who is still with us, was named after the characters Nick and Nora Charles from the Dashiell Hammett novel, *The Thin Man*.

Nicky and Sam have always been deeply bonded to each other. Though I talked with Sam about our options, it was only right for Sam to choose what we would do next. It was 5 o'clock at night. The Vet closed at 7 PM. **We didn't have much time to**

make a life or death decision.

We talked. We cried. We listed very “what if” we could think of, but in the end we both agreed we wanted Nicky to have peace if there really was nothing else we could do. With no kidney function, Nicky was being poisoned by his own bodily fluids. It wasn’t right to let anything cause him any further pain.

I began to fuss, preparing as fast as I could for what we would need. Staying busy kept me from falling apart. We just lost our dear cat Cricket four months ago. Here we were again, in this terrible place. I listed what to do in my head as I began gathering items: *find a nice cloth to wrap Nicky’s body, bring something for Nicky that he would like as a special treat, print out a photo of us to put with Nicky’s body after he passed away, figure out how to get a paw print if we could.* I didn’t want Sam to have to do this. Nicky was his boy. I would drive us to the Vet. I would take on the burden as much as I could, even if my heart was breaking, too. Sam didn’t need to have to worry about anything else.

I’d just left the Vet a few hours before and here I was again. I’d been there every day that week. We were silent as I drove us to the vet, our hearts so heavy a single word would have burst open a dam of heartache. I didn’t want to walk in the door. I wanted to turn around and run out, but I couldn’t do that. I couldn’t do that to Sam or to Nicky.

They brought Nicky in to see us in an exam room. Seeing him again made my stomach hurt and my legs go weak. He looked worn down, but calm. The vallium, no doubt, was wearing away any stress he was feeling. They told us to take our time. I took out a soft towel and put it in Sam’s lap. He cradled Nicky as he’d done so many times over the years. Nicky rested comfortably in his arms. The only thing different was that Nicky had a catheter in place in his left front leg from being on an IV.

The overhead lights were too bright. I turned them off and Sam turned on the softer lights that illuminated only the counter under some cabinets. We were both crying and petting Nicky. I took some photos, not sure I’d ever want to see them again. We told Nicky how much we loved him. Nicky relaxed, “made muffins,” in the air and purred. I gave him a catnip banana. He enjoyed rubbing his face on it while he relaxed. He didn’t appear to be a cat who needed to be euthanized. He was still our Nicky.

Dr. Larry came in to talk to us. Again he told us why he felt it was time, but respected that if we disagreed it was okay for us to do something else. Dr. Larry has always been understanding, no matter what we decided about treatment. We asked more questions, hoping to find an answer not thought of, a treatment or case he knew about where we could still have hope, but there were none.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. *The final photo of Nicky.*

Dr. Larry left to prepare the injections after we agreed it was time. He gave us as much time as he could, but the clinic was going to close soon. We’d had a final hour with Nicky, loving him as much as we were able, **but now it was time to say goodbye forever.**

Sam held Nicky, while Nicky continued to purr in his arms. The hushed tones in the room gave way to a feeling of love that filled the space. Nicky was with his favorite people, including his friend Dr. Larry. As Dr. Larry gave him the first injection Nicky’s purr silenced as he relaxed further. I was standing behind Sam and Nicky, just petting Nicky, not wanting to see him die. I couldn’t look any more. The second injection was given. I turned my head and continued to pet Nicky and tell him I loved him over and over again. I could hear Dr. Larry fussing with something. He took his stethoscope out and listened to Nicky’s chest. There was no sound. He nodded, turned and silently left the room.

Nicky was gone.

I got to work. Not wanting to see Nicky's lifeless form. I got the photo of us out of my bag and wrote a note on it to Nicky. I took one of Sam's fleece shirts and carefully placed it on the exam table, spreading it out flat, removing all the wrinkles. This is what we would wrap Nicky's body in because when the sleeves were folded over him, it would be like he had an eternal hug from his daddy.

I was sobbing so hard I could barely stand. I tried to focus on my tasks, but my head felt like it was going to split in two from agony. I tried to be strong for Sam but I was failing.

I offered to take Nicky so Sam could write something on the photo. Nicky's body was limp. We often joked he was a boneless cat, but he was limp in a way that was more like a wet rag. It was difficult to hold him.

I gently placed Nicky onto the fleece. I placed the catnip toy next to his head and slipped the photo under his body. I wrapped the sleeves across him and gave him a last kiss. Nicky would be cremated with all these things. I hoped that somehow he would know and it would comfort him.

I wanted to get out of that room and never come back again. This couldn't have happened. We didn't just have our beloved cat put to sleep. We had no time to prepare. No warning. *It happened all too fast.*

I'd spent 12 of the past 16 years loving that cat. He became part of my family when Sam moved in. Sam had had Nicky since he was a few months old. **Nicky's death felt more like losing a limb. I didn't know how we were going to walk in the front door and know we would never see him again, let alone live another day without our sweet, silly, boneless, goofy, loving, gentle, giant who often hogged the bed when he spooned with Sam each night.**

I'm going to write a memorial about Nicky some day. Right now my heart is broken. Over the past year we've lost Gracie, Cricket and now Nicky. 2016 has been one of the worst years of my life. I keep thinking that things have to get better, but they don't. I keep wondering how Sam and I can keep going forward when we feel kicked to the curb over and over again.

I'm grateful, at least, that we gave Nicky a very loved, peaceful, gentle passing. His experience really was to just go to sleep. He wasn't in pain and he died in his daddy's arms; the arms of the guy who loved him most in the world.

We will always love you, Nicky, and miss you and wish your life didn't have to end so soon. Fly Free sweet boy. July 2000—November 17, 2016.



©2007 Robin AF Olson. Our handsome boy.

And as for O.F., I'm truly sorry you're so sick. I'm not sure how sick you really are, but I do know how sick your cats are. For someone who has indulged himself, cheated on his partners, lived large most of his life, it wouldn't have cost you much to provide a half-way decent diet to your poor cats, to get them a scratching post or a toy, to have a vet look at them, even a few times. Now I'm left to pick up the pieces. These poor cats are depressed and in pain and have been so for years.

In all honesty, if you told me you were well and wanted your cats back I'd tell you to shove it. In the weeks they've been here you never contacted me even ONCE to see how they were doing. You don't deserve the unconditional love these cats give. They are gentle, sweet, and so very charming. You told me you believed in Karma and didn't understand why this happened to you. I believe in Karma, too, and I totally get it.

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