

Ginger's Cancer Scare: 'These Things Never Happen at Convenient Times'

Ginger showed up one wintry day in 2014 at Leslie and Jim Misener's house in Kenmore. After repeated efforts to locate the owner failed, the 2-year-old domestic shorthair was spayed, given her shots and soon settled in as a member of the family. Adopting a cat was nothing new for the Miseners, since they have six and Leslie volunteers for animal rescue organizations.

Things were going well for Ginger until this past January. That's when Misener felt a lump on her cat's belly and noticed an enlarged nipple. That led to a trip to Ginger's veterinarian to see what was wrong. The vet concluded there was a chance of cancer in part because Ginger was spayed as an adult and some cats, when spayed at an older age, are prone to mammary cancer. The only way to know for sure, Misener was told, was surgery. And to do that would require removing her breast tissue.



"My husband and I talked about it," Misener said. "We don't have tons of money. He is on Social Security and I'm a certified nursing assistant in a nursing home. These things never happen at convenient times, not that there is any convenient time to get sick. But we decided to go ahead with the surgery, and it was successful. The vet said the biopsy showed a very minimal area of possible cancer, which she was confident she removed."

When Ginger returned home, she had a cone around her head and her body was stapled from "stem to stern," Misener said. The cat was also on several medications. Ginger was put in a spare bedroom to keep her calm and away from the family's other cats. But things didn't start off so well. She was put on a special diet, but wasn't eating or urinating and pooping, either.



When Misener came home one evening after working the second shift, she found Ginger without the cone on her head, and open staples that left a fair amount of blood in the room. That sent them back to the vet again, where Ginger was re-stapled, treated for an infection and had a feeding tube installed into her neck that went right into her esophagus to ensure she would get the nourishment she needed. Ginger stayed at the vets for a few nights to make sure the tube feedings went well. At home, Misener fed Ginger cat food and medications using plastic syringes 10 to 12 times a feeding, three feedings a day for a month. “That was a challenge,” Misener said. “She didn’t always want to sit still for it, and sometimes it took up to 45 minutes.” Eventually, the cone and the staples came off and Ginger started eating and drinking on her own again.

Meanwhile, the Miseners’ veterinary bill kept going up, even as Leslie Misener said the vet worked with them to shave off some of the costs. It still left a bill of around \$4,000. The Pet Emergency Fund contributed \$350 to help ease the Miseners’ financial burden. “It was a fairly substantial amount and we appreciated that,” Leslie Misener said. “Working in animal rescue, I see so many people who want to do things for their pets and want the best care for them, but it’s really a struggle. Any help they get is fantastic.” Misener said she and her husband never doubted that they were doing the right thing, and 8-year-old Ginger is doing fine since her medical ordeal ended. “She’s back to being her porky self,” Misener said. “She’s a tough kitty.”