

Living With a Blind Feline - The Story of Maggie

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Unfortunately our four legged family members cannot tell us when things are not going well for them.

Such was the case when Maggie our (13 years old at the time) lilac point Siamese woke up one morning and tried to maneuver around the house. I watched her as she started walking into the furniture. My thoughts were "Do cats get strokes?"

The day before this incident, I happened to see her walk into the fan. The fan had been in the same place beside the doorway for years. She seemed startled by it being there. I just dismissed the idea thinking perhaps she had her mind on something else. Sort of like when we run into the coffee table or corner of a desk that has been in the same place for ages. Our reward for not paying attention is another bruise!

So that morning in May of 2011, I watched Maggie as she misjudged about every few steps as to where she really was. It was a red flag that things were definitely not okay. I stood in front of her and she plowed head on into me. I moved again and the same thing happened again. She would move and then bang into a chair or a table, sort of like a pinball machine. She was over compensating for the incorrect steps.

The harder she tried to correct her position, the more anxiety you could see in her expression. It was soon obvious that her vision was pretty much gone. We picked her up to calm her down and she clung on tight. This day changed all of our lives. No longer could we move anything she had counted on to get up and down on, or to be placing anything in the path of where she might walk.

After taking her to a veterinarian eye specialist we were given the final diagnosis as: retinal degeneration in both eyes. She can sense light and dark, may see large moving objects but has no depth perception or visual acuity. Vision loss is severe and diffuse retinal degeneration. This is not painful, but there is no treatment. Her vision loss eventually will be complete and is irreversible.

One question I did ask the specialist was, "If she can't see then, why did she step around Molly's cat toy that had been left in the room?" The answer was smell! So as their vision is diminished their other senses become more acute. She now had to rely on smell, sound and touch.

It has been an education to say the least. I watch her put her nose in the air and realize there is a smell that I was unaware of. Her hearing has become like radar. I observe to see where she looks and what has triggered her attention. The sad part is she still hasn't always got the touch part down to suit her best interest. She has learnt how to walk in the middle of the room avoiding all tables most of the time. But there are days when she is way off and bangs her nose. She has found that reaching out with her feet she can find what she wants to climb upon. Of course there are times when she in the middle of the room reaching for what is not there, which by the way is quite comical.

When people are blind they have their hands or cane that can prevent head on collisions to the face, unfortunately our pets are not so lucky. They can use their whiskers or the side of their

bodies to help them navigate and sometimes if they know the edge of something like the carpet or where different floor surfaces change.

When Maggie is off course I will call to her and she has learned to immediately respond and correct her position. Sometimes it still doesn't avoid a hit to the face, but it does cut down on some of them.

I am not a furniture re-arranger so that part of my life has not been affected. But this past Christmas, we did not put up a floor tree. It would have been unfair to Maggie and dangerous for her, as the branches would be at eye level.

She will be doing fine with finding her way around and then one day she will wake up having issues. We figure those are the days that she has lost more of what little vision she has left.

She is adjusting fine, much better than us humans could. Maybe it helps when most of your life consists of sleeping or vegetating in the sun. Maggie does want to be held a lot more I guess it helps her to feel a little more secure. We of course have been spoiling her a lot more and trying to make her life as easy as possible.

Living with a blind pet requires the consideration of your pet's limitations and then adjusting to fit their needs. What they give us back in love makes it all worthwhile.

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