

Catgut

When Pete moved out of the cabin, he left his huge un-neutered male cat, Pooper, to stay on the land. The land was 33 acres of mostly hardwoods (oak and maple) on the side of the hill overlooking a narrow but beautiful valley with a creek running through. About half-way up the hill sat the rustic, no indoor plumbing, cabin that I built from salvaged lumber, with a lot of help from my wife and friends.

Pooper was not the snuggly kind of feline to sit with you on the couch. He was twenty plus pounds of fierce small game predator. I once saw him sit at the bottom of a tree for over ten minutes as a full-grown squirrel kept working its way closer to the ground, stopping every couple of feet to look at Pooper and aggressively jabber at him. When the squirrel got about two feet from the ground, Pooper launched himself like a hellfire missile and took it off before it had a chance to react. Then he tore it to shreds and gobbled up the good parts.

I traveled frequently and often left Pooper and my dog Buster to guard the place. Buster chased off the bigger intruders and Pooper chased off or ate the rodents. It was a great system.

I'd leave a big tub of food under the cabin and there was a spring nearby where they could drink. Buster never strayed too far because he was neutered. Pooper on the other hand would go for days in search of female cats in heat.

So, it was typical when I came home from one of my sojourns and there was Buster but no Pooper. I didn't worry for the first few days but by the end of the week I was starting to have dark thoughts. Coyotes are known connoisseurs of kitty flesh and there were plenty of those around though Buster kept them far from the cabin. But I knew that Pooper traveled up to a mile in search of female companionship. By the time the second week went by I was sure I'd never see the big guy again.

It was a warm summer afternoon and I was clearing weeds and brush from the front yard. I happened to look up into the tree line and spotted something moving. Imagine my surprise when after almost four weeks I saw Pooper emerge from the woods heading down the path to the cabin.

He looked like he had been breedin and brawlin and not getting much to eat. His ears were torn up, his forehead had a

few divots, and he had several spots on his body where the fur had been gouged right off. The underlying flesh had been wounded to the point of having congealed blood on it. And damn was he scrawny. He had probably lost a third of his body weight. I went and picked up the bag of bones and held him and told him how glad I was to see him. I put him down on the porch and went inside to get him some canned cat food. I only fed him the canned once a week or on special occasions. Couldn't get much more special than coming back from the dead.

I thought "what the hell, let's feed him up", so I put three cans in the bowl. He started wolfing in down in big bites without much chewing. After a minute, with joy in my heart, I went back to the chores I had been doing in the front of the cabin. A few minutes later I looked back on the porch and the bowl was empty and Pooper was gone. I wasn't worried. Now that he knew I was back and had food, he wouldn't be gone for so long.

It was a temperate summer day and I was enjoying the solitude while working in small clearing by the porch of the cabin. About an hour after Pooper had finished eating and disappeared, I saw him coming back up the drive from the

valley where there was an old mobile home that I used for storage. My first thought was how great it was to see Pooper out and about again. Then I noticed something pink dragging the ground by his side. I quickly started down the hill to take a closer look. What I saw turned my stomach. The pink something was coming right out of one of the wounds near his stomach. Crap. I realized that over feeding him had crammed his intestine so full that it had burst through the wound where the flesh was already compromised. What a roller coaster. From being so elated at his return to feeling guilty and sickened that I had caused this serious medical trauma. I knew that he would need immediate medical attention so I went the rest of the way down the hill, ran into the mobile home and retrieved the kitty carrier that I used to transport him to the vet.

I ran back up the hill to where Pooper seemed to be reacting to the situation with his usual stoicism. I carefully picked him up without touching the extruded “gut” or even looking at it as it was making me nauseous just thinking about it. I got him into the carrier without further insult to the wound.

Next, I ran to the cabin and called my vet’s office. It was almost evening and I was grateful when his wife/office

manager picked up the phone. With much emotion I told her what the situation was. She agreed that Pooper needed to be seen immediately but that her husband was out doing his large animal rounds at the local farms. This was before cell phones so she wasn't sure how much longer he would be gone. We agreed that I would head toward the office, about ten miles away, and that if the Doc wasn't back there by the time I arrived, she would refer me to the "on-call" vet another ten miles down the road. I was really hoping he would be there when I arrived as I trusted him deeply and knew he would be very compassionate about Pooper's wound and my sorrow.

By the time I made it to the office, Doc still hadn't returned so his wife gave me the name and address of the on-call vet and said she would call ahead to inform him of what to expect. I was almost back to my car when she came running out and called me back. She said that the Doc was just pulling in the back. She ushered me into the exam room with Pooper in the carrier. I was talking to him as I had been doing all the way into town telling him to hang in there and everything was going to be OK. Pooper responded with silence.

In a minute the Doc entered the room and I recounted the story for him. His confidence and calm demeanor was like a balm, and lowered my anxieties considerably. He said “let’s take a look”. Again, I averted my eyes as he gently pulled Pooper out, not wanting to see his dangling intestine.

I looked into the Docs eyes as he tenderly put his hand out towards Pooper’s midsection. Then he pulled out the pink object, held it in from of my face, smiled, and said one word, “insulation”. I have never been so glad to look like an idiot. Apparently when Pooper was scouting around the mobile home for fresh rodent (I guess the three cans of food just wasn’t enough) a strand of pink fiberglass insulation stuck to the still sticky blood on one of the bare patches near his stomach. Doc kindly did not charge me and assured me that it was not the dumbest thing he had ever had a customer do. I wasn’t sure I believed him, but I sure appreciated him saying it.