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A Spoonful of Despair. Part 1 of 4.

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We all face difficult times over the course of our life, but the dark days often come in measured amounts—a spoonful of despair, a cup of grief. We must take a sip, as bitter as it is, knowing that's the cost of being alive. There's the dark but there's also the counterpoint of the light, the happy vs the sad. We assume that after a time of heartbreak there will be love again one day. We push against suffering. We can try to cover up the pain with medication, food, or other neurotic reactions, but it never really goes away. Despair forces us to take another sip and another and another, but there are times we know we'll drown if we have to take just one more. That's how I've felt these past few weeks as I've been struggling against the dark, praying for the light to return soon.

Heartache, anxiety and fear have robbed me from being able to write, work, think. As a cat-mom and rescuer, most of what I do has something to do with or for cats. There are bumps in the road that I usually manage, but when a health crisis hits one of them, the all-too-familiar and all-too-painful knot twists my gut, draining my soul. The worse the crisis, the less I can eat or sleep, the more I worry, research, call Vets, try to find an answer while attempting to soothe an anxious, weak, mysteriously sick cat.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. My baby, Spencer, flat, depressed and not eating while Blitzen worries about his old friend.

There was something wrong with Spencer, the mascot of Covered in Cat Hair, my 15-year old shadow . He was lethargic, would not eat, was depressed. He'd been drinking a lot of water and I'd feared it was his kidneys because water drinking can be a sign of kidney disease. At Spencer's age it's no joke for him to have a problem like this. The issue: **getting him to the vet when he's a very high-stress patient.**

This time it was no problem getting him to the vet. That's how sick he was.

We gave Spencer fluids, hoping it would help him feel better, but it did nothing. I knew we couldn't wait this out. Once at Dr. Larry's office my mind went into overdrive imagining what was wrong with my dear boy. I thought it could be pancreatitis or that his kidneys or his liver was failing but why? Spencer's on a fresh diet, with lots of protein. There was no reason something would irritate him like that. It had to be that his kidneys were failing so I worried about how we'd give him fluids when he has a very short fuse.

Dr. Larry did some tests that indicated [pancreatitis](#) [1]. It was possible I caught it early but Spencer still needed an ultrasound at the ER Vet as soon as possible to make certain there wasn't something else going on. They kept him there for the full day because he'd been so stressed out, even though he was weak. Just taking his blood was difficult so they had to let him calm

down in a cage for a few hours before trying to get the sample. By the time we got home Spencer was flat and even more depressed than before.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. One of my "go-to" things to tempt a sick cat to eat-chicken baby food. Notice I offer the food on a flat dish and elevate the plate not only to make it easier to reach but so that the aroma of the warmed food reaches Spencer's nose faster. Normally I use a soup bowl to elevate the plate but in this case a tissue box was a good height and nearby.

I didn't want to take my baby to the emergency vet because over the past year they've lost most of their staff and I didn't know if they were hiring any decent vets. I didn't want to believe the rumors I'd heard. Their prices are crazy-high, but they are also a few minutes drive from my home. It meant less stress on Spencer and they could see him the next day so I agreed and hoped for the best.

Even the short drive to the ER did a number on Spencer. He was open-mouth breathing so they rushed him into an oxygen cage until he could settle down. How the heck were they going to be able to do an ultrasound on him if he was flipping out? I feared they'd have to sedate him and the after effects of sedation on his old body. This had to be done, but how would they do it without pushing Spencer into the red zone?

Instead of meeting with the Internist, they went ahead and performed the ultrasound. I was surprised that it only took a few minutes. They went slowly and since Spencer was so ill, he was easier to handle and did not require sedation. I waited anxiously in the exam room, mentally adding up what I feared the bill was going to be for the day. The door opened and there stood Dr. De (*her nickname to keep her anonymity*). She was very nice and polite. She explained right away that yes, Spencer did have pancreatitis and that the key now was to soothe his belly while getting him to resume eating. **There was no sign of cancer and the rest of his organs appeared normal.** The concern was that if he didn't eat soon, I'd have to assist-feed him or what worked much better was the placement of a [feeding tube](#) [2].

Feeding tube? In Spencer? The cat whose claws I can barely trim if I only try one or two at a time? Oh God!

She gave me a list of meds and a schedule along with some bland food (*which of course I hated since the ingredients included corn, wheat and soy, but I had to do whatever I could for my boy*). I went home and wrote everything out. Pilling Spencer was going to be dreadful but I had to get the job done.

Pancreatitis is no joke and cats can get it once, then never again or they can have flare ups for the rest of their life...or they can DIE.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. I constantly followed Spencer around, but not so close as to make him anxious. As he chose a strange place to lay down, near the stove, I decided to sit down on the kitchen floor, too. Fluff Daddy, ever the jokester decided it was a great time to sit on my lap and watch Spencer with me.

Spencer laid on the floor under the table in front of the sofa. He'd lost a good bit of weight and he was depressed and in pain. I began giving him pain meds and something to help the nausea. I offered him some food but he would not touch it beyond a few licks.

Two of my friends got in touch with me when they heard the news and offered to help me if Spencer did need a feeding tube. **They assured me to welcome this if the Vet thought he needed it because it made it much easier to provide nutrition and medications and that most cats (hey, not Spencer!) would not be bothered by it, too much. That feeding tubes could extend or save lives.**

A very nice lady named Dee even offered to come to the house and show me how to feed, then clean the setup should Spencer need it. I had to prepare myself for doing this. If he needed it then so be it.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. I took this photo not realizing that Spencer was laying in a large pool of his own urine. He was completely zoned out, between the pain meds and being sick. You can see it effected his pupils as well.

The next morning I woke up to find Spencer sleeping next to me. I was so happy to see him after days of him sleeping under a table, but my joy was short-lived. Spencer was also laying in a pool of his own urine. He had peed on the bed right next to me. He has never done anything remotely like that in his entire life. I wasn't angry for what he did. I was

heartbroken. This was not good. Not good at all.

After a few days of meds, Spencer began to eat on his own. He liked the crappy food so I was glad that he'd eat anything. I offered him many small meals throughout the day and he'd eat a teaspoon or two at most. He began to perk up a little, but I was still worried about taking him off the pain killers. I also wondered if we did something to his food that made him sick in the first place. We make our own raw food from carefully sourced ingredients, but what if we made a mistake? Surely one of our other nine cats would have been sickened, too?

By day five Spencer was off his medications and back to eating his regular diet. He's still underweight but he's back to his old self. **I think he's even friendlier than before and he's not sucking down copious amounts of water, so perhaps the drinking was a way to soothe his digestive tract and not an alert that his kidneys were failing?**



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Spencer giving me "love-eyes."

But my joy was very short-lived because as Spencer began to improve, our little black cat, Cricket began to go down hill, fast.

Next up: A Semi-feral cat, indeed!

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Links

[1] http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/Health_Information/pancreatitis_serious.cfm

[2] <http://consciouscat.net/2015/06/08/feeding-tubes-save-lives/>

[3] <https://coveredincathair.com/taxonomy/term/33>

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