

## The Nine Lives of Aquarii

Aquari was found hiding under a bed, bleeding profusely from his nose and close to being in fatal circularly embarrassment.. He was a handsome young Bengal Tiger Cat, and was presented to my hospital in critical condition. . He had a hard time breathing and was in pain. There was a round wound on the bridge of his nose that appeared to be an animal bite or a puncture wound.

One of the most interesting aspects of my profession is being a detective who must analyze scientific diagnostic data, use available medical or surgical methods, be able to utilize experience and apply intuition. Aquarii's case required several of these aspects of practice. There are elements of this case that resembled an episode of CSI: (Crime Scene Investigation).

The first consideration in his treatment was to alleviate his pain and then go about assessing his condition and determining what was causing these distressing symptoms. He was examined under anesthesia and I discovered a wound in the soft palate of his upper mouth and a deep laceration through the back of his tongue. This combination of symptoms left me with the responsibility to not only heal him, but to make sense of what had happened to him

X-rays of his head delineated a great deal of trauma in his nasal passages, however, no foreign bodies like sticks or metal were seen. These symptoms made little sense as a bite from another animal could not cause them. Next, an x-ray of his body provided a clue. A Bullet was in his abdomen!

Aquarii was a butterball of a cat, who melted into my body when I held him. Given any opportunity, he would slide up to me and gently press his face against my hand or face. As he slowly improved under supportive care, I became more and more attached to his personality and spirit. When we were performing repeated treatments, he disliked being restrained and complained with a weak meow and drew his ears back, however there was a silent communication between him and I and

I could trust he would never unsheathe his claws. Once a procedure was completed, he returned to his wonderfully affectionate persona.

The next assumption was the bullet caused the head wound, however, if it traveled thru his head to his abdomen , it would have killed him. If the bullet had hit his skull in any other location, that wound would have been fatal. The fact that Aquarii was still alive was somewhat of a miracle. However, accurately deciding how he lived through this was difficult.

Our best hope was that somehow the bullet's path had been slowed by the head wound and was then swallowed. That was unlikely but a possibility. The x-ray indicated the 22 was possibly residing in his intestinal tract. The advantage to that would be that other organs were not damaged and blood tests verified that. The disadvantage to that is that the intestinal tract creates an acidic environment that could cause the lead to leach into his blood stream. We hoped we would see it move thru the intestinal tract and that an exploratory surgery could be avoided.

After several days of supportive care, he started to eat and have bowel movements. Unfortunately, a daily x-ray indicated the bullet was not moving through his intestinal tract with the food he was ingesting and eliminating. This created a doubt that it was in the intestinal tract.

After a week, Aquarii was sent home for several days and he was scheduled to have barium x-rays and an ultrasound to determine the bullet's exact location prior to surgery. The result was fascinating: it was no longer in his abdomen.

The only logical explanation was that the trajectory of the bullet was such that it's path ended in Aquarii's throat and was swallowed. It then became lodged in his intestinal tract because of a jagged edge and was eventually dislodged and eliminated. Aquarii had used 8 of his nine lives and we were overjoyed at the outcome. Feeling the loving nature and generosity of Aquarii, I am haunted by the question of how could anyone intentionally harm this defenseless creature?

No one will know if this was a haphazard accident or a mean spirited act. I do know that that we who continue to share Aquarii's world are the better for it.. Hopefully, we will provide the type of education that ensures the proper use of firearms and most importantly, share a concern for the value of innocent life.