

# My Cats Made Me a Better Doctor

Category: Animals

written by Deborah Pierce | September 28, 2018

I adopted my first cat, Oscar, right before starting internship. He was a tiny kitten, just learning the world, a stray cat picked up from a local park by a friend. We both were in new surroundings, exploring with excitement and trepidation, learning how far we could leap without falling.

I'd had him a few weeks when he had a bout of diarrhea on a weekend. I was doing my pediatrics rotation and looked at this tiny cat and panicked: my thoughts of dehydration clouded my ability to notice him purring and leaping happily about. As the on-call vet calmly reviewed with me what I needed to watch out for, a lightbulb clicked over my head. I now understood why new parents called in the middle of the night with trivial things.

Oscar knew when I'd had a bad day and would sit with me as if to remind me that if I concentrated really hard on patting his shoulders, at least one of us, and usually both, would feel better. From him I learned the healing value of mindfulness.

Oscar lived to be over nineteen years old. We went through several moves and heartbreaks together. As he aged, I fretted about end-of-life decision-making. I was caught between wanting to spend every moment with him and not wanting to see my buddy being old, skinny, tired and crippled.

One summer day, Oscar's needs were declared with pure clarity. He'd stopped purring, and the look in his eyes was unambiguous. We scheduled the appointment with his family doctor—the same family doctor he'd had for his whole life—and he was given the softest blanket the office had to lie on, and was surrounded by love as he received his final injection. From him I learned the beauty of a good, peaceful death; and it taught me, again, the precious value of a family doctor who knows her patients well.

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