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Saving Spencer: The Everlasting Now. Ch. 3

Sun, 2017-12-17 18:47 — Robin Olson

(continued from [ch. 1](#) ⁽¹⁾ and [ch. 2](#) ⁽²⁾)

For a long time now I've had this calming feeling as I take my walk around the neighborhood. I'm enchanted by the wind as it scoops up the dried autumn leaves causing them to swirl and dance, and equally charmed by two squirrels who playfully chase each other across a well manicured lawn. I hear birds chirp merrily along as I see their silhouettes on a sun-kissed branch. It reminds me that I'm part of all these things and we're all part of something much bigger.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. Another day, another walk.

*On a deeper level, I feel a state of interconnectedness that has no sense of time. **It just is.** It is just now, but it also feels like all of it has already happened, will happen, is happening. It's a very big feeling in my soul that as I take another step I've already finished my walk, it's another day, it's the first time I tried to take a walk and could only walk to the top of the driveway, it's years from now when I can't walk any more. It's not a sad feeling. It feels full, like I don't have to worry about Spencer because in each breath he's just being born or has already passed away or is purring on my lap all at the same time. It's fluid, not tangents on a path. It's more like a river with a wild current that curls and froths and bubbles up around itself and back again.*

The other day Sam and I finally moved an old tube TV set out of our bedroom to make a space to add a litter pan, now that Nora is 17. She still gets around fairly well, but we'd like her to have a pan upstairs so she doesn't have to travel too far. Moving the TV was no joke. It's awkwardly weighted and there's nothing to hold onto, just smooth edges. We managed to slide it down the stairs on a big flat cardboard box with a blanket wrapped around it like a sling. I held the sling and pulled towards myself as Sam guided it down the stairs. Somehow we didn't break the TV or our legs.

There's a place at the town dump where they recycle old electronics. It's inside an old semi-truck trailer. I wasn't certain how we'd get the TV out of the car and make the 12 steps or so trip to the trailer. I said as much aloud as Sam opened the hatchback of his old red subaru. A man unloading his car ahead of us heard what I said and offered to help carry the TV. It was such a kind, surprising gesture and I was so very grateful for his help. It made me less sad that in this moment we were throwing away something that took me many hours of work to earn the money to pay for. There was a time I yearned to be able to acquire a nice TV for my bedroom and it was quite an accomplishment to get one, but now it was junk, maybe salvage for its parts and that's about it. This TV saw me through a few uncomfortable days or weeks when I was sick and had to stay in bed, but for many years it's only gathered dust in the corner. I haven't even turned it on. It's too old to work with a digital cable box.

Sam says for me to think that yearning for something and knowing, even in that yearning, that the object is already decayed and dead is very Buddhist of me. He also said something about a relation to quantum mechanics and atoms but that's too far over my head. The gist of all this pondering is that if you take a step back far enough and look at the world, heck the universe and beyond, we're all just made up of stardust in different, constantly ever-changing forms. I suddenly feel like I understand reincarnation in a way I never did before. It's very likely that the form I was in before I was a cat mom was something else. It may not have been a human, it could have been a little bit of many different things, even an old tv. What happens to my body next is it will become a different form that will become a different form again and again. It makes me feel a little bit less sad about Spencer's future. He's already part of me and I of him. **It's all the same little bits of stardust, just in different shapes.**

Monday 12/4/17

Somehow I managed to raise \$4300 in 4 days to cover Spencer's surgery. I honestly don't know how I could be so lucky and so honored to have so much support. The stress, the fear of if I could raise the money in time, did a number on me. I didn't know if we'd make it until the night before his surgery date.

I hate to ask for help, but I really felt that doing the surgery was the right thing for Spencer and I needed to make it happen. **With a mass inside him, at least it was uncomfortable and, at most, it was killing him and needed to be removed. I assumed it was carcinoma because there was a mass and not tell-tale inflammation that would make us consider it was lymphoma. Big masses usually mean, big bad things. In the morning we'd have a beginning of an answer when Dr. Deb opened Spencer's abdomen and took a look inside.**



©2017 Robin AF Olson. Our last morning together before surgery. Spencer's belly was shaved to do the ultrasound the week prior, but even more was removed later that day.

The night before surgery, Spencer ate well and purred away, as he always does. He came upstairs and got into bed and tucked me in as he's often done over the years. I had to sleep in a weird position so I didn't bother him. It was an honor to do that. I didn't know if it would be our last night together. I didn't know if he'd ever be able to come upstairs again or if he'd even survive the procedure. I was sick with worry and kept wondering if this was the right thing to do. I could still call it off and just do chemo and hope that did the trick and maybe he'd have a better life, maybe shorter, but less pain...I had to stop over-thinking it. I'd consulted 4 vets and 3 said to do the surgery. In my gut I felt we had to try and give Spencer a chance. I just prayed I wasn't wrong.

Tuesday 12/5/17

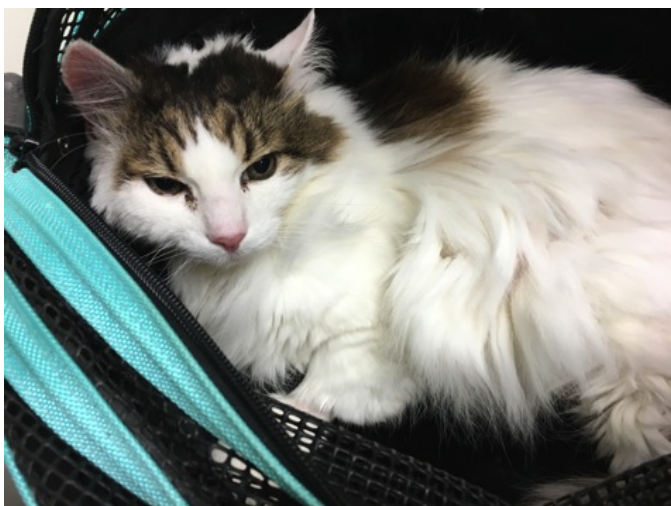
I tried to be cheerful about taking Spencer to the vet, think positive, non-jinxing thoughts, even though I felt sick to my stomach. I wore my brand new [Lil Bub Sweater](#) (3). **It's so colorful and adorable, I felt like Bub was watching over us and would keep Spencer safe. How could anything bad happen if I was wearing something so upbeat, right?** I told myself that no matter what happened, my memory of Spencer would never leave my heart. I could still hear his wheezing even if he didn't sleep near me any longer. **Whatever was going to happen, was going to happen. I couldn't control anything. I just had to remain present, be kind, and be open to however things unfolded. I had to be prepared to say goodbye, knowing I did everything I could, even if one day soon I would hate myself for making a choice that ended in Spencer losing his life. I gave Spencer a kiss and handed him over to the vet tech. I tried not to burst into tears.**



©2017 Robin AF Olson. Traffic cop, Spencer.

I gave the vet tech a new ziplock bag with a note on it to please save all of the fur they shaved off of Spencer's belly. I wanted to keep it to make a memorial out of his fur one day. I was embarrassed to ask for such a silly thing when surgery was all I should focus on, but being a realist I also knew I might need that fur sooner than I'd like to admit.

I was told that surgery was going to begin around 11:30 AM. In a way, I wish they hadn't told me. It was possible that at the last minute an emergency would come into the hospital and that they'd have to bump Spencer's procedure to later in the day. Alternatively, I knew that if the procedure was quick, they either got the mass out or Dr. Deb decided it couldn't be removed at all.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. It's time.

I sat with my phone either next to me or I held it in my sweaty hand. The ringer was turned on and turned up. I kept checking the time. Thirty minutes passed, then an hour. My heart started to sink as it approached 2PM. Finally, Dr. Deb called.

"We go it out! All set! His blood pressure went down a bit too much during the procedure but we were able to get him back up. He's in recovery now and we'll be keeping a careful watch on him."

Dr. Deb explained that the mass had been attached to the very tip of one of the lobes of Spencer's pancreas. She had to remove that tip, but it was only a very little bit. Even so there was concern that Spencer would get pancreatitis (4), which would be a very hard on him. It's something that scares the heck out of most cat parents because it can go on and on causing the cat to not want to eat. If it goes on too long, they can get "fatty liver" (5) disease and die unless there's a lot of intervention on the cat parent's part, even a feeding tube may be required. We'd have to be **very** careful.

The good news was that Spencer's liver, which had shown lesions on ultrasound, was in very good shape-no signs of cancer there. Dr. Deb said she looked at everything else in his abdomen and everything looked as she would expect. The pathology of the mass would take 3-5 business days so I figured it would be the following week before we knew what kind of cancer it was.

The game plan now was go visit Spencer that night and hopefully get him home the next day.

Spencer was alive, for now. The next few days were going to be really hard on him. I needed to stay strong, but first I needed to take a nap. I felt like I hadn't slept in a decade from all the stress.

Around 10PM Sam and I drove to NVS to visit Spencer. I tried to prepare myself for seeing him stitched up, wearing the dreaded "cone of shame" around his neck, probably looking a lot older and weak.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. *Nothing is a worse indignation than the cone of shame.*

But before we could see him we had to wait until they could get him ready for our visit. They had a nearly record number of animals being treated-about 18-at the time, so we had to wait for them to move Spencer into an exam room. While we waited, a couple came in with a pug dog. We knew what happened well before they got close to the reception desk-a skunk sprayed their dog. **My GOD did the place suddenly stink to the high heavens. The lady kept apologizing, saying she'd changed her clothes three times. Lady, it's not YOU that got sprayed!**

The dog got scratched by the skunk but it didn't even need a stitch. They needed to update the dog's rabies shot, but otherwise he didn't need anything other than about 50 baths. The receptionist shooed them out the door saying they should have called first so they could have treated the dog outside the building. As it was the place had no open windows and we were all suffering. The couple went into the vestibule between the two front doors because it began to rain. It only created an inescapable stink-zone that everyone who entered or existed the building was going to have to walk through. I started to wonder if all the bags of chips in the nearby vending machine were going to stink like skunk, too.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. *Baby food to the rescue.*

We were finally able to go visit Spencer. Thankfully he was too drugged up to be bothered by how badly Sam and I and my Lil' Bub sweater smelled. His pupils were huge. He waxed and waned between being asleep and being crabby. The tech told us he hadn't eaten. I offered him a spoonful of chicken baby food. He furiously licked at it, going through the entire jar of food as fast as I could spoon it out. We made a huge mess because we weren't allowed to take his e-collar off, so some of the food went onto the plastic barrier and some into his mouth.

I took a few breaks to wipe off his face and get the collar cleaned up. Sam held Spencer up so he didn't fall over. He had an IV line in his leg and the pain meds made him weak. Even with all that it was good to see him eat. I hoped it was a good sign.

Since Spencer got crabbiier the longer he had to sit up, we decided to get him settled back in his cage for the night. It would be our first night apart in 15 years, but I knew he was in good hands.

Weds 12/6/17

Spencer pretty much hates being messed with, for any reason. Even drugged up he red-zoned at NVS to the point of them realizing he'd do better at home than be in the hospital for another day. I couldn't argue the point. I'd set up my home office as his space for the next two weeks of recovery. I'd also be ripping that cone off him the second we got home. If he tore his stitches out that was on me, but he'd be a lot happier without the cone on and hopefully he'd be too tired to do much with the stitches for the next few days.

This is when I decided I better write down everything I was doing with him in case things took a turn for the worse. I made a list of all his pain meds ([buprenex](#) ^[6], [gabapentin](#) ^[7], [onsior](#) ^[8]) and when they were to be given. I wrote down what he was eating and how much. I made notes if I noticed he was having side effects-which he did-like diarrhea and extreme weakness. I knew I had to just see this through. I had to support Spencer's needs, keep him warm and clean. Make sure he ate enough and was comfortable. He might not be himself for some time. I had to have faith he would be feeling better in week or two.

Thursday-Friday

Spencer was a mess. He was so weak he could barely make the trip of a few steps to his litter pan. Once in the pan he would fall over and just lay in the litter. Thankfully I had been meticulous about keeping his pan clean, but seeing him laying there broke my heart. I helped him up, careful not to touch his belly. He strained to pass stool, but could not go. I looked up side effects of all the meds and called the vet. One by one I pulled him off most of the pain meds a day or more early because he was just too sick from them.

Sam gave Spencer fluids every day. It helped him feel better. I gave him an injection of B12 and offered him raw chicken liver. **He'd lost 40 mL of blood during surgery. No wonder he felt awful.**

Spencer barely moved. He mostly slept. I kept out of my office so he could have peace and quiet. Not being bothered by the other cats was good for him, too, so my door stayed closed.

That night I called NVS. Spencer just wasn't eating well and I wanted to start him on [Cerenia](#) ^[9], which combats nausea and could possibly help him want to eat. I started him on the medication that night and prayed it would work by morning.

Saturday 12/9/17

The first real snow fell. It would have been something to enjoy if I could forget the guilty feeling that we didn't rake the leaves out of the front yard yet and now we'd probably have to wait until spring to do it. Spencer wasn't eating very well and sleeping a lot. I spent time brushing him because he likes it and he needed it. I hoped the comfort it gave him would help him want to eat, but he had a long way to go before getting back to his old self. I was very worried about his appetite issues so I called our vet and asked for an appetite stimulant if we really needed it-**we did**.

Sunday 12/10/17

Spencer wasn't eating more than a few bites of food. I offered him a zillion different options. He'd eat, at most, an ounce of food. I offered him food about 10 times that day. I added it all up and it came to 3 ounces, barely half of what he should have been eating. The good thing was that Spencer was a bit brighter. He was grooming himself and though he still had diarrhea, he was not falling into the litter pan any more.

Now if he would just **EAT**.

Monday 12/11/17

We gave Spencer [mirtazapine](#) ^[10], an appetite stimulant. I got varied answers on how long it would take to work-the average sounded like a few days. In the meantime Spencer's appetite was still lousy and I finally began to syringe-feed him a meal once I'd seen if he'd eaten enough over the day. If he didn't, I syringe-fed him.

What was interesting was that he seemed basically ok with it. I expected a fight but he almost appreciated it. He even ate something about an hour after I syringe-fed him. I started to wonder if he just needed a jump start to get going.

By now Spencer definitely looked a lot better. The contusions on his belly were starting to fade and though he didn't move around too much, he was much sturdier on his paws than before.

Tuesday 12/12/17

Dr. Deb called. **The results were in. I expected her to say carcinoma, but she didn't.** Dr. Larry, my vet for over 20 years, has this joke about my cats. They're called "*Olson cats*." The reason why is that more often than not, my cats have things go wrong that he has either never seen before or so rarely sees that it's only because my cats are the ones it happens to. He even knows to look for the weird diagnosis when I bring my cats in for an exam.

It's extremely rare that a big mass in a cat isn't cancer, but the mass in Spencer's abdomen, is NOT CANCER. It's benign. It's gone. It's over and done.

It's also extremely rare that removing a non-cancerous mass leads to the discovery of actual cancer, but it did. Spencer DOES have cancer. Cells were detected that are "consistent with small cell lymphoma," so it's not 100% sure but it's pretty darn likely.

That said, it kinda IS a miracle because if a cat is going to get cancer, then small-cell lymphoma is the one to get. It's treatable for a good long time. It grows slowly. It's not an expensive treatment and Spencer can possibly have a good year or MORE of quality life. That would put him at about 17-18. If it had been carcinoma, we'd be lucky to get 9 months, if that. More likely we'd get about 3 months.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. The power of the Lil' Bub sweater is strong. Good Job, Bub!

And as the day passed, and the fog of the shocking news lifted, I realized that one thing was very clear-doing the surgery was *the right thing to do*. If we hadn't done it we would have assumed it was a carcinoma and treated him with the wrong chemo drugs. It would have been a waste in so many ways, but now we know what it is, what to do, and how to do it...or do we?

But this is an Olson-cat, so things may go a little differently than one would expect.

Next up...meeting with the oncologist and considering a potentially cutting edge treatment that could be a game-changer. The only problem is there's no research on it yet, only anecdotal information for dogs, and even less for cats. Oh yeah and Spencer's eating...cat litter!

Note from Robin: Thank you VERY MUCH to everyone who made this story possible. Your donations, which ranged from \$2 to hundreds of dollars, all added up to making Spencer's surgery a reality. YOU are his lifeline, his rescuers, his friends, and for that I am eternally grateful.



©2017 Robin AF Olson Thank you from Spencer, too.

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Comments

Mon, 2017-12-18 10:20 — Judy shelton (not verified)

I read every single word, it ^[21]

I read every single word, it was sooooo worth waiting on, and I am truly happy that I could donate and help in some part to his recovery , I love this little guy, and don't even know him. He won my heart from very beginning, I am so thankful that his mass is out and it was not cancer and although like you said even though cancer was found its not bad kind which is a blessing, you were so right when you made comment the news was weird and shocking, pray he continues to get better and eat and get stronger, you are a fantastic care giver and person with a huge heart, you should have been a vet tech or a vet yourself, God bless you and have a wonderful holiday ,

Mon, 2017-12-18 14:19 — [Robin Olson](#) ^[22]

:-) ^[23]

Thank you, Judy. Your comment and support mean a lot to us. Thank you for loving Spencer. He's truly and awesome, pissy, fluffy, purring-machine, baby! xoxox Merry Christmas!

Mon, 2017-12-18 13:37 — jmuhj (not verified)

RE: SPENCER ^[24]

Never underestimate the power of the BUB. *PRAYERS* and healing thoughts of wellbeing going up, and out, for Spencer the warrior! ❤️

Mon, 2017-12-18 14:17 — [Robin Olson](#) ^[22]

Thank You! ^[25]

Spencer appreciates all the love and prayers! (and so do !!)

Mon, 2017-12-18 15:04 — Martha Girdany (not verified)

Spencer! ^[26]

Thanks for the news-y update, Robin. Great to hear that Spencer is doing better, and should be around for a while. I cannot imagine how difficult it was for you and Spencer to go through this. Happy to have been able to contribute a little bit to his surgery. Wishing you and Spencer a Merry Christmas. With much love from Hawaii. <3

Mon, 2017-12-18 15:06 — Martha Girdany (not verified)

Thanks for the update on ^[27]

Thanks for the update on Spencer! Sending much love to you and Spencer from Hawaii.

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