

CHAPTER 13

Up to this point I have been describing cats and events in chronological order but now I feel like a change! In the last chapter I was about to describe what happened to us all in a rather sudden and unexpected fashion, and the chapter ended around 1970. I stated writing this book many years later, starting in 1992, when for the first time I had a spare computer available for use as a word processor instead of only as machine controllers. When I finished the last chapter it was summer 1996 and I have now started again in summer 1997, so you can see that I do not have a regular routine for writing!!!

Laying in bed last night waiting to go to sleep, I was aware of our newest cat snuggling up against me, an older cat lying against Myrtle, a cat older still, lying between us and his brother curled up on the bedroom chair as he is in a 'sleep in the bedroom' phase again. The feel of the cats was a reminder of Cleo and Koshka and of another Siamese that we had after them. He was called Sashkin and died of old age almost a month ago, so our memories of him are very fresh. Sashkin of course had blue eyes and the cat snuggling against me last night (I won't name him just yet) is one of the not so common type of cat that has one yellow and one blue eye. As Sashkin had a profound influence on us all, I will tell you his complete story, as well as fitting him in to the correct sequence in later chapters. By the way, I write this some years after a *second* big change in our lives as the bedroom, the cats and us are now in our home in the centre of Denmark!

When two cats died within three months of each other in 1982, both naturally and of a good age, the rest of the family said that they didn't think we needed any more animals. By then we only had cats. I was very upset about this, having so soon lost both my very best friends and when Myrtle found me crying on the sofa one day, she realised how much it had meant to me and agreed that I could look for another cat. Of course I did not just want to try and replace them with look-alikes, so looked through some of our books about cats to see what sort I might like. With our finances in a better state now, I thought about buying a pedigree cat and started to look for adverts for Burmese as they are similar to Siamese in shape and temperament. While looking through Exchange and Mart later that week, I found an ad. for Lilac Point Siamese kittens and looking at a picture of what we thought were such cats, that we had hung in the living room, decided to go and have a look.

The owner lived in South London and turned out to be a school teacher who liked to breed from her three adult pets. Two were seal-point but the mother cat was a lilac-point and so were her kittens. They were *not* like our picture! However, I was thrilled to see them and then charmed by one of the brothers who sallied forth to greet us; showed off by playing and then explored our cat basket. The female kitten was already sold. The owner said to us that the forward kitten did not have such big ears as his brother and also had a small bony knob on his sternum that happened sometimes in the breed, but reduced the points at cat shows, so if we did not want to breed from him, we could have him a little cheaper. So I agreed that he was the one that I wanted and paid over the £ 50 that she asked. That much for one kitten! But it's not such a lot for a pedigree cat, and we had his pedigree and Cat Fancy register in the price, together with a tin of special kitten food that she said he liked. So into the

basket for our new little friend and then into the car for the drive home. That was the end of the happy little friend. We then found out what volume of noise a highly bred Lilac Point Siamese kitten could make! He shouted to the world that we were catnapping him and had him trapped in a prison! We had to stop after five minutes and get him out of the basket so that Myrtle could cuddle and calm him but although the noise abated a little, he still struggled and complained all the way and the drive through South, Central and then North London felt like forever. We looked forward to him getting back to the kitten we had first met, once we got home.

No way! Once out of the car and into the house it was an immediate dive for cover. Sashkin Bilbo, to give him his full name (his ex-owner liked The Lord of The Rings), wasn't having anything to do with his cruel captors and certainly wasn't going to be tempted by the food he was supposed to like. Over the next couple of days we had to try everything to get him to eat while we watched what a friend later described as 'a skinny little scrap' almost visibly waste away in front of our eyes. From what the ex-owner had said to us, we reckon that in fact he was not weaned even at 12 weeks as while she was out all day, he had been getting his food from his mother and the other cats ate *his* tinned food. Eventually we persuaded him to eat something, I can't remember what now, and he started to get over his shock and integrate and play. Luckily he took to our bed straight away at night and never slept away from me at night for all his life, except the few nights when I was away somewhere.

At that time we still had five other cats. Two had been strays which we had neutered and then homed and two were ones that we had adopted from local friends own cats litters. The oldest was 9 but the others were all no older than 3, so those all still wanted to play with this strange little thing that had turned up in their midst. Sash funnily enough made special friends with the two ex-strays and as one was a long-haired cat with a fluffy tail beloved by Siamese as a comforting place to rest a chin, he settled on him as a catnap companion. His name was Ptolomey and he has his own strange story to be told. The other cat was what seemed to be a pure bred Orange Eyed British White and he had become the centre pivot for our cat household as they all loved him tremendously. His name was Snowy and Sash also thought that he was a splendid cat. So began our life as the carers of a Lilac Point Siamese and what a life that turned out to be!

Once we had got over the food and new home trauma, then Sash became a truly loving little companion. He still hated car travel and as our vet was now some miles away (Mr Amsden having retired to Greece) he exercised his voice wonderfully when going for vaccinations (oh yes, we were the owners of another pedigree cat now!) and then to be neutered. He flatly refused to go in the cat basket, so that had to be taken only for shifting him from the car to the surgery and back. The rest of the time he suffered on Myrtle's lap or prowled around the back seats and windows, complaining to all who would listen. He also had to go there for an emergency one day when he came back home mouthing at his tongue which I found had a loose flap of skin hanging from it. Like Koshka, Sash turned out to be a terrible thief and scrounger and we reckoned that he had found an empty tin to lick in a neighbours rubbish sack and thus sliced through his tongue. The loose piece had to be cut off under anaesthetic and healed well without any more treatment and luckily he never did that again. With that adventure out of the way, he found another.

As Hamilton Way was effectively a no-through-road, all our cats would, from time to time, go down the drive and visit neighbours or just to be nosey. Sash was no exception, but he always had to go one better. Sometimes I would have to go to the bottom of the drive to shout for anyone not back in time for their regular meal times. Sash's response on those occasions would be to holler back and then rapidly appear. One evening he didn't, so I went further up the road in case he was in a back garden and could not hear me and sure enough, at the top of the road, I heard a faint shout. However, he still did not appear and his shouts got increasingly more frantic - so did I! Eventually I realised that he got to the other side of a tall, old, brick wall that surrounded the old Brent Lodge formal garden on three sides and he was coming towards me in the centre of the U shape and thus although nearer to my voice, could not work out how to get to me. I ran around the higher road to get into the garden - not worrying what anyone might think! - and we shouted at each other until we met in amongst the roses. He told me at length how worried he had been and certainly stuck to his promise never to do that again!

By the time that we adopted Sashkin, Michael had left home and Eric was working so neither of them were going on holiday with us. We had started to be more adventurous by ourselves and with Michael living in Poppa Webbs house as a lodger and Eric living at home some of the time, we could safely go away and leave all the cats behind, so no more cats in the caravan. By the time that Sash was a year old, Eric had gone on a trip to the USA and never came back, but Michael was now firmly established in number 13, so enjoyed having a sort of holiday in his old home during the day, where he could look after the cats for us and enjoy watching Sash grow up, although some say that he never did! Luckily Sash didn't get into any scrapes that first year! I think that it was the second or third year of his life that the next emergency journey to the vet took place!

We came back from holiday to find healthy happy cats waiting to greet us, but when I stroked Sash all along his tail, I found what seemed to be a bit of stick stuck in the fur. On closer examination, it turned out to be the bare cartilage at the end of his tail, with the skin and fur missing from the last inch. Rapidly to the vet - back under the anaesthetic and another bit of his body was removed! The end was stitched and eventually the fur grew back so that his tail just looked a bit shorter than it had been. For a cat that didn't like cars and shouted "I hate vets", he was doing quite well! We reckoned he must have jammed it under the edge of the cat door sometime, but Mike and Linda had never noticed him acting any differently so it did not seem to have hurt him much.

Sash was now about 3 years old and in his next year of life, both my father and mother died. Once we had cleared up their estate, Jenn, my sister, and I were left about £ 7,500 each so Myrtle and I decided to build a swimming pool of our very own with the money. By doing much of the work ourselves and buying material (and labour when necessary) direct, we were able to build both the pool and a complete enclosure attached to the house. Thus by the time that Sash was 4, the cats had a new place to relax in and as the pool house got nice and warm when the sun was even slightly out, even in winter, they had to have their own cat door into it so that they could use the loungers for their naps. We kept a floating cover on the pool when not

in use, but even so, we remain surprised that Sash never managed to fall in! He once got one back leg wet when he tried a shortcut across a corner, but that was all. A few times I floated him around with me in my arms or on a floater, but he was not thrilled with the idea so it never became a habit! By then we had made new friends of a family that came to live in Hamilton Way and Lesley, the mother, regularly came swimming two evenings a week. Sash thought that she was nice, so started to visit her across the road and it was probably him starting these new excursions that led to his next downfall. Soothing note:- don't worry, dear reader, you already know that he lived a full life to the natural end!

So now it was the first of October 1987. Sash was five years old and we had been on our summer holiday to Denmark for the eighth year running. Everything was settled down again in a nice autumn and looking to winter coming in a month or so. Sash still slept cuddled in my arms with his head on my pillow as he was to do all his life. The cats would all come in to greet us when we finished work and get ready for our evening meal, but that evening Sash didn't appear. By the time we were almost ready to eat, he still had not come in so I gave another loud call and had a quick look down the street. Jack said that he had seen him earlier and he was OK then, so we had our food and then realised that it would soon be dusk and he had still not arrived. Then started the worst time of my life. We both went out to check on the street, the neighbours and their gardens and apart from Jack having seen him the once in the afternoon, there was no sight or sound of him. We of course immediately thought of his adventure in Brent Lodge and then of Richards journey, so extended our searching further and further until almost midnight when we were too exhausted to do any more. We tried to go to bed and sleep but hardly could. I woke again at first light and went straight out to look again and again. All our friends kept an eye open for him and we walked miles over the next few days looking and calling over and over again. It was a nightmare, although we still had hope that his collar and medallion would be noticed and someone realise that a sad worried little siamese cat had to have a home somewhere. But after a week of this, we were having to encourage ourselves so as not to lose hope.

On the 10th October at about 10pm, the phone rang. I answered and a young womans voice said that she was speaking from Stanmore Hospital. "Yes" (- puzzled). "I have a little cat here with your name on its collar." Wow!!!! I couldn't believe it - that hospital is about eight miles from us in a direct line and over 20 minutes by car (normally!). The nurse, Julie, said that she had just started night shifts again after a break and had heard from the other nurses about a cat that had been stealing from the rubbish sacks for some days, so she had managed to catch him and had him with her in the ward. To believe that he had got there at all was difficult enough, but to imagine that he had got there almost the next day after he vanished was impossible. Nevertheless, Julie had him and I drove at top speed to the ward that she described to me.

Disaster. She had put his collar back on but when she opened the store room door again, he rushed out and had not come back by the time that I got there. However, she was certain that it would be OK and told me the direction he had gone, so I tried calling, softly, (it was long past patients bed time), that way. No luck, but back in the ward, Julie told me the story as she knew it. Sash had appeared early in the week,

stealing from the evening rubbish sacks as only a siamese could, by ripping the sides. The nurses on the night shift were quite used to the hospital's own permanent collection of stray cats, so just made sure that another dish of food went down in the covered connecting corridor and then later saw him eating from them. He did not seem to have been seen during the days, too much activity probably, but came every night. The other nurses would not bother about a new one, but Julie was the self-appointed cat carer who liked to check on the cats and new kittens and have them homed or neutered where possible, so she made sure that she kept watch for him. When he appeared that Saturday night, she managed to catch hold of him and put him in the store room while she got his collar off and then telephoned us. Julie told me to come back early in the morning as it got light and before her shift ended and in the meantime, she would still keep looking and try and catch him and put him in our cat basket if she could.

Back before 8am on Sunday, I went to Julie and she said that she had seen him once more (*what* a relief) but he was too wary of her so she could not get close enough to him to catch him. She had watched him go off the same way as before, so could tell me in which direction to look, as it was probable that he had found somewhere to hide during the days. I started to walk slowly away from the wards along paths between other buildings, calling as I went and trying to imagine hideyholes on the way. I tried a little garden and copse and then followed the paths further round the back of some administration buildings. There was still no sight or sound of him. Then I suddenly had a feeling of near certainty when I saw a small flight of concrete steps going down under the side of the building. As I walked down them I could feel the warmth and hear the noise of a heating boiler from the open door at the bottom and felt even more nervously expectant that this was the right place and I called again as I stepped inside the door. There was a moment of stunned silence and then a little body came rushing around from behind the boiler, shouting his head off and I grabbed him up off the floor into my arms. He was dusty and grimy from sleeping in the corner on some old cloth and paper and a bit hoarse but otherwise seemed OK. I stumbled back up the steps into the light and looked at him properly while he went mad with joy. We were both chattering away to each other and I was certainly crying with relief and I don't know if cats really can cry, but Sashkin sounded as if he was. I tucked him firmly inside my jacket with his lead clipped to his collar just in case and quickly went back to the ward where Julie was handing over to the day staff. We thanked her over and over again and then the two of us got into the car and drove home, talking all the way. It was perhaps the only time that Sash was glad of a ride!

Back home, the others inspected him and pronounced themselves puzzled but satisfied and Sash had the biggest meal of his life. We then both went into the poolhouse and spent the rest of the morning laying on a lounger, with him on my chest so as to be as close as possible, and both slept the sleep of exhaustion and relief. More food at lunchtime to build him up and this started a trend of course, as all the others also wanted lunch! Now, more than ten years later, all our old and new cats still expect to get a snack at lunchtime even though Sash is no longer with us. We looked him over carefully and I gave him a brush to remove the dust, but the only thing that seemed to have happened to him was that one canine tooth had a bit chipped off the end and his claws were all roughened and shortened on the ends. On Monday I took him to the vets, another one that we had moved to and then stayed

with, and he was pronounced perfectly fit but thin. Together with what Richard the vet said, what Julie told us and our own developing ideas, this is what we think must have happened:-

For some weeks, one of our elderly neighbours had been going on a weekly visit to Stanmore Hospital for treatment and the day he was lost was the day of her appointment. The ambulance that took her and brought her back was normally one of the sit and ride type where the back is opened and a ramp lowered for patients with wheel chairs or crutches to get down to the road and it is of course left down and open while the driver helps the patient back to their own house. Late that afternoon, Sash must have gone in to look around and then got shut in while the driver took the ambulance back to Stanmore. The ward that Julie worked in is led to by the covered corridor that goes to the different wards from the entrance next to the area of the hospital's roads where the ambulances arrive and turn when transporting outpatients. Sash must have dashed for cover once it stopped and then later wandered around until he found a place to hide. The theory about the ambulance is supported by the condition of his claws and tooth. In sliding around on the metal floor he would have worn the claws and quite possibly have knocked into a seat support and broken the tooth. We had some ideas that he may perhaps have been stolen and then dumped off the motorway that goes quite near to the hospital, but that seems very implausible. Also the other idea that he may have wandered off, got lost and walked there seems impossible, particularly as he was seen there after only a day or two and, anyway, could he have found food and places to hide in many, many places long before then on such a journey? From what we all talked about, the ambulance idea definitely wins hands down. People have often expressed surprise that he should have chosen a noisy boiler house to hide in, but that is easily explained. To Sash, it must have seemed like home from home as our poolhouse also had a noisy boiler and pump running nearly all day long and it was of course, nice and warm in there - a favourite place for all our cats as I said before.

While he was lost, I had written his story and sent it to the local paper who published it and I said that there would be a reward for anyone who found him. So, when we went back later that week to thank Julie again, and for Myrtle to meet her, I wanted to give her the money but she would not take it. However, we saw that the nurses needed some money for their own strays as the hospital did not provide any, so gave them the money for some new kittens there to be fed, checked and neutered. The mother cat had made a nest between some of the heating pipes where they entered the building from outside, so that boiler system does well for all lost cats! We have kept in touch with Julie ever since and we send each other new news every year with our Christmas cards. There is no way that we could ever thank her enough.

It was very strange, but it must have been a year or more before my mind completely accepted that Sashkin was back with me. During the time that he was lost, it was like a nightmare and my unconscious seemed unable to let go of that idea so that from time to time I had the most peculiar feeling that I was really just dreaming not only that Sashkin had been found, but every other detail of my life. It is difficult to explain, but the feeling really did persist for a long time and only gradually let go. Our cat sitters the next summer kept a very, very careful watch on Sashkin and it was very difficult for us to resist the temptation to telephone to check!

So, you can see that not only was Sashkin very special to us but that he already in his first five years managed to get involved in many adventures - he did not change, so here is a little list of other times he worried us and had to go to the vet! Not necessarily in the correct order as there are so many things to remember.

Firstly, he never again went into a strangers vehicle but he still liked to go visiting. I think that by then most of our neighbours recognised him and perhaps some made too much fuss of him as he developed a new habit of calling at their back doors to see what might be available as a snack. The habit was reinforced by one lady who used to put her chicken carcasses out on the lawn for her own cat to chew at. Naturally, Sash found out about that and we had a hard time convincing her that it was dangerous for the local cats, and please don't do it. By then he was convinced that nice things would turn up if he visited often enough, so if I had not seen him for a while I would have to go across the road to the back passage behind the gardens and give him a shout. Usually there would immediately be an answering shout and he would come through a back gate to see where I was. I would then chase him back home to try and encourage him to think at it was not the right thing to do, but this phase lasted for quite a time, until we managed to convince the two main offenders amongst the neighbours that we were worried about these excursions. In the end, I found out which cat flap it was that sometimes clacked soon after I called him and persuaded that neighbour who no longer had a cat of her own, to seal it up, despite the fact that she swore blind that it already was and that he never came into her house! Very strange, as twice Myrtle knocked on her front door and found Sashkin strolling through the hallway! This phase lasted about a year and gave us a little worry as although Hamilton Way was not officially a through road, there was a way to drive through on what was supposed to be only a footway and so cars *would* drive straight through. However, with parked cars both sides, there was so little room to drive in the narrow road, that even the occasional lunatic could not get up much speed and none of our cats were ever hurt. If you could have seen Sashkins method of perambulation (I could hardly call it walking!) you would wonder yourself if he ever actually knew where he was going as he walked like a fashion model, swaying from side to side and crossing one paw in front of the opposite as he progressed in zigzag fashion. Only his running was even partly orthodox, as although it was the usual cat type of bounding, it was much more in the air on each leap, with the odd jink thrown in for good measure. The first time that he tried tree climbing as a kitten, he managed to get about 15 feet up an ash tree in the garden before losing courage in the way of most kittens. However, he didn't do what Richard did years ago and what other kittens do; try and find the way down and then shout for help when they couldn't. Sash tried a few manouvres that didn't seem to work and then just jumped straight off from 15 feet up. It was like a slow motion film to us as we watched in horror - he spread all his legs out like a flying fox, landed almost flat and then picked himself up and staggered over to me little the worse for the adventure. I think that was his only try at tree climbing, but he could manage wooden fences quite well. He never managed to work out how to climb up my trousers however, as he would only use his front paws for that and so without the back claws getting a purchase he always fell off halfway up. Once I was playing with him when getting ready for bed and I said to Myrtle, watch this as I drop him upside down over the bed. All other cats turn round in mid air so as to land on their feet, but not Sashkin. He just landed flat on his back! I tried it several times over

the years, holding him upside down by his paws and then letting go, but he always seemed to trust me so much that he just landed on the soft duvet flat on his back again!

As I mentioned, they all always had to have a small snack for lunch after the events of 1987 and Sash of course had to have a snooze on me when I sat down for a rest after mine. He was usually very comfortable as Ptolomey also thought that it was a good idea, although he had to fit into the space that Sashkin left and then have Sashkins chin comfortably tucked into Ptolys's nice fluffy tail. Watching television of an evening would usually result in the same combination. The other stray cat, Snowy, that we had at the same time was also a favourite of Sashkin's. Sash found out when he was still only a kitten that Snowy was a real softy, despite weighing a stone. Sash worked out that if he launched himself at Snowy's shoulder, then Snowy was always caught by surprise and even Sashkins two pounds would bowl Snowy over. We have a lovely picture of Sash which shows only a long snaky paw poking out from behind a photographic light to try and reach Snowy, who was having his picture taken while basking in the warmth of the light. If I was not available in colder weather, then Sash would usually pile up onto Snowy in front of the warm air blower with several others all around the two of them.

One evening Sash gave us another fright by starting to really stagger around and when I put him onto my lap to see what was wrong his head started to shake. Another emergency call to the vet and we arranged to meet her at the clinic some 20 minutes away (at night) for a check. When she asked me if anything strange had happened that evening, I remembered that as he jumped onto my lap to see if I had anything nice for him during our evening meal, he had caught his head on the edge of the table. Of course, he couldn't just bruise it, but got a full blown case of concussion and had to have injections to reduce the brain swelling. Luckily overnight the medicines effect did the job and on the next days visit he was pronounced on the mend and just a little more medicine and another visit made sure that he was fully OK again.

We had other emergency calls for him and I cannot now remember the exact order. Once he went badly off his food and was sick. We always watched out for appetite problems as he did not have weight to spare. On this occasion I was particularly worried as he seemed to be reacting the same way as another cat we had had who got seriously ill, so quickly to the vet with him. Yes, it was serious, as his intestine had spasmed and a section turned back on itself, so stopping any food getting past the blockage and also cutting off the blood supply to that section so that it went gangrenous. He was straight into surgery and then intensive care with all the tubes for about six days. Once again, he proved how tough that little body was and made a full recovery. We had one more fright with that as he seemed to develop some symptoms about two weeks later and so he was opened up again, but nothing was wrong that time except a liver infection, so medication fixed that and he put back on the weight that he had lost. It was a standing joke with us and the vets after that, that he should have been fitted with a zip, ready for any more emergencies!

The next emergency, (late at night of course) seemed at first to be a repeat of the concussion but I could not think of any bangs that he had had in the previous few hours. His muscles spasmed and his head shook and he couldn't walk. That meant

more drips and days of intensive care at the vets and it was found that he had managed to get another rare problem. That was an infection by a parasite called toxoplasmosis which is effectively impossible to completely remove from the system. Luckily, the invasion was brought to a halt and the remaining sites of infection reduced to a level at which his own body defenses could keep it fully under control, but it was a worrying few days at first and then a worrying few weeks until the continuing checks showed that the remaining infection was controlled. This parasite can badly damage its host by forming cysts wherein the parasites breed to further infect the host. Such cysts in, for example, a kidney or liver, could easily kill a cat. Sash managed to escape that, but it seems that one cyst must have formed in his brain before it could be destroyed and that cyst damaged his ability to hear. His ears seemed quite all right, but the message could not get through past the hearing centre, so he could no longer hear. He was obviously puzzled by this, but managed over the next few months to cope by learning to lip read! At least, that is how we define it. He would closely watch my face to see what I was saying to him and got to manage quite well. Needless to say, as we could no longer call him from a distance, we took great care not to let him out of our sight for long. As he was by then 11 years old, he was anyway slowing down a little and he also seemed to know that he was better off not going too far.

By then, Sash had become a very expensive and very well loved bargain. In addition to all those problems, his teeth deteriorated when he was about 8 or 9, so first his canines had to be taken out and then later the molars as well, leaving him with just the small front teeth. As usual, he managed to cope! He was not able to bite onto his food and so just caught it in his front teeth and then tossed his head back, like a bird having a drink, to get the food to the back of his mouth where he could mumble it with his gums and then swallow it. I just had to make sure that his food was fairly soft and in small pieces, without any hard biscuit. So by the time that he was eleven and a half and we moved to our new home, he was ready to accept anything that came to him! One thing that came with him was nine A4 pages of vets notes for his new Danish vet!

He settled in here very well except for a desire to explore the new surroundings that led to me following him round and round the garden for weeks until I was sure that he could find his way back without being able to hear me. He still needed to lip read although he could by then just about notice very loud, sudden, noises. While we were in Hamilton Way he got very good at tracking down any barbecues and in the first summer, he found our new neighbours barbecue as soon as summer arrived and was brought back by a very puzzled professor of history who said, is this your cat as he doesn't seem able to understand Danish!

We took him with us to the caravan which we had on a fixed pitch nearby for the summer and autumn season and we all enjoyed that so the next year, 1995, we did it again. During the July of that year, however, Sashkin seemed to lose enthusiasm and just wanted to lay around and even stopped eating. We and Kirsten, our vet, thought that this must be the end at last, so we just let him be and tried to tempt him with favourite foods, but to no avail until one day I came back to the caravan after going home to feed the others, with a bit of chicken from the freezer. Wow, that did it and the small piece that we had cooked went down like a flash. We cooked the remainder

and that disappeared too. So the next morning I brought back all the chicken pieces that we had and he ate the lot. So from then until the end of his life, he got through almost one small chicken a week, and after a few months he had put on nearly two pounds and weighed more than he had ever done before in his life! He never stopped eating properly again until near the end, despite developing catarrh (oh, yes, he wasn't finished with vets yet awhile!) which meant that from time to time he couldn't smell so well. In cats the loss of the sense of smell usually means that they do not believe that what is in front of them is really food and so won't eat. However, it seems that Sashkin trusted that if I put a food dish down in front of him, then it had to be food and so he tasted and then ate it.

Over the next 18 months the catarrh, which is very difficult to cure even in a young cat, we managed to control by judicious use of a very low constant dose of antibiotic - almost like a homeopathic remedy. Kirsten and I tried different treatments and remedies, but that one was the only one that worked well enough to keep him comfortable. I knew that it was not sustainable over a very long time, but he again surprised us by how well and happy he stayed until the last week in May, when on the Monday he stopped eating and did not eat again until he died the following Monday. Judging by the symptoms that developed over the weekend before, we think that the persistent infection further affected his brain as he started to lose co-ordination again, and as his kidneys had started to deteriorate some time before, even his desire to eat was no longer sufficient to keep him going. For the last few days, I just devoted my time to cuddling him and giving him sips of water as he could longer work out how to drink and he died in my arms in his usual place in bed at 6am one week later. I miss him very much, but not in a very sad way as he had a great life that lasted about three times as long as it should have, and he loved and was loved greatly. I left him for a day for the others to see and then buried him next to his old friends in his new garden.

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