

14 June 1971

Dr Michael L Katz  
11 East 12 Street  
New York N Y 10003

Dear Dr. Katz,

I do not know if you have yet experienced the kind and degree of anguish I have felt since your call last Friday, or whether such inconsolable grief remains in waiting, or whether you will be fortunate enough to escape it entirely. I do not wish you any misfortune nor do I write to cast blame or reproach. On the contrary, I felt and still feel that you intended to do everything you could to help my cat Allegra and to save her life.

She might have expired during surgery, but she might have survived and recovered. Now we will never know. I am sure she would have failed in a few short months, perhaps only weeks, had I merely kept her at home, but then she would at least have come to her end in familiar and comforting surroundings that were her home for ten years, enveloped in all the solicitude and love that could be heaped upon her. I hope that I am not morbidly projecting human thoughts or emotions on a pet but a large part of my sorrow relates to the horror I feel that the cat may have felt deserted, left among busy strangers and caged up, when she needed me more than ever before.

For she was, in a sense, the victim of your success and your irreproachable intentions. The traffic in your office is very great and perhaps more than the facilities and staff can really cope with, unless by accepting the inevitability of the occasional misjudgment or delay that will cost some pet's life ambiguously or unnecessarily. I learned long ago, in my work, to keep records or notes of everything of potential importance, and so I have a record of our telephone conversations between the Tuesday and the Friday. From this it seems to me that every procedure was delayed substantially beyond the estimated time, and performed successively, each time by use of an anesthetic whose properties, at least in humans, were questionable. Was the effect on the animal properly and attentively monitored, or were there not too many clamorous demands on you and your staff to permit it? Did this immeasurably treasured animal—to me—have to die when she did, or was it preventable? Could she not have lived after surgery and even recovered? You must have thought there was a chance or you would not have attempted even the preliminary investigations performed.

For me the loss is irreversible and nothing can be salvaged, but I am thinking about other ailing animals as precious and unique to their owners as my cat was to me. They are the reason for this letter. Forgive me for saying it, but I think that if there is not better synchronization between the work accepted and the human capacities available to give each animal his maximum chance, there are bound to be losses of pets who perhaps need not have died. I must accept the grief that has fallen on me, as I have no choice, but I would like to feel that my cat's extinguished life and my own acute pain will spare another animal and another owner such heartbreak.

Again, I do thank you for doing what you could do and for trying, with disregard for your own leisure time, to save my pet's life.

Yours sincerely,

Sylvia Meagher  
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