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Marca Leigh's experience in rescuing kittens with panleukopenia / distemper / feline parvo virus...EVERYTHING.

It started when I took in kittens from a shelter, end of August 2003. I got a mom with 4 kittens about 2 weeks old (I guess), and some orphans...maybe 3-4 weeks old. 3 from one litter 3 from another. I knew to keep them away from my own cats. I have one separate room I use for storage and rescue...its small but has a window. I began with them in separate cages...mom & babies in one, the 'toddlers' as I called them in another. I decided at intervals to let mom out into the room, and then when she went back in the toddlers could come out for exercise. I figured they were all in the same room at the shelter & as long as they didn't have direct contact they wouldn't be in life threatening danger (Mistake #1). After all they had separate litter boxes & food bowls.

When going in & out of the room I had slippers only for that room & a big t shirt to wear over my clothes. after coming out I washed my hands (& face !) with soap & water to get rid of germs so my cats would not get a URI or anything I knew of. (Mistake #2) I didn't know the virus could live right through that, and gloves were what I should have been wearing.

I caught Spaz, my teen kitten, sniffing at the crack under the door & shooed him away, but wasn't worried. no fluids had transpired between the cats. (Mistake 2A) Spaz had been having diarrhea for the month since we rescued him & it had FINALLY gone away with lots of Albon.

2 days after I took the kittens home we had that massive blackout & I was home alone with all the cats & kittens. I noticed by flashlight that toddler Charlie had bad diarrhea too. I wiped his butt that night & washed my hands quite well.

All the toddlers were too thin...I mean ribs and hip bones thin....so I fed them like 6 times a day. Charlie was the thinnest, & very lethargic. My cat sitter noticed it too. She was to stay & watch them while I went camping that weekend.

The first night one of the 2 week old kittens died...had crawled away from mom & died. On my way home the next day she called me to say Charlie and another baby had died. We hurried home. I noticed that of the 2 babies left one was much tinier although eyes were opening. I supplemented with KMR & took 'her' to the local vet (mine was away!) where he gave her a drop of Albon. I took her home where she appeared to be suffering & not nursing. I tried giving her a bit more KMR & warm her up, but she cried out a little & then died in my hands. I had named her Gabby. (I was hoping to have a Xena & Gabriel...warriors to conquer whatever was wrong). Xena turned out to be a boy whom I re named Rocky. I figured Charlie had died of malnutrition.

Then about Tuesday I noticed Spaz was a bit under the weather. I figured it was more to do with whatever had given him diarrhea. he had just been to the vet so instead of bringing him back in I just picked up some antibiotics. By Thursday he looked sick, so I made him an appt for Friday at noon. All part of Mistake #3.

Friday morning I had a bad feeling, he was lethargic & hanging over the water dish. I called the pet taxi to pick us up right away. while I was in the shower I was startled by something furry at my feet. **Spaz had come into the shower and under the water with me!!** I picked him up soaking wet & he was hot. my heart sank... I knew something was

up. I gathered Spaz (& toddler Freddie & teen foster Pepper who had been sneezing & runny) & raced to the vet. I contemplated bringing in Winkle but was already loaded down with cats. He had thrown up yesterday & today what looked like plants (yellow green) he liked plant matter so I wasn't worried...I figured he had eaten too much this time. Mistake #4, one of the worst I feel about.

Spaz went into shock at the vet's and died while I held him, with a tube down his throat gasping for air. He hardly knew I was there . I didn't think he was going to die...and so fast! I thought he would need to be hospitalized at the most! I was so shocked I didn't know what to do. I cant even remember if they looked at Freddie & Pepper. They told me about panleuk and the possibility of a new strain & described the symptoms & how contagious it was. my stomach turned as I realized they were describing Winkles' symptoms!!!!

I saw a rescuer friend who suggested I go to the Humane society as they might be able to help me. Another friend who lived nearby said he would drive me as I have no car. I called the HS & they said I would have to come right away as they were closing. I couldn't go back & get Winkle, I would have to wait until the next morning. We raced to the HS with Freddie and Pepper. they said Freddie had only a URI & gave me medicine& recommended I bring in Winks & Pepper in the next morning. That night I couldn't wait. I went home & begged for a ride to the AMC , where we brought in Winkle and Pepper.

It took an HOUR to see the doctor, where he suggested I admit him to the hospital. We were concerned about how expensive that would be. The vet never said how imperative it was that we admit him...when we suggested taking him home & back in the morning he said that would be fine. I wanted Winks to be with me, not alone in

the hospital. I had no idea how fast he could die & what he actually needed right then & there. AND they did a 'snap test' which came out negative for parvo virus. Even though its not accurate I had hope. But you know I still blame myself!

Winkle threw up again that night & I stayed with him. That morning we went back in, first to the Humane Society.(I had been told they might have something that could help him.) As soon as they saw him they told me to bring him to Animal Medical Center. it was 4 blocks away so I ran with him to the hospital, and yes I was panicking. The new vet said...why didn't you admit him?! I realized I had made a mistake (#5) that might have saved his life...maybe. I admitted him & said goodbye in case I didn't get to see him again. I went home & my husband & I just cried and started checking on our other cats. My cat sitter had downloaded info on distemper and I realized that bleach was the only thing that would kill it, and how it can live on your cloths, hands, surfaces ! That afternoon we began a fury of throwing out all the litter boxes when we got a call from AMC that Winkle 'wasn't responding' (meaning that the machines were keeping him alive.) I knew that the same had happened with Spaz & he had died gasping...so we made the decision to let him go.

I realized with horror that all my cats could die! I had 10 of my own plus foster kittens and cats ! I called the same driving friend if we could get our cats out of my house & into their garage before they were all exposed to it. He came over with cages & carriers pooled together from good friends, and his van. As we loaded our cats Sheba threw up yellow foam! & Pepper had some bloody diarrhea! I went into my rescue room & put out a ton of water & food & checked on Freddie, gave him his antibiotics. He seemed OK, just sneezy. I honestly cant remember at what point the AMC had looked at Freddie, but they said he was

OK...just a URI. So I felt alright leaving them overnight. They must be immune or they would have died already...right? (that turned out to be true) Except that was Mistake #6 for Freddie...he was much sicker than anyone knew.

We crossed Manhattan from Jersey City to Queens, stopping at AMC to admit Sheba & Pepper. When I inspected the carriers in the van Cosette had thrown up and Miranda was panting & drooling. I couldn't stop crying. Lee went in with them & I went to Queens with the rest. I set up the cages in the garage in a circle, some doubled up, and we put a water raft in the middle to sleep on. That night Lee came back with Miranda & Cosette, their white blood cells were fine & they had just been stressed out. But Sheba & Pepper were much more serious, hardly any at all. They had to stay. That night there were all sorts of calls from people supporting me...including Tina, Beatrice, Naomi, Lisa, Pat. Also my friends who owned the garage knew people who were calling about 'the outbreak of a new distemper virus.'

I didn't sleep at all & my cats cried all night in the cages. The next morning I fed them & raced home to the mom & kittens to find Freddie dead! At this point I wrapped him & put him in the freezer (what else could I do?) & called the vet to bring in the rest. I checked in Sasha & Rocky, and toddlers Katrina, Dolly, Georgie and Lizzie.

Sandy & Don gave us refuge in the garage, Lisa called me a lot with help from my vet, Naomi lent me cages & gave me carriers, Tim set up the FVEAP website, Tina posted about the virus, Beatrice gave me great advice, Pat made a beautiful tribute for them, Mary, Debbie & Brenda gave me support. My vet Dr Sakal came back & really helped. So did Dr Smith. People really helped lift my spirits. We learned how to give our cats Sub Q fluids to prevent dehydration, & how to vaccinate the healthy

ones. We were in & out of my vet's group down the street checking white blood cell counts. I wanted Sheba & Pepper closer to me so we transferred her to my vet (AVG). They said they were both doing about the same.

That week was a blur of vets and crying cats, no sleep, cages, commuting back & forth to NJ to bleach down every speck of my apartment. I called to find out Pepper hadn't made it. When the weekend (Labor day) came, I didn't realize a whole week had gone by! It began to sink in that I had lost my Winkle and I started to mourn him, and Spaz, & Pepper, and all those babies.

Sheba began recovering and the mom & kittens at the vet were doing fine, so we took them 'home' to the garage on Saturday afternoon.. Rocky didn't seem right to me, so Sunday morning we ran him back to the vet. He wasn't nursing. Sunday night we loaded everyone into the van & took them home, confining them to my living room. My vet then told me they had already been exposed & had immunity so there was no reason to keep them from the rest of the house! Plus they were with Sheba & she was still contagious anyway. It was good to be home...we were coming out of the woods, and the cats were so happy. We could sleep in. ha!

The next morning, VERY early I heard a kitten throwing up! Georgie was in the corner, looking sick, & there was diarrhea in the litter box with a bit of blood in it! On a Labor Day bus schedule in the pouring rain we ran the kittens back in to Queens, where it turned out to be nothing. I think at that point I had officially used up all the adrenaline I had left. We decided to go out & have a nice hot breakfast (now at 4pm) & relax, when we got the call from AVG that Rocky had died. I just couldn't believe it. They had tried their best to save him, mentioned the possibility of a Calici virus, that it wasn't distemper.

So, this past week I have been watching my cats like a hawk. We have been monitoring the kittens since some of them had the runs, especially Katrina. Been giving them fluids, good food, lots of love. She is SLOWLY putting on weight. Her runs stopped but she now has taken to pooping outside the litter box. (?) She is also the only one who had flea dirt.

We've just been trying to put the apartment back together, buying new litter boxes & toys. The kittens & mom will be up for adoption after their second vaccination. Since they never became ill they did not contract the virus and therefore are not contagious. Even so I am watching them. My poor cats cant burp without me examining them, I just cant help it.

The Animal Medical Center bill is now \$2,600. and the Astoria Vet Group bill is around 2,000, which is going to get higher

when we send our passed away babies to be cremated.

I cant risk bringing another cat into the house for fear of them contracting the virus from Sheba or a missed spot I didn't bleach, and I cant risk Sheba's weakened immune system either. It has been a horrible ordeal I will never forget and I am glad to have had the support of these lists and the people on it, as well as my own friends here at home. I am so lucky to have a husband that cares & does as much as I do about our cats . I could never have gotten through this without him. If anyone got left out of the "thank you" please remind me...a lot of this story I had to re confirm with Lee as my brain has been running overtime for almost 3 weeks.

I hope, if anything, reading this story can help other rescuers prevent the same happening to them.

Good luck to you all!
Marca Leigh

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