

Cases From Our Clinic: The Cat Hit by a Car

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

This is a true story... one of the interesting cases that Drs. Foster and Smith have treated. We sincerely hope you enjoy this fascinating and educational tale.

In the early eighties, we were introduced to one of the "class cats" of our practice. It was February and the outside temperature here in Northern Wisconsin had hovered at about 20 degrees below zero for a week. If anything will keep a small animal practice quiet, it's extremely cold weather. Our clients prefer to stay home with their pets rather than venture out into the local Arctic air.

We were all sitting around reading the latest journals when the receptionist came into our office shouting that we had an emergency in the first exam room. My colleague and I quickly made our way to the first exam room where we found a cardboard box covered with an old blanket. On the other side of the table stood a ten-year-old girl with red eyes and tears frozen to her cheeks. Under the blanket was an unconscious cat that was extremely cold and actually hard to the touch. She had found the animal on the side of the road and although she wasn't the owner, she had carried him over a mile to get to the clinic! The cat was alive, but just barely. He had been hit by a car. He had several obvious cuts and abrasions, but the most tragic thing was that somehow both of his left feet had been severed from his body, each about 2 inches above the paw. His breathing was very shallow and his gums very pale. He had probably lost a large quantity of blood and was now in shock.

The policy in our clinics has always been not to euthanize normal, healthy animals. If someone brought us a dog or cat that they no longer wanted for whatever reason, then we would keep it until we could find it a home. Our only exceptions to this rule were the animals that were truly aggressive and could not be trusted. As a result, our clinic had always been the repository for found or unwanted pets.

In a situation like this one, it would have been very difficult to tell the young girl the animal was too badly hurt or because we didn't know the owner, that the animal should be "put to sleep."

We treated the cat with IV fluids, antibiotics, medications to reverse the shock, and gave him a blood transfusion. As he started to stabilize over the next 24 to 36 hours, we did what we could to care for the leg injuries. We repaired the ends of the bones and covered these areas with skin. The cat had recovered well enough that he was eating on his own on the fourth day, and from that point on he recovered nicely. He had no feet on his left side and his injured legs ended about three inches from the floor. He could not stand.

We put out newspaper ads and spots on the local radio station to find the owner of a "Black and White Cat Found on Highway 47." No mention was made of the injuries.

After four weeks, no one had come forward. The girl who had found the cat couldn't keep him because of allergies.

By this time, the animal was actually doing very well. All the injuries had healed and as amazing as it may sound - he walked! He learned to balance himself and walk on his two right legs. At first he crawled, then he hopped and occasionally fell, but by the end of six weeks he was running around the clinic so well that few noticed his lack of feet.

Everyone in the clinic had grown to love the little beast and some hoped that his owner would never show. And that's exactly what happened. Over the next eight years, Captain Hook as he was called, was the official "clinic cat." He had a great personality and lived totally without fear. He could roam free in most of the building and would sleep on a bench in our waiting room. He snored loudly and this always brought a smile to clients. He grew into a very affectionate animal responding to all the clinic personnel and most of our clients and their pets.

Captain Hook became a real special part of our clinic and got more Christmas cards and gifts than the rest of the staff combined. Until one night, when he failed to wake from one of his noisy sleeps, he was the classiest being in the whole building.