

Bria's Life

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Bria was born on July 12, 2004. She was a Blue Lynx Point Birman, and she was gorgeous. Her registered name was Brienna Jamie, Bria for short. Bria means "strong one" in Celtic. My husband Jim and I brought our little furry bundle of joy home the Friday before Thanksgiving. She fit in right away, as if she had always lived with the Gingrich-Shurskis household.

The first veterinary examination went well, and Bria was deemed very healthy. She was seen a few weeks later, along with her sisters, Angel and Sinta, because they all had upper respiratory infections. When Bria was six months old, she returned to the veterinarian to be spayed. Upon coming home, she resumed playing and eating as enthusiastically as ever.

About a month after the surgery, I noticed that Bria appeared to be breathing from her abdomen. Her energy level was greatly diminished, and she wasn't playing. Her appetite was still excellent. I mentioned my observations concerning Bria to the vet. She was concerned that the symptoms might be related to a diaphragmatic hernia. Bria was scheduled for x-rays and a barium study.

Following the tests, the call from my vet expressed great concern. Bria definitely didn't have a hernia. But, the studies detected a great deal of fluid in one side of Bria's chest cavity. With my permission, a fluid sample was extracted and sent to a lab for analysis. At that time, my vet relayed that she suspected that Bria may have Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP). It would take several days for the lab report. Somewhat in a daze, I brought Bria home that evening. How could this be happening to my healthy dear little baby? I knew nothing about FIP. For several days, Jim and I researched FIP, and the possibility of FIP was especially horrifying.



Early the next week, our vet called with the lab results. The fluid contained a great deal of protein. There is no totally accurate test for FIP, but the results were in line with a diagnosis of FIP. Our vet relayed that the prognosis for FIP was poor. There was no cure; cats with the wet form of FIP succumb to the illness quickly. Because Bria was still eating so well, I asked the doctor what we could do to give Bria quality of life for as long as possible. She suggested a consultation with a specialist in Internal Medicine.

During the consultation, the specialist suggested an additional test on the chest fluid, a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test. He said the test would probably be positive, but he advised testing her. A sample of the fluid was sent for a PCR analysis. Again we waited, anticipating the worse. To our utter amazement and delight, the PCR test came back negative for coronavirus!

Bria remained fairly inactive and continued breathing abnormally. Her appetite was decreasing, although she would eat with encouragement. Because of the conflicting findings concerning FIP, our vet suggested we take Bria to the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine for additional testing. We drove to Philadelphia and admitted her. During the next several days, Bria was the subject of many tests to determine the cause of her illness. After all the tests, enlarged kidneys, renal failure, anemia and fluid in the chest were confirmed. Feline infectious peritonitis was the tentative diagnosis causing the other problems. The veterinary resident assigned to Bria advised us to come pick up Bria as soon as possible, because she didn't have long to live. She knew Bria would be happier at home. We made the difficult decision to end Bria's suffering the following evening.

We spent the next day with Bria. We talked to her, and I sang to her and brushed her. Jim took a nap with her lying on his chest, and he took her outside in his arms to hear the birds and feel the breeze one more time. When it was time, we took her to the veterinary office, where our darling nine month old kitten died a quiet and peaceful death. After a brief ceremony, we buried her in a place of honor in our yard. The stone marking her grave says "Beloved Bria So Small So Sweet So Soon". We didn't have her in our lives very long, but we treasured every minute with Bria.