Pet Peeves: So You Want Me to Adopt an Animal?

June 7, 2016 By Kate Ferguson

When my cat Al, a beautiful sandy-brown tabby, died in 2003, I was upset. But I still had another cat I'd adopted named Juma. He was a sleek male feline with tan patches splashed against his smooth, white coat.

Then 12 years later, Juma died too. Now, I had a decision to make. Should I get another cat? Truly, after nursing two cats through difficult rounds of severe and expensive illnesses, the decision didn't take long for me to make.

When Al developed stomach cancer, the vet at the animal hospital where I took him said there was an operation he could perform that might help save him. There were no guarantees, however, about what the quality of his life would be. The cost? $6,000.

At that point, my head reeled and I felt faint. The doctor looked alarmed and asked me whether I wanted to sit down. I did and immediately thought about the cost of this surgery. I certainly didn't have that kind of money to spend, neither on Al nor on myself. I took the prescription the vet gave me, bundled Al back into his carrier and left the hospital. I nursed Al through his illness for as long as I could.

One night, he collapsed on the floor, and I rushed him back to the animal hospital's emergency room. After the doctor examined Al and returned to the waiting room, he shook his head. I didn't want my pet to continue suffering, so I asked the vet to put him to sleep.

When Juma got sick, the vet diagnosed him with kidney disease. Once again, he suggested surgery. But, once again, there was no guarantee. Crushed by an overwhelming sense of déjà vu, I heard the vet tell me the cost of the operation. Between $5,000 and $6,000, he said. So I opened the door of Juma's carrier and watched him rush in. He settled down with his back turned. He wanted to leave the vet's office, and so did I.

From there, Juma's story played out much like Al's. This time, my older brother took over caretaking duties until my cat lay in his litter box one evening and remained still. We buried Juma in the backyard next to Al.

Months passed, and a litter of cats was born in my backyard. Five cute kittens dwindled to three: one gray-striped female and another female with unusual patchwork markings on her dark-colored fur and one ginger-colored male.

I remembered Juma and Al fondly and was tempted to usher them into my home. Still, I resisted the urge because I also thought long and hard about how good it would be if there were resources available to help people like me care for these wonderful animals when they got sick. If costs for their care were covered, I think more people would rush to adopt pets.

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