

Special Care for Gypsy - an interview by Annie Wright of 'The Write One'

Receiving a check-up call on Christmas Day from your vet is definitely not the norm.

But Mark Robson from the Veterinary Specialist Group (VSG) based at Unitec in Auckland, took time out from his own celebrations to check on the progress of a small black cat called Gypsy and, according to owner Suzi Collard from Epsom, that call sums up the VSG attitude.

According to the old adage most cats have nine lives but Suzi says her small, black furry friend Gypsy has used up all of these recently, and if it had not been for the superlative treatment and care she received from both Greenlane Vets and VSG, Gypsy would almost certainly be dead.

Gypsy (affectionately known as Jew-Jew) is a four year old, small, black & white female cat who is much loved and cherished, along with her brother Moses. Jew-Jew had been unwell over a period of time culminating in serious illness in December 2004. She was spending long amounts of time away from home and was emaciated and very ill and, although she had already been diagnosed with a very narrow pelvic canal, which was causing her to become constipated, she seemed to be fading by the day.

Suzi says Jew-Jew had a history of acute constipation and late last year she became extremely thin and jaundiced. She consulted with her local vet at Greenlane Vets who put Jew-Jew on daily Lactulose syrup which would help her pass stools and ease her condition. While this did seem to improve Jew-Jew's lot, Suzi says it was extremely hard to find the correct dose and also ensure that Jew-Jew was always on site to receive them.

When Jew-Jew's health did not improve Suzi took her back to Greenlane Vets and extensive tests were again carried out to determine the base cause of her illness. Blood tests showed up very high levels of bilirubin & liver enzymes, which can have very serious consequences for small animals such as cats.

"They thought that the high levels could be attributed to some sort of toxic poisoning but couldn't find a satisfactory cause.



Due to Jew-Jew's deteriorating health, Greenlane Vets decided to refer to VSG. Suzi says she had been told by her local vet to expect the

worst but upon contacting VSG she was given hope.

"The whole team were so caring and did not treat Jew-Jew as just another sick cat. I was immediately assured they could do much for her - that they had the expertise and equipment and would do everything possible to save

her life. They sat with me and explained what they would or could do, how they would approach the problem and how much the treatment might cost, which is an important part of the process."

VSG veterinarian Mark Robson says Jew-Jew presented as low energy, thin and showing signs of malnourishment and dehydration despite the fact that she had been well fed and cared for.

After rehydration and supportive care, Chris Warman performed an ultrasound-guided biopsy of Gypsy's liver. This revealed a syndrome called hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver) that cats are unusually susceptible to, and which is often fatal.

Treatment centres on providing a guaranteed intake of calories each day using an endoscopically placed feeding tube.



Suzi says as treatment progressed Jew-Jew slowly started eating and was discharged from VSG weighing just 2.67kgs - "while she was skin and bone she was taking in food. I had this belief that I wanted to do the very best for her as she is an incredible little cat, full of affection and character that never failed her despite all the tests and treatments she has endured." She says Jew-Jew came home and was taking eight meals a day through a tube inserted into her stomach. Things were looking up.

"Mark was so caring and supportive. He called me every day to check on her progress - even on Christmas Day, which was amazing. Suzi discovered Jew-Jew liked roast chicken and gravy, which was freely available at Christmas, and more importantly Jew-Jew started eating unassisted. "She took an instant liking to this swish diet and from there moved gradually onto a normal daily diet of two and a half bowls of cat biscuits and water consumed by herself. She reached four kilos in weight and from there started to flourish while Mark continued to keep a close eye on progress."

Suzi says she is sure Jew-Jew would have died under normal circumstances had she not received the incredible level of care provided by Mark and the VSG team.

"Mark and the team at VSG were just brilliant with the both of us. They really cared, were always available and kept in contact even when Jew-Jew had been discharged back into my care. Every morning I wake up to Jew-Jew's little face and think it's been worth all the effort - for cat and owner."

