

# First call for last post

Vets2Home's 24/7 service for pets at the end of their life is just a phone call away for caring owners in the south east



**S**usan Gregersen, 47, DVM, MBA, MRCVS, Hospice and Emergency Vet, is founder of Vets2Home, the in-home, end-of-life and euthanasia service for pets and their owners in Sussex and on the Kent/Surrey borders.

## The vet's story

I first met Rosy Lee when I was a general mobile vet and she chased after me one day as I filled the vet-mobile at a petrol station. She had two lovely and very spoilt rescue cats - Mimi (a tiger tabby) and Fifi (a tortoiseshell) - and I helped her look after both her babies, as she calls them, for the last half part of their lives as their personal visiting vet. As they grew older, I started specialising as a dedicated hospice vet, which was lucky coincidence for what was to come.

Sadly, in 2011, Mimi developed a slow-growing tumour in her abdomen, which she lived with very well for over a year. This was probably because her devoted carer, Rosy, was a natural and very attentive nurse who had looked after her old mother until the age of 95 back home in Mauritius. An accountant by profession, Rosy has an extremely good natural instinct and her two cats were lucky to have such full-on, 24-hour attention and care where no expense or request was too much. (I am not sure her husband Peter feels he gets the same level of attention as the cats did, but he seemed resigned to second place, and I know first-hand that partners of most of us cat lovers realise this is the natural pecking order).

Once the curing of an animal is replaced with caring, one very important component of in-home animal hospice care is to empower the owners so they feel competent to know they are attend-

ing to their old or sick cat's every need. As professional hospice vets, we educate our clients about how to best deal with their companion animal as symptoms worsen and disease or old age progresses. We help them understand what to expect as the illness develops, prescribe medication and provide tips for giving this to reluctant feline patients, all within the safe surroundings of home. What's more, we are available 24/7 because life - and the end of it - can be unpredictable, although less so once our clients are under the care of animal hospice methods.

At-home, animal hospice care is designed as a peaceful, compassionate way that includes the end-of-life stage as a natural and treasurable last period of life. It gives both the cat and the owner the opportunity to prepare for saying farewell and quality time to say 'thank you for being in my life'. We feel, as professionals, that we help pet parents give their companion this one last gift.

This quality time was exactly what Rosy Lee wanted. A year-and-a-half

after Mimi passed gently in her sleep one night, Fifi fell ill. Rosy was well prepared and she wanted to give Fifi the same gentle and stress-free, in-home care that Mimi had received, although Fifi's symptoms were very different. They related to her chronic kidney disease and her lifelong battle with respiratory disease, which caused breathing issues. This dated from having suffered from cat flu as a kitten, long before Rosy rescued her.

Rosy fought so bravely to meet every need Fifi had. She was a typical cat with chronic kidney failure (CRF), a slow-progressing disease of many elderly cats that can be managed well by special diets and supplements, although appetite is a real problem. This wasn't so much the case with Fifi, as Rosy - who works from home - fed her by hand with a special diet, plus water, many times each day (and at night). She also made sure that Fifi had regular check-ups with me as often as she felt she needed it - daily, weekly or several times a month - and I gave Fifi stimulating injections to save Rosy from having to give too much medication in her food. I also made sure Fifi had enough pain relief as her condition worsened.

Felines hide pain very well and are often suffering silently at the end of their lives because the well-meaning owner doesn't realise that hiding, sleeping a lot, not eating, not moving much or not interacting can be signs of pain and discomfort. With Rosy and Fifi both feeling comfortable and supported with regular vet check ups - for fluid administration and adjusting her pain relief - complete comfort was possible till the very end. Fifi was able to pass naturally just a couple of hours after my very last visit, lying calmly with Rosy on the special bed prepared for her.



It was obvious to me that Rosy felt so much more prepared and at ease letting go of her baby knowing she had catered for her every need for weeks and months. In the end, Fifi decided for herself when she was ready to go and slipped away with Rosy by her side.

Seeing Rosy at ease with the loss of her pet at the very end is why animal hospice care has proved to be such a healing way of saying goodbye. This is relatively unusual, though. On most occasions we do actually intervene with a gentle, two-step euthanasia because some diseases result in a more dramatic natural end than Fifi's and that isn't something that pet lovers want to watch their animals experience. Luckily - unlike in human hospice care - we have the gift of choice for our animals.

### The owner's story

Rosy Lee, 62, is a self-employed accountant. She is married to Peter Lee, 76, a retired accountant. They live in Southwater, near Horsham, West Sussex with their new cat, Lara.

We were adopted by our neighbour's tabby cat, Sam, and he shared our home for many years but after he died in July 2000 we missed him so much that we decided to take on a tabby of our own. In August 2000 we went to Cats Protection and came back with two pussycats - Mimi, a one-year-old tabby, and Fifi, a two-year-old tortoiseshell. We could not bear to leave one behind because they had both been abandoned on the same day in London.

We were very happy with them and we hoped that they were happy with us too but in 2008 both cats developed serious health problems with their teeth and began to suffer from high temperatures. We took them to a vet's surgery recommended by Cats Protection and they looked very stressed and frightened as they were hospitalised for a few days. It was heartbreaking to watch. We decided there and then that there would be no more visits to vets and that we must find a vet to do home visits - but this was very difficult. Nobody we asked was interested in coming to our home.

Then one day in 2009, we saw a big black vehicle with VETS2HOME on the side at a petrol station in the Chichester area. It was so eye-catching - and it was the answer to my prayers. I went across to the vet, who was called Susan, and she gave me a business card and said we could ring at any time if we



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The house was so empty.*

needed their services.

In 2010 we called Vets2Home for Fifi, who was having breathing problems. (We didn't know at the time that it was Mimi who was in greater need of medical care because she had a slow growing tumour in her abdomen.) We were so grateful to have access to Vets2Home 24/7. Susan was so good with the cats and spent hours examining them, taking blood and recommending a surgery where we could take Mimi for further investigations. It was a really personal service - Mimi and Fifi were not so stressed and as their 'parents', nor were we. Susan looks after the owners as well as the animals, which is important.

At the same time I decided to stop going to my office and work at home in order to keep an eye on my sick babies. We also decided that one of us had to be at home during the day and overnight in case of an emergency.

After 18 months of being cared for by Susan, Mimi passed away on 9 September, 2011. It was a terrible shock and I miss her still - but Fifi seemed to think it was not such a bad thing, as all the attention and cuddles were now for her.

Susan and her veterinary nurse Alex took extremely good care of both Mimi and Fifi but Fifi needed regular attention as she was quite petite and frail. Susan was very attentive in planning for her long-term medical care. We even commented on the fact that Fifi, being very curious by nature, had grown accustomed to seeing Susan and no longer ran away from her. She'd never have lasted as long as she did without Susan.

When Fifi was about 16 and near the end of her days, I did not leave her side and it was very comforting to know that Susan was at the end of the phone and would never take long to appear if I rang her. We lost Fifi on 22 October, 2014 and decided we wouldn't have any

more pets. But soon after I started to suffer from high blood pressure. I was lost without my Fifi. The house was so empty.

By the end of November I had begun to look for another cat, reassured by the fact that Vets2Home is so dependable. We feel that Susan will always be there for us when we need her, so in January this year we adopted a new, middle-aged cat - another tortoiseshell, called Lara - for us middle-aged parents.

We would highly recommend having a vet at home for any service, be it hospice or end-of-life care, as it is so important to feel that you have given the best possible farewell to your treasured baby. I also feel that if you are lucky to have a garden then it is important to have a special place to remember your pets after they are gone. Our three pussycats are buried next to each other in a row and we are having a bed of roses put in to remember them by. 🐾

### What Vets2Home offers

An unhurried, end-of-life and/or quality-of-life home consultation with Susan and Vets2Home typically starts at £148 and can be conveniently booked for evenings or weekends at no extra cost. Same-day appointments for gentle in-home euthanasia always including a sedation, when the end has come more suddenly, is available at all times, with prices starting at £155 depending on the area and time of call.

● For more information, see [www.vets2home.co.uk](http://www.vets2home.co.uk), ring 01273 842115, or email [contact@vets2home.co.uk](mailto:contact@vets2home.co.uk) if less urgent.

