

## **Junior**

(Blond, domestic short hair feline - 1993/1994 to July 7, 2012)



**Junior at the top of the steps in the morning (April 28, 2011)**

by  
Rick Pieper  
(friend, buddy and staff)

A neighbor of mine at the time thinks he was born in 1993 or 1994. I first met Junior around 1995 or 1996. As I recall, I was sitting on the side of the apartment's patio, on the steps in the sun, reading or eating a snack. This blond cat came up the steps, sat down and just watched me. He "lived" in the duplex next door, yet seemed to spend most of his time wandering around the neighborhood. I probably chatted with him and we just sat there for a while. Then, this time or next time, I reached out to pet him - and he backed away. After a few such "meetings", I got some cat treats and would put them out for him to eat. After some more time elapsed, he would let me pat him on the head and scratch behind his ears. I remember one day the girl next door saw me petting him and was amazed. She said he wouldn't let anyone there touch him.

Junior and I continued that pattern until the duplex next door was demolished to build two condos. The family moved and left Junior behind. I was angry that they moved and left the cat, even though I would have also missed him. I then started feeding him outside; wet food morning and night, with dry food always available by my door (at the time I had an indoor cat). He continued to sleep wherever he had in the past. During the day he might be in our patio, or across the street (I never knew where), or in the patio between two houses across the alley, or somewhere else in the neighborhood. He would also visit other neighbors for treats. When it got cold, he might be sleeping at night under a car or on the hood of a car which was still warm. And, if it was raining he might be on or under a car in the garage in back which was always open.

He was an independent cat. Birds fascinated him and his ears and body would perk-up when he saw or heard them. I periodically saw feathers, remains from some kind of encounter. He seemed to get along ok with other neighborhood animals, both roaming cats and the wild possums and raccoons, yet did not seem to be buddies with any. No one could approach him (which was good protection

from Animal Control). I had to wait for him to approach me. He would sometimes come up for treats and pats and scratches, or periodically he would roll over in the sun on the concrete and let me scratch his back (sometimes his stomach).

This pattern continued until my indoor cat died and the outside animals became a problem eating the food at night. I then moved the food inside at night. Junior would, eventually, come inside to eat dinner, then immediately go back outside. At first, I would leave the door open so he could come in and out until I went to bed. This pattern had to be changed one Spring when first a baby possum came in for a bite to eat (I heard "someone" crunching the dry food; Junior was a quiet eater), it hid when I tried to chase it out, and I had to wait to finally chase him out. I blocked access to hiding places, moved the food, and waited to hear the "crunching". This was followed a while later with two very young raccoons who came in for a bite. They were very cute and cuddly looking, and I successfully kicked them out. I was lucky; I had kicked them out with my bare feet, which was not a good idea. Fortunately, they ran out, tumbling over each other in the process.

So, the next feeding arrangement followed. Junior came in to eat dinner, and I would then let him out when he asked. Somewhere along the way, he did learn that it was both ok and kind of nice to spend the night inside during the winter when it was cold, and especially when it was raining. During the winter and spring, he would sometimes stay inside during the day – if it was cold and/or raining. He would sleep on the floor, in a chair, on the couch, or on the bed. He wasn't much into playing. Periodically he would play with a catnip pillow or mouse, and then leave it alone. Junior would stay outside most of the time during warm, sunny weather.

Our relationship slowly got closer over the years, although we still led quite independent lives. I did not try to pick him up, I fed him, and he would approach me when he wanted some attention or petting. And, he would occasionally climb into my lap to nap a while (inside). If I petted him too much, he would move off and curl up somewhere else.

Junior was amazingly healthy until 2009 (age 15-16). As far as I know he had never been to the vet. I had not taken him to the vet as there had been no need for it. He did not want picked up, which would be needed to take him anywhere. Either at the end of 2009 or early 2010 Junior came in looking terrible and immediately went under the bed. He was dusty and had bloody scabs on his body. I thought he had been in a fight. It was time for a visit to the vet. When I picked him up there was a violent reaction and he ran under the couch; it was like you see in the comics with fur out, feet and toe nails extended. After dropping him and applying bandages to many cuts and abrasions on my arms and legs, I called a friend for help. She came over and we cornered him under the couch; he then went under the bed. As we were pulling stuff from under the bed, my friend looked over towards the door and there Junior was, calmly licking himself. She walked over to him, casually picked him up and gave him to me. We went to the vet. Junior had developed an allergy to fleas, had been scratching himself, breaking the skin which then became infected. They cleaned the wounds and gave him an antibiotic shot. We started routine anti-flea treatment with a new medicine

In retrospect, Junior was aging and his immune system was no longer up to par. In late 2010 I saw a growth on his lower lip, right side, and took him in to see the vet. This time he only climbed the sink in the bathroom before I got a hold of him (with no wounds to me). The vet thought it was a cyst and picked it off. About 2 months later the "cyst" was bigger and I took him to a new vet who took it off again. And, a month later it had re-grown. The vet wanted to take it out and get a

sample for biopsy. Since he had to be sedated, he also had his first dental cleaning. In January 2011 the results came back that it was basal cell carcinoma. However, the vet thought she had got it all.

The cancer came back, larger and more extensive. In April 2011 I took him back for substantial surgery with a professional surgeon. He survived the surgery and they sent him home. The surgeon and vet thought that they had got all of the cancer. At home, Junior would not eat; he was interested but every time he would hit his lip/chin on the food he would jerk back and go under the bed – it hurt. After 3 or 4 days, I talked to a different vet and demanded that they take him back, feed him there and give him pain medication. I visited daily and held him. A week after the surgery on the day I was to pick him up, he started eating. At home things seemed to be going fine, almost. I had to find a new diet as he was having diarrhea problems with the existing food. It turned out that his system could no longer tolerate food with gravy, which had been his favorite. Classic Science diet was the only food that worked. I promised him that we wouldn't do the surgery thing again. He barely made it through this one.

On September 6 (2011) Junior seemed “out of sorts” and wasn't eating. I couldn't tell what, if anything, was going on. At 2:00 AM on September 7 he wanted out, and I let him out (I never kept him in if he wanted out). He disappeared. I search for him, posted notes, and talked to the neighbors. I finally decided that he went somewhere where I couldn't find him -- to lie down and die. I was heart-broken and started throwing out old food and toys. It was even worse in that I didn't know what happened – or why. Of course, I still don't know.

About 3-weeks later, I was going outside on Saturday morning to take dirty clothes up to the washer. AND THERE JUNIOR WAS, calmly sitting in the patio and grooming himself. We went back to the usual routine. I think we paid more attention to each other. If Junior wanted something when I was on the computer, he would come over and pat me on the leg with his paw (no claws). If I didn't respond right away, he would tap me again, a bit more forcefully. I then had to figure out what he wanted. It was rarely a food treat. He usually wanted outside; when I told him to come right back, he did. Sometimes he wanted me to go over and sit on the couch so he could sit in my lap and take a nap, and get some petting (but not too much).

In November I could see a cancer lump starting to re-appear. I knew that neither of us was up to another surgery. I didn't know where else to go; I had tried both veterinary practices near me, unsuccessfully. I didn't think he had long to live. We would just let things go. I paid more attention to Junior and gave him fresh fried or baked chicken every night for dinner (he usually preferred fried, freshly cooked from Vons). We tried and used whatever treats he liked. Yes, he was picky and enjoyed being spoiled. Junior behaved really well and gave me extra attention as well. He only now went outside during the day when the sun was out and would come inside every night.

In January 2012 the tumor was continuing to grow, although he did not seem to be in pain. I couldn't handle not doing anything and made an appointment with a vet at VCA Animal Hospital. The vet could do nothing, but told me that Dr. Alice Villalobos, a cancer specialist, was back practicing one day a week at VCA (private practice) and had formed PAWSPICE for animals near the end of life. I made an appointment to see her, too late for the cancer, but she provided support for me and Junior for the next 4-5 months. Our thanks to her and her staff.

Junior was a wonderful friend and buddy. He was strong and extremely independent. We were mutually interdependent, casually at first and much more so later in his life. I still “see” him, periodically, at home, on the bed or couch, outside and wanting something. And, yes, I continue to miss him.

