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Student saves teacher's pet



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COVER STORY

A South African biology teacher, her ex-student and a drip stand helped save a pedigree cat's life late last month.

It probably helped that Bev Cruywagen's ex-student is veterinarian Dr Liza Schneider, who completed late night surgery on Bev's 5-year-old ragdoll, Toby.

Bev had arrived home to find Toby not his usual cheerful self. In fact, it was her black Labrador, Jet, that tipped her off.

"I noticed the dog was fussing around him and thought 'that's a bit odd, wonder what's going on'," Bev says.

"There was no blood, there was no nothing, but I could see there was something wrong and then I could feel the lumps in the abdomen."

So Bev called her old student, Holistic Vets director Liza, who put her biology lessons from high school in Johannesburg to good use.

Liza says an examination showed his claws were sheared and he had a large hole in his abdominal wall through which his intestines were protruding.

Bev thinks her 7kg cat climbed from her fence onto her roof, then tried to jump onto a



Bev Cruywagen (left), with her ragdoll Toby and her ex-biology student, Dr Liza Schneider, who recently saved Toby's life.

Photo: GEORGE NOVAK

metal-framed deck chair, and missed.

"He's not the most agile cat. Other cats walk around on your crystal and they don't knock it over, he just plods along and everything goes flying," she says.

Liza says it was immediately clear Toby needed emergency surgery, so he was sedated at about 7pm.

"The pain that he was in, and the bruising and the hole in his breathing muscle [diaphragm], he could have gone into toxic shock at any moment," she says.

During surgery, Liza confirmed Toby's diaphragm was damaged, along with two broken ribs and a grazed liver.

It meant Toby was in for a longer, more difficult recovery process, but as Bev had taught Liza all those years ago — when the going gets tough, the tough get going.

So where does the drip stand come into it? When Liza arrived home, with Toby in tow, at about 11pm, she found her front door jammed.

"I thought 'holy moly, this is a cosmic joke'," Liza says.

She says that "like anyone with good South African genes", she had to break in, so she disassembled Toby's drip stand and used the pole to get in her window and pull the latch down on her back door.

Liza says it took about 20 minutes, but she managed and Toby is now doing really well.

"There was a big risk, because of the severe bruising, that the skin would just die away. And there's a little patch that's at the moment just dying away, but it's really small in the bigger scheme of things."

Bev reconnected with Liza, who was already based here, when she emigrated to



Toby waking from anesthetic. Photo: SUPPLIED

Tauranga nine years ago. She says seeing Liza's success is awesome.

"I always knew that Liza had incredible potential and I always knew she would follow her dream and to actually see her doing that and doing such an incredible job is just, it's every teacher's dream," Bev says.

"That's what you aim to inspire. You aim to inspire those children to greater heights."

Thanks to Bev's nurturing of Liza's potential, her beloved cat Toby will now live to climb plenty more fences.