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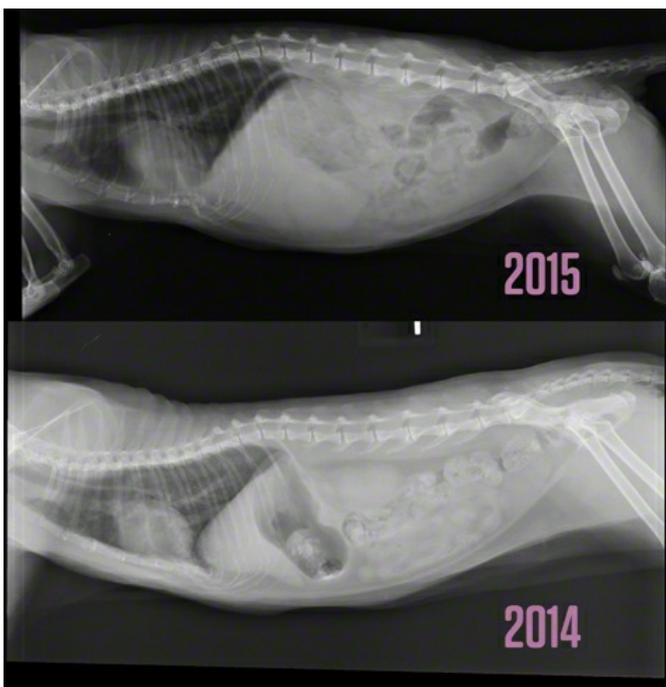
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Staying Strong for Gracie. Part 1.

Tue, 2015-09-08 15:00 — Robin Olson

In my last [post](#) [1] I wrote about trusting your gut instincts. My 14-year old cat, Gracie hadn't been quite right after having a dental cleaning. She was barely eating and becoming less and less active. I kept taking her to see my vets, telling them something was still wrong. We all tried to sort out what was going on, but as often happens with cats, they're great at hiding health issues until they're in such bad shape that their life is in jeopardy.

A little over two weeks ago, my vet, Dr. Larry, was very concerned about Gracie's liver. He urged me to get an ultrasound done as soon as possible. It would give us a better idea of why Gracie's liver looked strange on x-ray. The problem was that the vet who came to his office once a week and performed the ultrasound diagnostics was booked up for weeks.



Gracie's x-rays. Another good reason to do a baseline x-ray of your cat during a routine exam when they're seniors. (top) You can see how the center of Gracie's abdomen, where her liver is located, looks cloudy. That's the fluid buildup in her abdomen and her liver is enlarged. (Bottom) organs look more defined.

I knew we could get the ultrasound done at one of many emergency veterinary hospitals in the area, but Dr. Larry said he really wanted me to take Gracie to the one he considers top notch and that meant a trip to [Pieper Memorial](#) [2], which is over an hour drive away. Though other hospitals were closer, Dr. Larry trusted Dr. Sean's expertise and he knew I'd do whatever was asked to get to the bottom of Gracie's issues.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. *Waiting for Dr. Larry.*

The thought of the trip gave me painful flashbacks to the last time I went to Pieper. It was in 2012 and I had Fred ^[3] with me; a 10-month old kitten who had lost use of his back legs. Dr. Sean was to look for signs of FIP (Feline Infectious Peritonitis) ^[4] because that was our fear. I remember pacing anxiously outside the hospital in their garden. It was early April and still cold, but I couldn't stay inside and sit quietly waiting for the results. I prayed and prayed that Dr. Sean would tell me Fred was going to be okay. **Ironically, he did tell me there were no signs of FIP, but sadly Fred did have it and died a few weeks later.** I didn't want to have the same experience now—a clean ultrasound and heartbreak later. I angrily wondered why even bother doing an ultrasound if the results are so questionable, but it was safer than doing exploratory surgery by far.

Sam had been working around-the-clock on a very challenging project and was exhausted. I was emotionally wiped out from worrying about Gracie and didn't sleep the night before the test. I was going to take Gracie by myself so Sam could stay home and tend to the cats, but Sam somehow dragged himself out of bed, after very little sleep, and we both took Gracie to Pieper. I was so grateful he made the effort because frankly I didn't want to be alone. I needed him to be with us.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. *A very sick girl on the way to Pieper.*

It was a sunny morning and the commuters were out in full force. I sat with the cat carrier on my lap with the top unzipped so I could pet Gracie. She was not happy to be back in the car yet again, but she was comforted by my gentle caress. **I felt sick to my stomach with worry, but we had to know what was going on and if there was a chance we could do something about it.**

We didn't have to wait long before a cheerful vet tech took Gracie from us. I stopped her before she could turn away and asked if didn't Dr. Sean want to talk to us first and she said *no, that he had all her notes*. I found that odd and wondered if they didn't value my observations. I'm not a vet so what do I know. Maybe it's not necessary. All he's doing is looking into her abdomen. Whatever I say won't change what he finds.

I sat against the side of an austere hallway lined with chairs with Sam by my side. Sam was drinking coffee, trying to wake up and I was trying to be calm while my heart was pounding in my chest. I saw a lot of dogs with their parents. I tried to distract myself by people-watching. Did they match their pets? *Not really*. Did one of them have a really big behind when the rest of her body was tiny? Yes. Did I wonder if the golden retriever with the white mask of fur on his face was going to be around much longer. Yes.

A few minutes later, the tech arrived and said the Dr. Sean was ready to talk to us. My stomach did a flip-flop as I stood. I reached out to Sam for support as we entered a nearby exam room.

Dr. Sean entered and took a seat. I could read by his body language that the news was not good. He proceeded to tell us that Gracie's liver was full of cysts and she had fluid in her abdomen. It was likely it was cancer, but to make certain it wasn't just cysts, he wanted to insert a needle into one of the cysts to take a biopsy (called cytology). I asked about the costs and it wasn't going to break the bank so I agreed. I asked if we could hope for it to be cysts and he said yes, but that it was unlikely. Of course he'd seen things like this before so I had to accept the fact that maybe this was the end of the road for our cat.

We thanked Dr. Sean and left him to do the test. I felt like my heart was going to explode. I wanted to run away. **How the HELL did I miss my cat having CANCER? How is this happening? Just the day before all I thought I needed to do was fine tune Gracie's medications so that we could get her eating better and now I'm thinking my cat is possibly terminally ill.**

I needed to go outside. I didn't want people to see me react to the news. I raced out the door back to the garden. I paced. I cried. I prayed for a glimmer of hope. Sam tried to comfort me but I couldn't stand still. I wanted Gracie to be okay. I wasn't ready for this to happen. My mind was swirling with dark visions of what the future held-if there was to be any future-for my girl.

It didn't take long for the test to be done. One of the techs came outside to find us to tell us we could check out and take Gracie home. It being a Thursday meant that the results would probably not be ready until Monday. MONDAY?! I wondered if Gracie would be alive by Monday—and sadly I wasn't wrong to worry about that.



©2015 Robin AF Olson. Gracie's little blanke area where she spends most of her day.

I'd set Gracie up inside a big dog crate with a cat bed and heated pad. She'd spent the last week on the bed, but now she wanted to lay on the cooler flat oriental rug near the crate. I imagined that her belly must have hurt based on how awkwardly she would lay down. I grabbed some soft blankets and made some bumpers for her to rest her head on and one where she could prop herself up. She'd sit up, stretching her abdomen, no doubt to give her enlarged liver and fluid build-up more space inside her. I wanted to keep her as comfortable as possible. I also had to figure out a way to get her to eat.

So began an all-too-familiar odyssey—trying to find the Holy Grail of cat nutrition to keep Gracie alive, at least for a few more days.

Part 2, to Hell and Back, next...and don't think you already know what's going to happen, because no one saw this coming.

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