



Elizabeth thanks her veterinary team for being there every step of the way, through good times and bad.

Feline diabetes is a vicious and fickle disease, a thief that recently stole the life of one of the seven beloved felines who came to live with my husband and me over the past 13 years. Most of them are former strays who found their way into our home and into our hearts. Three of them, all unrelated, eventually became diabetic.

One of them – Gumby – recently succumbed to a kidney infection that had laid dormant in his body, possibly for years, until diabetes weakened his body just enough for the infection to take over. Physically and emotionally fragile for all of his almost 11 years, Gumby never stood a chance against the ravages of disease. We shall be forever grateful for the tremendous compassion and understanding of our family veterinarian, veterinary internist, and all of their staff members both during and after this most horrendous ordeal.

The Importance of

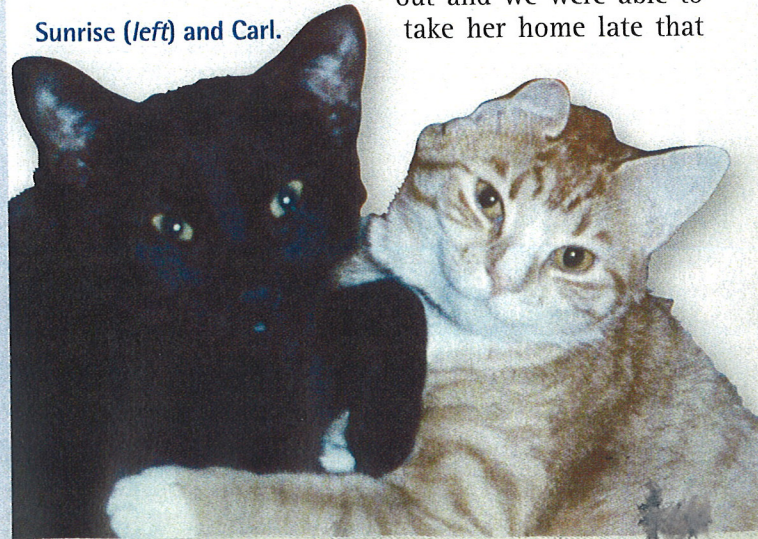
Sunrise's Saga

Sunrise, the first of our cats to be diagnosed with diabetes, began exhibiting signs in early 2000, at age 10. After the diagnosis was confirmed, Sunrise began a regular regimen of insulin injections and semi-monthly blood glucose tests, which turned into a 3-month emotional roller coaster. During that time her weight dropped drastically and she seemed to resist all attempts at regulation. It was frustrating and discouraging, and more than once I was driven to tears with worry. Finally, when all else seemed to have failed, our doctor suggested simply trying her on a fresh bottle of insulin. Voila! We had achieved regulation at last!

For almost 2 years, Sunrise received 5 units of insulin twice daily and her diet consisted exclusively of dry kibble. Weight and blood glucose levels remained stable. She actually gained back all the weight she had lost. Without warning, she went into severe hypoglycemic shock at around noon one calm Saturday in February. In rapid succession, she began uncontrollably moving her head from side to side, stiffening, drooling, and vocalizing and was completely stiff and blind by the time we rushed her to our veterinarian. During the car ride she jerkily clawed at the air as if to escape the seizure, occasionally crying out in her distress. We were immediately ushered into an examination room for a preliminary evaluation, after which Sunrise was taken back to the treatment area where she spent the next several hours receiving intravenous fluids and glucose. We were allowed back to visit with her, and at the onset we did not hold out much hope that she would pull through. (This is where a ready box of tissues and soothing words from the technician made a big difference.)

As time wore on, though, Sunrise's will to live won out and we were able to take her home late that

Sunrise (left) and Carl.



COMPASSION

afternoon. We administered fluids at home and kept her bundled up, surrounded by hot water bottles, and she fell into a deep sleep until suddenly, at around 9 PM, she woke up, looked around, stood up, shook herself off, and walked calmly to the litterbox as though she had just roused herself from a long nap. We were stunned and jubilant! Our Sunrise was back! The next day our veterinarian pronounced her completely recovered, and we have carefully followed a regular insulin regimen ever since.

A Little Guy with Guts

Gumby began exhibiting signs in November 2001, also at age 10. Gumby seemed a bit more desperate in his disease, frequently exhibiting signs of distress, such as vocalizing, that Sunrise had not. He never started entirely on the road to recovery, never again seemed "right." His distress persisted even after his blood glucose level dropped to normal, and it was only in hindsight that I was able to fully comprehend the intensity of his struggle to remain with us. Even as kidney disease sapped his strength and spawned new complications like small range fires that refused to go out, Gumby kept coming back, rallying in big ways and in small ways until his little body could no longer fight. We let him go on an afternoon in early April surrounded by some of the most compassionate and caring people I have ever had the honor of knowing. I cannot imagine how we could have held up as well as we did without their kind words, the gentleness and respect with which they treated Gumby in his final days, and the wonderful words of comfort in the condolence cards that followed soon after his death.

Carl: An Unfolding Story

A handsome, sleek, 12-year-old, solid black cat, Carl began exhibiting some of the classic signs of diabetes in December 2001 and was diagnosed in January 2002. He, too, was started on a regular twice-daily insulin regimen, and his blood glucose level gradually leveled off until late March, when it dipped dangerously low after his insulin had been increased to 5 units twice daily. What followed was a series of blood tests that supported his apparent return to normalcy. It was all quite baffling until our veterinarian suggested that a series of steroid injections that Carl had received in late 2001 for a



Carl (left) and Gumby resting.

proliferative gum condition could have triggered a temporary diabetes. Thankfully, we discovered this in time to avoid a hypoglycemic reaction such as the one Sunrise suffered. Unfortunately, Carl's proliferative gum reemerged as a rather nasty growth that required surgery to eradicate.

As a pet owner and veterinary technology student at Medaille College in Buffalo, I cannot emphasize enough how vital veterinarian and technician empathy and support are to clients. Encouragement and understanding are key. So is that ready box of tissues. During our efforts to regulate Sunrise and our experience with Carl's temporary diabetes, my frustration and concern occasionally grew into desperation and fear, but for the most part I was able to keep my feelings in check because our veterinary team was there each step of the way to answer questions (no matter how trivial) and to reassure us that all was not lost. Understanding the disease helped me to keep a cool head and a positive outlook. That, in turn, kept to a minimum those stressful vibes that cats are so good at sensing. Less stress for me meant less stress for them and less psychic interference with regulating their disease.

I firmly believe that anything technicians can do to help clients overcome their fears will, in the long run, also help their animals. Empathy and compassion are just as important to clients and patients as good medical care and could make all the difference in the patient's recovery.

— Elizabeth Maginnis
Rochester, New York