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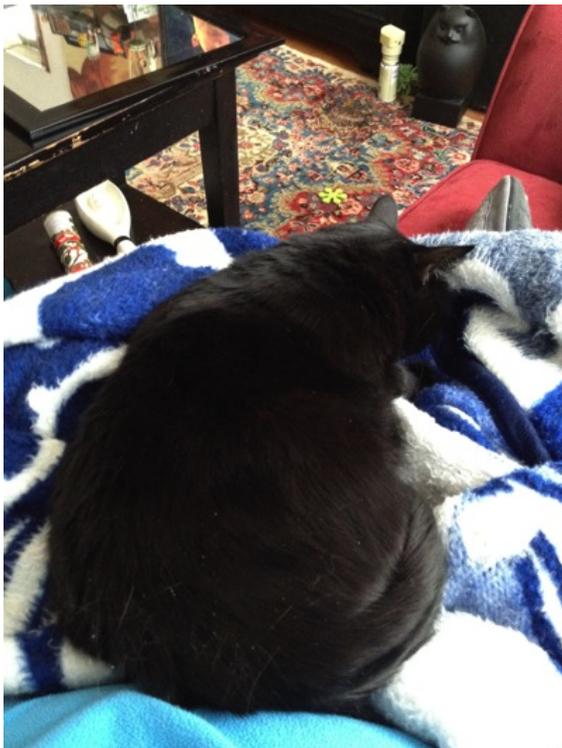
A Spoonful of Despair. Part 3 of 4

Fri, 2016-07-22 13:12 — Robin Olson

Cricket is the kind of unassuming cat most people would pass by. He's not a fancy breed and he's small and keeps to himself. When someone would come to visit we'd usually point him out hiding in a basket under the table, then warn them not to touch him because he had been feral and we didn't want anyone to get bitten; that he only trusted us.

But Cricket had more going on than we thought. Very slowly, over the years, adding more and more cats and having more and more people come to our home, Cricket began to stand his ground. He was never aggressive, he was determined. Cricket had a brave heart that burned inside him and he wasn't about to spend the rest of his life hiding. With our encouragement, this little cat blossomed.

Most mornings, Sam would make coffee and Cricket, hearing the sound of the beans being measured out or the water poured into the carafe, would come running into the kitchen. He'd sit on the bench nearby and ask for pets. It was their special time together.



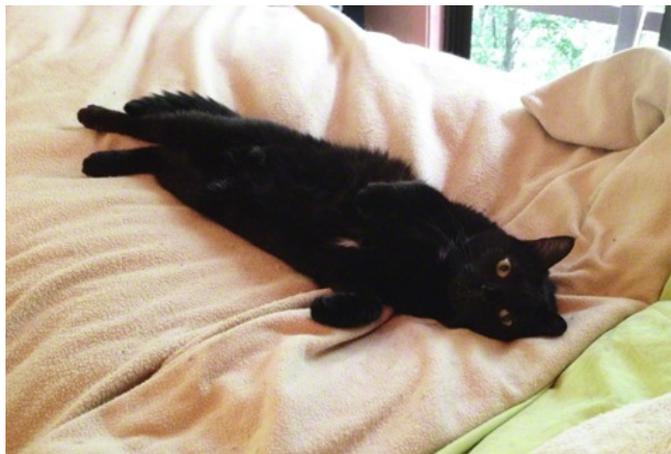
©2014 Robin AF Olson. A proud moment for me, Cricket sat in my lap. I think this was the only time he ever did it, but I was so grateful.

Later in the morning, Sam would often sit on the loveseat, typing with one hand on his laptop and petting Cricket with the other and Cricket loved the attention. Cricket was the master of giving head-butts. He loved to rub his face against us, marking us as his own, rubbing and rubbing over our hands and arms. He was not shy about it either. I'd sit with him from time to time, too, leaning over and letting him rub my face and forehead. I never worried he would nip me or hurt me in any way. I felt proud that he was claiming me as part of his family.

This was no feral cat.

Cricket was a fixture in our home, but we also knew that we could probably never take him to the vet because he was still

fearful about us picking him up and certainly ever taking him anywhere in the car.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. Brave enough to come upstairs and lay in bed next to me when I had the flu. Cricket rarely entered the bedroom since the other cats claimed that space. I wish he could have spent every night with us.

Two years ago our hand was forced. With friends visiting us one night, Cricket walked past one of them and I gasped. His rear end was covered in blood. It appeared his anal gland had ruptured and he needed to be vetted, and soon, but how?



©2015 Robin AF Olson. The second, worse rupture in 2015. He never acted oddly or in pain and with his black fur it was tough to see if there was something wrong until it was too late.

Thankfully my friend, Katherine, who has a lot more experience handling cats than I do, was willing to come up and get Cricket crated for us. In the end it wasn't as bad as we feared. Cricket was ten years old and though very scared no one was harmed getting him packed up to go to the vet.

Cricket was in sorry shape, but we had his teeth cleaned and got him stitched up. Shockingly, a year later the other side blew out. This one was very serious and we had no idea why it was happening. In fact it blew out two days before Gracie died so you can imagine what sort of nightmare we were facing with two critical situations going on at the same time.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. Cricket looked angry but never was. He was always a sweet boy.

After Cricket's scary health issues early this year he got an upper respiratory tract infection, along with a few of the other cats. Everyone eventually got better, but Cricket still had runny eyes. It also seemed like he lost his sense of smell. Getting him to eat became more and more difficult.

We returned to the Vet and we started him on antibiotics, but his inappetence got worse. We changed medications but they did nothing. Feeding Cricket became a frustrating chore, so we tried another Vet visit and this time they did x-rays looking for a polyp or problem and found only that his kidneys were small and oddly shaped. His kidney function was okay but the real shocker was that Cricket was hyperthyroid...AND...a very rare kind of hyperthyroid that was idiopathic in nature...meaning *he had no signs of the disease at all*. He did not drink water. His coat was beautiful. He was not eating all the time, in fact, the opposite. He was not yeowling at night. Cricket never meowed. How did this happen? At least it could be treated with medication or radioactive therapy, but I couldn't help but be shocked.

We began treatment in pill form until we could afford the \$1600 radiation treatment. The medication could cause many other health issues so we had to re-check Cricket's blood work in about a month. We also began a steroidal eye drop into Cricket's nostrils to see if it would help him smell his food.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. To the Vet yet again.

It worked great. Cricket began to eat again and I was becoming a master of learning how to hide his daily pills so we didn't have to stress him out all the time trying to pill him.

But something still wasn't right.

Cricket stopped showing up for mealtime. He began spending a lot of time in a cardboard box with a blanket in it in the basement. We had a harder and harder time getting pills into him and we assumed he was staying away from us because of the pills. *Maybe they were making him sick?*

Cricket wasn't eating much at all. Just as Spencer began to get back on his paws, I brought Cricket to the vet. It was eight days ago today.

They repeated his x-rays to find a shocking change. Cricket's once normal lungs looked like there'd been an explosion inside them. It wasn't a normal pattern of pneumonia, or even asthma. Dr. Larry feared it was neoplasia (a nice way to say cancer), but how could this be true? The x-rays barely a month before were clean and now my cat was showing an interstitial pattern indicating something terribly wrong was going on. Was it a reaction to the drugs? Was it something we did? If he was in the basement, did he get a fungal infection or was it from not treating the upper respiratory tract infection hard enough with antibiotics? WHAT WAS GOING ON? CRICKET HAD JUST TURNED 12 YEARS OLD.

Dr. Larry told me Cricket needed a wash of his lungs ([TransTracheal Lavage](#)) ^[1]. They would insert a small tube into Cricket's

lungs, inject a small amount of sterile saline into them, then tap his chest to loosen up the material inside them and take a sample. This would be done under sedation, but Dr Larry could not do this procedure. I had to go back to see Dr. De and it would easily cost over \$1000 to do this test, but it was the only way to know what was sickening my cat.

The problem was, I didn't even have enough money to pay my mortgage.

I decided that if my own rescue granted funds to other families to help them get Vet care for their cat that we could do it for Cricket, too. He was a rescue, he needed help. It had to be done somehow. I had a few dollars left in my IRA. I would deplete it if need be. Cricket wasn't a broken car. He was my cat.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. Cricket and Gracie, about a month before Gracie died.

I posted about Cricket on Facebook and that night something happened that I still can't believe. Years ago I wrote a post about a cat who needed help. The cat got a rescue and a new, loving home. I later helped this person with other cats, but never thought anything about what I would get from this. I was just doing my thing, helping others. We became friends and often sent each other encouraging messages on Facebook and she even helped us do some fundraisers from time to time. She reached out to me and said she wanted to help Cricket. She had set aside some emergency funds for her cats and wanted me to have them. I warned her it was going to require a lot of money, but she did not back down. She told me, though she wanted to remain anonymous to everyone else, that in a few days she could grant us enough money to cover Cricket's procedure. She was grateful for my help and told me I was her inspiration. That because of what I'd done for so many cats that she, too, had found her place doing rescue and had saved many lives. Not only was she making it possible for me to save my cat, she had given me a gift of knowing that what I do makes a difference. She wanted to pay it forward, so she did.

She was the reason all our donations for Cricket were matched. She was the reason why when he needed more than I ever thought possible, I could say yes, do the treatment...do the test...but I digress.

Wednesday was the day. We were to do the wash and get some answers. The problem was instead of being about \$1000, the estimate was nearly \$4000. The grant money would not be to us until the next DAY and even with that it would wipe out all our funds and I still have 14 kittens to provide for. Cricket sat in an oxygen cage while I debated what to do. It took me three hours of call after call to Dr. Larry, to Sam, to my friends who have 30 cats and know every little thing about them. **The test might result in no answers at all because whatever was going on was between the bronchioles, not inside them. They'd have to hope that when they tapped on his chest that something would loosen up and move into the brochi so they could remove it..or it would loosen up something terrible and it would kill Cricket. Also, it would not be responsible for me to spend what little we had, risking all our kittens.**

I asked if we could do something else. After speaking with Dr. Mary, Dr. Larry's partner, she said we could hit Cricket with a high dose of antibiotics for a few days. If he improved we knew it was bacteria. If he didn't it was more likely cancer or a longshot, a fungal infection. We could take him home and better yet, take a few days to get funding ready. It made sense, but it was also very risky.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. *The last day Cricket was home.*

I brought Cricket home, but he did not do well. By Friday we realized that we HAD to do the procedure because Cricket was getting worse. I called too late in the day and the Dr was not willing to stay late to do the test. With the weekend beginning there was no one there to do the test until Monday or she could do it on Tuesday. I couldn't risk moving Cricket to another vet over an hour away. We had to wait and pray we could keep him comfortable until we could get the test done. We'd keep up on the medications and hope they would kick in, but Cricket wasn't eating so I began the difficult task of assist-feeding him to keep him going.

Being a nurse to a sick cat isn't my strong suit because I get upset when they get upset. Sam has a much better temperament and I honestly think we work great as a team. Where I become unglued, Sam will step in. He would carry Cricket over to me and I would prepare the food, track the medications and feeding. Then Sam would hold and comfort Cricket while I awkwardly syringed soft food into him. I hated doing it, but I wanted to save Cricket's life. I was in such shock that he could have cancer, my head was spinning. What did we do to cause this? If it was a primary cancer, meaning it started in his lungs, it was VERY VERY RARE. Most often lung cancers start someplace else, but we did an ultrasound on Cricket and everything other than his lungs looked just fine. His blood work was normal yet he had a demon lurking inside him and it was moving fast.

Saturday was awful. I kept wondering if we should start Cricket on steroids. Giving him steroids meant we could NOT do the test. It would effect the results. It could effect how he gets other treatments. I had steroids from when Gracie was in her final days. I could give them now because Cricket's respiration was going up and up. **After giving him a pill or feeding him he'd get so bad he's open-mouth breath, nearly passing out. That night I started him back on his thyroid meds, hoping it would help slow down his breathing because hyperthyroid basically causes the heart, liver and kidneys go to into overdrive. I hoped the next morning I'd see him feeling a bit better.**

During a crisis like this I don't sleep well and don't eat much. I have a hard time functioning at all because I am so deeply concerned for the well-being of my cats. I'm so scared to find them dead or in distress that it pushes me over the edge. I constantly wonder if I should medicate myself so I can get through it, but the other part of me thinks I have to face it directly. **Where is my faith that it will get better? I had none. I couldn't run away from this fear even if I had horrible visions of finding Cricket dead on the floor flashing through my head.**

Cricket began to hang out on a big cat tree near the window in the living room. Sam and I made a rule to not mess with him when he was on that tree so he could feel less like he needed to hide in the basement and it seemed to work. On Sunday morning the first thing I did was to check on him. Seeing him alive was a small comfort, but as I sat near him, I watched his breaths. They were more rapid than ever and he seemed as if he was about to pass out and I wasn't even touching him.



©2016 Robin AF Olson. Safe space on the cat tree and Cricket's special yellow towel.

I asked Sam what he thought. Was Cricket worse? We weren't sure. Maybe it was just that he thought we were going to pick him up and give him a pill? In days past we couldn't even lift him to put him on a scale do check his weight without him going into a panic.

I didn't want to see that Cricket had gotten worse. It was Sunday. No specialists on hand at the ER, yet we needed Cricket in an oxygen cage and we needed to do it soon.

I was terrified. We waited too long. Maybe they could get him stabilized until the next day. Maybe a day on oxygen would help him feel better. I called Dr. Larry, who was taking a few days off with his family. He agreed we needed to start steroids right away and that the oxygen would help.

Although I felt like I was betraying Cricket to take him back to the Vet, it had to be done. Sam drove while I sat in the back seat with Cricket. He cried out and began panting. The ER knew we were coming and were ready to put him into oxygen right away. A few times I thought Cricket was going to die he was breathing so fast. I petted him and tried to soothe him while my own heart was going to burst from grief. I wanted to help him, not see him suffering. If only he could understand we were trying to help him feel better.

As we walked in the door, a tech ran out and took Cricket away. We met with the Vet on call and she said they would keep him on oxygen and go over his case then decide what to do next. That steroids certainly would be called for, but right now they wanted to let him rest and recover. The bill for one night was over \$1000, but at that point we had to do what he needed. I signed the estimate and we went to see him before we went home. It was so difficult to see him struggling and knowing he was scared. I felt Despair tap me on the shoulder, then asked me to take another spoonful. I opened my mouth as tears ran down my cheeks, the bitterness of what had already transpired was more than I could bear.

Next up: another spoonful and another...



©2016 Robin AF Olson. In oxygen cage for now, but will Cricket ever be able to come home again?

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