

CAT TAILS

## Chester...a Dedication to a Dear Friend

*Hey, Mom, look at me in the tree! Staring down at us from the hazelnut tree were two blue eyes, golden ears, and a wide grin. A Cheshire cat we called Chester! Three months old and as precocious as can be.*

Nearly 16 years later the tree is bare of leaves and his agile body is no longer perched on a branch. He has left this earth but his memory lives forever. This is Chester's story.

Chester came into this world on August 22, 1991, an outgoing kitten in a litter of five. Some Himalayan genes in the mix blessed him with a soft, downy coat that seldom needed brushing. As he grew older, the orange rings on his fluffy tail disappeared and turned into a golden hue, which then gently melded into his cream-coloured fur. A handsome, delicious boy, a phrase often used by his caring doctors at Cats Only.

Always the leader, his outgoing personality and adventurous, fun-loving spirit were no match for other cats. He was so smart — a brain the size of a planet, my friends would say, and his vivid, blue eyes were windows to a very wise, yet young soul.

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## Hooray for Ming!

Ming is a lovely year old Siamese who we met when her people moved to Kitsilano from North Vancouver. Prior to this, last summer, Ming was close to death when she developed pancreatitis and secondary diabetes. What made her so fragile was the life-threatening complication of diabetic ketoacidosis. This condition results in serious electrolyte imbalances, specifically potassium and phosphorus. Along with correction of these imbalances and anemia, the team at Canada West Veterinary Specialists had to get Ming rehydrated and fed. For this she had a feeding tube

placed, a very helpful tool not just for nutrients but also for the many medications she needed. She pulled through that bout and both the pancreatitis and diabetes resolved.

Just before moving to Kits, her diabetes started up again. We recommended ultrasounding her learning that her pancreas looked fine. Within a couple of months however, she presented to us at Cats Only collapsed and near death in ketoacidosis again. With great diligence in visiting, her people helped us nurse her back to health and are now monitoring

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His sense of humour was second to none, and he ruled the household and the neighbourhood. Adventurous and a great communicator, he always had lots to say. His expressive eyes flashed with intelligence and mischief and he honed his language skills so that even lowly humans could get the message. He was so affectionate and loved his five-minute hug each morning. He was the official greeter to all two-legged beings who came to the house, his tail straight up in the air as he raced up to them to say hello.

Chester did not quite meet the quota of nine lives but he came close.

When he was less than a year old, I was packing a cooler in preparation for a trip to Long Beach. He was watching me, hoping that I might spill some tuna his way. I finished packing, loaded the car, and checked to make sure he and his brother Pumpkin were in the house. No sign of Chester but Pumpkin was staring intently at the fridge. I heard a faint rattle, opened the door, and there he was, in the fridge, raking the bottles with his paw to get me to open the door.

His second disappearance was far more serious. When he was four years old, he didn't appear for his breakfast one morning. That was not characteristic behaviour because he checked in frequently to make sure that everything was OK in the house. By noon we had plastered every telephone pole in the area with his picture and conducted an extensive search.

Days passed, long days searching, searching. We walked the neighbourhood night and day, desperation replacing hope. We decided to consult a renowned animal communicator and psychic in San Francisco. She was not available, but we spoke to her associate who asked us to send her Chester's collar and a photograph. She called a few days later,

reassuring us that he was still alive, that he was an excellent communicator, and very funny. She also called him a "little Napoleon," and said he liked to rule! The psychic visualized the numbers 3 and 4, as well as a blue and white Victorian-style house. That night we leafleted every house that remotely resembled the description on 3rd and 4th Avenue in a twenty-block radius. We left the cat door open waiting for his return. It was the eighth day.



*Always the leader, his outgoing personality and adventurous, fun-loving spirit were no match for other cats.*

The next morning at 5:30AM, from the upstairs bedroom, I heard constant meowing and vocalizing. I ran downstairs and there he was, a little thinner, very hungry and thirsty, smelling faintly of old cars, and "talking" non-stop for half an hour, determined to tell his story. We never did find out what actually happened to him because he didn't want to talk to any animal psychics. Maybe he was trapped in a garage fairly close to home, but it was definitely strange that he came home the day after we did what the psychic suggested! He definitely lost his taste for mice as a result, but not his love of cars. There were a couple more episodes when he was locked in a garage but for a much shorter duration — overnight and for six hours. However, every disappearance created the same level of anxiety because he was too precious to lose.

When Chester was 14 years old, I was petting him and found a bump near his spine on his lower back. I immediately rushed him to Cats Only and the biopsy showed that it was a malignant sarcoma. Specialists at the Canada West Veterinary Referral Hospital removed the tumour and surrounding tissue. He was a star patient and very brave throughout the ordeal, which included sharing a room with a coughing Pomeranian! Before bringing him home two days after the surgery, the doctor gave explicit instructions on how to dispose of the narcotic patch he was wearing. I had locked him in the bedroom with me so that he could rest peacefully. In the middle of the night, he ate a bit of food and used the litter box. A few minutes later, I heard a Rip! He had successfully removed the patch, sending a clear message that he was tired of feeling "stoned." Homeopathic remedies helped him in his recovery. His surgeon was optimistic that he would live to a ripe old age.

However, that was not to be. In the spring of 2007 he started to lose weight, slowly at first. Blood work indicated diabetes so we started him on insulin. However, further blood tests revealed that his red blood cell count had dramatically dropped and so did his weight. An ultrasound two weeks later, on July 13th showed that his pancreas was twice its normal size, and his kidneys and liver were also abnormal. The radiologist suspected lymphoma. Chester was given antibiotics immediately because he did not have the strength for an invasive organ biopsy. We were hopeful that it was an infection causing the pancreatic inflammation and not cancer. There was no time for an accurate diagnosis. Dr. Margie gave him a shot and narcotic patch in the event he was experiencing any pain.

While waiting for his ultrasound, Chester spent many hours with his brother Pumpkin in the garden.

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Pumpkin stayed very close to him and offered comfort and support. We think Chester instructed him in the important cat chores that needed to be done, because he knew the end was near.

The next day, July 15, 2007, Chester died in our arms at home. Mercifully, the final moments of his death were quick. He is now resting in the garden that he loved so much, under the California lilac...blue flowers to match his blue eyes. A perennial plant rests on his grave and will produce blue flowers next spring and summer.

It is a Buddhist ritual to free the spirit after 49 days, so we held a small ceremony in September to send him on his karmic journey and thanked him again for the gift of his time with us. A stained glass stepping stone with the image of a white sleeping cat will mark where he is resting.

Goodbye, my dear friend, I will always love you and miss you. You are now free of the pain that plagued you for many months. Some day you will return to this world, and, if I am very fortunate, it will be to me. If not, I envy the next person who will share your incredible spirit. Pumpkin is doing his best to fill your paws and take over the essential duties, such as greeting me in the carport when I come home. He hasn't left a lot of footprints on the car as you would do, but he definitely leaves his mark by discretely spraying a few drops on the front tire.

There is a bright star in the sky—it is you. *Diana Broome* 🐾

MING...

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her blood glucose carefully. With careful control of her diabetes, we all hope to avoid this emotionally and financially stressful situation for her people and, most importantly, the suffering Ming herself copes with. Bravo all! 🐾

# Does Your Cat Seem to be Losing Her Mind?

*Cognitive dysfunction syndrome is a common phenomenon among elderly felines.*

Your 17-year-old cat, once a fastidious creature, has been ignoring her litter box for the past several months, defecating and sometimes urinating wherever she pleases throughout the house. She spends most of the day either fast asleep or, if awake, staring blankly at a wall. And at night she wanders about the house in the dark, wailing pathetically. Considering that she seems to be in good physical health, you're apt to wonder whether the cat, at the age of 17 (the equivalent of 85 human years) might be losing her mind.

You could be right. Various studies have shown that as many as 80 percent of cats over the age of 16 show signs of age-related dementia, often referred to as senility or—as animal behaviourist Katherine Houpt, VMD, PhD, prefers to call it—cognitive dysfunction. “Senility is a rather disparaging term, and dementia implies a kind of aggressive behaviour that you might see in extremely unstable humans, but never in cats,” says Dr. Houpt, the James Law Professor of Animal Behaviour and director of the animal behaviour clinic at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

## Looking For Clues

The physical changes in the makeup of a cat's brain that result in mental impairment and bizarre behaviour patterns are not well understood, but progress is being made. In one study of cats over the age of 16, post-mortem examination revealed the same type of tangled fibers (beta amyloid plaques) that are seen in the brains of humans with Alzheimer's disease. Another post-mortem study revealed that the brains of cognitively impaired cats contain a certain protein that is also present in the brain cells of humans with Alzheimer's.

## Telling Signs

The salient indications that a cat is experiencing this condition include spatial disorientation; wandering in unfamiliar territory; diminished playfulness; excessive sleeping; shifting cycles of sleep and wakefulness; long periods of staring into space or at walls; indifference to food and water; sudden, prolonged and seemingly unprompted vocalization; and elimination outside of the litter box.

According to Dr. Houpt, the most dramatic and most frequently reported behavioural indication of feline mental decline is an elderly cat's persistent vocalization during the night. “They howl constantly between midnight and dawn,” she says. “That's the behaviour that that owners complain most about and the one that most frequently leads to a cat's being euthanized. People wouldn't mind if the animal was just active during the night. cats are light on their feet, and you can't hear them pacing. But the constant yowling keeps owners awake.”

Another behavioural indication that may signal age-related mental decline is a change in an animal's socializing patterns. “They tend to withdraw from other cats,” says Dr. Houpt. “On the other hand, an old cat will usually become more affectionate, more willing to lie purring in its owner's lap for extended periods.”

Despite the presence of cognitive dysfunction in the older cat population, owners of an elderly cat that begins to behave oddly should not assume that it is becoming mentally impaired. For example, Dr. Houpt points out: “An undiagnosed cancer that the cat has

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harboured for a long time may make a cat defecate in the house or become less active. And, hyperthyroidism, which can be very easily treated, can make a cat hypervocalize, or meow a lot.

Other age-related conditions whose signs may resemble those of mental deterioration include arthritis, which can cause a cat to slow down noticeably as it ages; advanced kidney and urinary tract disease, which may severely alter an animal's litterbox behaviour; progressive hearing problems, which may make a cat decreasingly responsive to its environment.

### Easing The Situation

Certain measures might help prevent or delay the onset of cognitive dysfunction, says Dr. Houpt, while others will ease the discomfort of an already affected cat. For example, she suggests that cats 15 years of age and older be fed a diet rich in vitamin E and other antioxidants, substances that are known to retard the effects of aging.

Dr. Houpt also advises owners to try to reduce the stress in an aging cat's daily life. "Don't bring another cat or a dog into the household," she says. "This can be very stressful during the later period of an animal's life."

If the aging cat has trouble going up stairs or jumping onto a bed, she suggests helping the animal by providing a ramp. Make sure that its litter box is readily accessible and that the animal can get in and out of it easily.

And take the cat to its veterinarian for routine checkups twice a year. If its unusual behaviour is due to an underlying illness, the veterinarian can recommend treatment. If cognitive dysfunction is diagnosed, the veterinarian can prescribe medications that may ease the condition. *Tom Ewing, CatWatch, October, 2007* 🐾

### Interesting and informative websites to purrruse at your leisure

#### **PetObesityPrevention.com**

A site dedicated to reducing the pet obesity epidemic.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr/-/2/hi/science/nature/7073194.stm>  
Cinnamon, the first feline to have its DNA decoded.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=hO\\_Tm7uGf4c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hO_Tm7uGf4c)  
A beautiful collection of morphing cats.

[www.freewebs.com/observe-the-aletterfromyourcat.htm](http://www.freewebs.com/observe-the-aletterfromyourcat.htm)  
A Cat letter to cat care givers.

[www.christinelandry.com/](http://www.christinelandry.com/)  
Patterns for cozy kitty sweaters.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmwqpHsMExg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmwqpHsMExg)  
A familiar wake-up call.

<http://life.familyeducation.com/cats/health/45708.htm>  
Physical changes in the aging cat.

#### **www.catsonlyvet.ca**

Our new website will be completed by January 31. Please visit us. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

## Sinonasal Disease Facts

- If a runny nose persists for more than a few days, the discharge thickens and becomes darker in color and the cat isn't eating normally, you should seek veterinary attention.
- Sinonasal disorders can include cancerous tumors, noncancerous masses (polyps) and the presence of foreign bodies. But the most frequently observed nasal disorders develop as a result of upper respiratory infections with one or both of these viruses—feline herpesvirus (FHV) and feline calicivirus (FVC).
- Other microorganisms that may infect the sinonasal structure include various bacteria, chlamydia and certain fungi.
- To reduce the risk of sinonasal disease, you should have your cat vaccinated for herpesvirus and calicivirus. It's also important to prevent the animal from being exposed outdoors to unvaccinated cats. *CatWatch, October 2007* 🐾

### Snippets

Construction workers saw a cat fall 18 stories and brought him to a veterinarian. Fortunately, Maxim had a microchip implant, so his owner was found and he was successfully treated. *WMAQ-TV News 8/18/07*

Scientists have traced the house cat's maternal lineage back 70,000 to 100,000 years to ancestors in the Middle East. A research team found just five matriarchal lineages to which modern domestic cats belong. *National Geographic News 6/28/07* 🐾

### EXPANDED CLIENT PARKING

**Yes! We now have additional parking spaces available off the lane abutting the clinic.**

### SPECIALS

**JANUARY:** 15% off all weight control diets  
**FEBRUAR/MARCH:** Dental Health Months  
**APRIL/MAY:** Senior Care Months

# Cats Only Veterinary Clinic

*February and March are  
Dental Health Months*

*April and May are  
Senior Pet Care Months*

Please call 604-734-2287 and book an appointment.

We invite you to take advantage of our \$50.00 off special during Dental Health and Senior Pet Care months.



Offer expires May 31, 2008

## Dental Quiz

1. Are kittens born with teeth?
2. How many teeth does a kitten have?
3. How many teeth does an adult cat have?
4. At what age does a kitten get his/her adult teeth?
5. How many roots do adult cat teeth have?
6. Do cats grind or chew their food like we do?
7. Can a cat survive without teeth?
8. If a cat breaks a canine tooth (the large fang), what signs will he/she show?
9. How often do most cats need dental hygiene?
10. What is the most common type of cancer in cat mouths?
11. What is that bad smell coming from my cat's mouth?
12. Do cats get cavities?
1. No. The deciduous teeth begin to erupt at about two to four weeks of age.
2. Kittens have 26 temporary teeth, 14 in the upper jaw and 12 in the lower jaw.
3. Cats have 30 permanent teeth, 16 on the top and 14 on the bottom. These emerge at about three to four months of age.
4. The deciduous (milk) teeth should fall out and the permanent teeth start to erupt at around four months of age and have fully been replaced by six months of age.
5. Cats have two permanent teeth that have three roots each, and 10 teeth that each have two roots.
6. No, they tear it and swallow it as soon as the piece is small enough. The teeth interdigitate rather than occlude (meet).
7. Absolutely.
8. Possibly no signs or sneezing! With an Xray, we can tell if the tooth can be saved (root canal).
9. Every two to three years, but it varies with the individual. The teeth should be a creamy/white colour with no build up of dental deposits, and the gums should be pink (or they may be pigmented).
10. The most common oral tumor in cats is squamous cell carcinoma. These tumors often start under the tongue. Regular examinations help detect changes: look whenever your cat yawns AND bring your cat in for us to examine!
11. Studies show that 70 percent of cats show signs of gum disease (gingivitis) by age three. Symptoms include yellow and brown build-up of tartar along the gumline, red inflamed gums, and persistent bad breath.
12. No, bacterial decay causes cavities. Cats develop feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions, commonly called cervical line lesions or neck lesions are the most common dental disease of domestic cats, and the most common cause of tooth loss. The lesions often begin below the gumline, so they may develop undetected. They hurt!

# What's She Up To Now?

## Margie's Mews

Dr. Margie finished 2007 with a swoosh through Jacksonville, FL, Nice, France and Atlanta, GA all in five days. She is relieved to have husband Jim back after his six month stint at the University of PEI. Her service as the President of the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) is over, leaving her with a lot more time to give back to the Veterinary Information Network (VIN) online. Being Editor for the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* is an ongoing learning experience. January brings speaking in Maine and Florida as well as a consultant round table on feline diabetes. In February she'll participate in the AAFP meeting in Palm Springs, as well as speaking in Las Vegas and Columbus, OH. March is quieter with only a short visit in Texas.

In April, she and Jim will spend two weeks in Hawaii. This break will be followed by speaking in Atlanta and Halifax as well as participating on a consultant's roundtable for Greenies. Her specialty college, the American Board of Feline Practitioners (ABVP) has its meeting in Savannah, GA, at the beginning of May after which she leads a week long program in Orlando again for vets wanting to learn more about all aspects of feline medicine. In June, after speaking for the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine in San Antonio, she needs to get ready for the World Veterinary Congress in Vancouver. No need to hop on a plane for that! This jet setting and increased writing will reduce the number of days she is in the clinic, but she is still available! 🐾

## Staff Mews

Colleen just celebrated her 19th anniversary working at the clinic! Her girls are now five and seven years of age and growing quite nicely, as she would say.

Michelle continues to balance work with caring for her four horses, four cats, two dogs, a ferret and a chinchilla. She says her Mediterranean cruise in September was fabulous.

Tamara brings her passion for cats to work every day and will be the one in the room if there is a kitten on the premises. She continues to play hockey (defence) in Burnaby.

Kris (aka Blue) has three cats (including Kiki) and two rabbits. She is an avid reader, student of the word and enjoys art movies.

Amanda (aka Pink) is our newest team member, a long term client, who has four cats. She loves her lunch dates with our boarding kitties. You will enjoy her pleasant nature, too.

Dr. Janet (MacLean) has developed an interest in football but personally continues to run. She is our main dentistry provider. We are delighted that she is still with us after 15 years!

Dr. Michael (Bratt) is the new owner of the clinic. He graduated a year before Margie. While you won't see him in the examining rooms, you will feel his influence in the lovely renovations and improved service.

Dr. Paula (Bedford) will be taking on more days in the New Year and will be providing your kitties with the option of acupuncture. Riley and Missy are grateful recipients!

Which brings us to our kitties. Kaylee passed away after a very brief but severe neurologic illness. We miss her prancing feet! Riley has inherited the role of senior resident. Missy, Hawk and Raven ignore him as best they can. 🐾

## MOUSELLANY



### Cats Only Hours

Monday, Friday: 9:00 am to 6:00 pm  
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday:  
9:00 am to 8:00 pm  
Saturday: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

### Contact Information



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Vancouver, BC V6J 3J7  
Phone: 604-734-CATS (2287)  
Fax: 604-734-8011  
[www.catsonlyvet.ca](http://www.catsonlyvet.ca)

### Please Call Ahead



Call ahead for medication refills and to ask us to set aside your kitty's special diet. This will ensure that we have it ready and that you don't make an unnecessary trip if we don't have it in that day!

### Our Policy Regarding Emergencies



We will always make room for the kitties of our existing friends (i.e.: YOU!) first. For emergencies and urgencies call us and we will ask you to drop your cat off to stay with us for observation. That way we will be able to examine him sooner than if you book an appointment.

If the emergency is after hours, or sounds imminently life-threatening, with your kitty's best interests in mind, we'll refer you to the Vancouver Animal Emergency Clinic at the SE corner of 4th Avenue and Fir Street. 604-734-5104.

### Are You Moving?



Please let us know if you and your kitty are moving. It's especially important that we have your correct address and phone number if your friend has a tattoo for identification purposes. Give us a call and we'll update your file so we can continue providing care for your kitty.