

This is a story about a kitten named Venom that defied the odds and overcame so many obstacles. Venom is a black kitten named after the comic book character and character played by Tom Hardy in the 2019 movie Venom. Like his namesake Venom proved to be fierce and persevere against the odds and among other challenges defeat the deadliest feline virus FiP.

My wife Michele and I run a kitten rescue from our house. We have taken in many kittens that were malnourished looking for food around dumpsters and that kind of thing. We would take them in, fatten them up, get them their shots, and find them a home.

Michele got a call from a friend that she has found 4 kittens in a storage shed at her work. They were so tiny they didn't even have their eyes open. Their mother hadn't been seen in a few days. There was an adult cat in the street that was hit by a car. We assumed that was their mother. By now we have gotten pretty good at bring home kittens and taking care of them until we can find them a home. However we have never taken in any this small. We never had to bottle feed any before so we were kind of unsure what we were doing.

I found myself in a pet store at closing time trying to find baby kitten formula and feeding bottles, again we have no idea what we are doing. The friendly people at our local PetSmart helped us find everything we needed. We get home while I am setting up the bin we kept them in my wife is reading every article she can find on the internet about bottle feeding kittens. We get them setup and attempt to feed them for the first time. There was a lot of squealing and formula everywhere but we got food in their bellies. For the next few weeks Michele and I alternate going home on our lunch breaks to feed the babies. Slowly but surely we start to learn how to do this.

A few weeks go by and we were so relieved when they were finally big enough to eat and use the litter box on their own. At this point after bottle feeding them and caring for them since they were just days old we have decided we are keeping them. It was time to name them. The white and black one becomes Ghost, the grey tabby becomes Spike. Then there are 2 black ones. The larger of the 2 is very lean and muscular and his front legs are slightly bowlegged and he walks like a big dog. He reminds me of a big black wolf, he becomes Lycan. Last but not least we have this small little guy black as night and has really big beautiful eyes. He reminded us of the comic book and movie character, he becomes Venom.

About 3 months have gone by and our babies are getting bigger. We notice that all of them except Venom are using the litter box without trouble. Venom is having accidents on the floor. We thought no big deal he is the smallest of the bunch he'll figure it out. One day Venom lets out a scream while trying to urinate. We take him the vet the next day. The vet is looking at Venom's genitals and says they don't look right but he doesn't know what to do. He gives us antibiotics and treats him for a UTI. This actually worked for a little bit, he stopped screaming while using the bathroom but clearly something isn't right.

We take the babies on a camping trip in the RV. Everything is going good. They are having a good time running around in the RV. The last day of the trip Venom again lets out a scream while using the bathroom. We had enough and lost all confidence in our vet. When we got home we took the other babies in the house and took Venom straight to the Vet emergency room. The vet looks him over and feels his belly and says his bladder is full. She takes him in the back and drains his bladder with a catheter. He's the smallest of the 4 and only 4 to 5 months old at this point. He is very tiny. I don't know

how she got a catheter in his tiny little body but she was successful. While she has him back there she consults with the other vets. She comes back and says she has some bad news. Venom's genitals are malformed and would need a PU surgery to have any quality of life. She says more than likely he too tiny to perform the surgery and the surgery is going to be very expensive. She said we could consider euthanizing him. Without missing a beat I looked her in her face and said I don't think so, not today. At this point I feel like I had to force the vet to shut up with putting him down and let us talk to a surgeon. It's getting late on a Sunday. The vet says there aren't any surgeons available at the moment, I told her that she needs to get one on the phone. She isn't confident that she can get a hold of one. My wife is like "really?" "you mean to tell me that if somebody brought in a pet that was dying you couldn't get a surgeon in here to save it". A little reluctant she realizes we aren't leaving. She goes in the back and eventually gets a surgeon on the phone. Meanwhile I am sitting in the exam room calling every vet hospital I can find on the internet. The vet returns and before she can say anything I tell her I have a surgeon on the phone if she can't get one we are taking him there. She managed to get a hold of a surgeon and we talk to them on speaker phone. She explains that the PU surgery is basically genital reconstruction surgery where they attached the urethra to the outer part that the penis normally comes out of. They were able to perform the surgery the next day if we left him over night. We walked back to the kennel where he would spend the night. I honestly thought this could be the last time I see him alive but I will never forget the look on his face. His face didn't say dad I have had enough. His face said dad help me I need your help.

The next day we get a phone call, Venom was the smallest cat to successfully have the surgery both by the surgeon and at the vet ER. He's going to be fine. Venom was so small they didn't have one of those cone things small enough to fit him. They had to modify and rig one to fit him, it ended up only lasting a couple days before he got it off. We were given antibiotics and pain medicine and sent on our way. If you ever need a tiny cone thing to stop animals from licking their incision there are inflatable ones that remind me of something a kid would wear to a pool. He recovers from the surgery and all is well for a little bit.

The second time a vet suggested euthanasia on Venom was only about a month after his surgery. We noticed Venom's belly was getting bigger and he wasn't running around as much. We didn't think much of it at first. The surgeon had just look at him a week or 2 before and said everything surgery related was fine. We thought he was just feeling better after the surgery and finally gaining some weight. As we would find out we were very wrong. After about 3 days of noticing his belly getting bigger and bigger I was working late and Michele decided to take him to our new vet. I get a call from Michele in tears telling me to come to the new vet it's not good. She puts the vet on the phone and he tries to explain the situation while I am driving there. I kind of burst in the door no nonsense look on my and ask the receptionist where is my wife and my Venom. She let me in the room, Michele is in full on hysterics crying her eyes out. It was a lot to take in try to understand. Our vet said he was very confident Venom had FiP. Feline infectious peritonitis FiP is the deadliest feline virus in the world. FiP kills about 3% of domesticated and feral cats worldwide. When infected it is always 100% fatal. The reason Venom's belly was getting bigger was it was building up fluid. The vet explains that he is going to extract some of the belly and send it to the lab and test it to see if he does have FiP. So now I am in full on hysterics crying my eyes out. Our poor kitten has been through so much already. We already spent a considerable amount of money on his surgery, this couldn't be happening. The vet explained to us the situation and if the test was positive for FiP we had "weeks not years" with him. We talked about what

little treatment options there were, all of which would only make him comfortable and buy time. I still wasn't expecting this. When he needed a surgeon I found him one. As crazy as this sounds, now he needs a treatment for this virus and I was going to find him one. For the second time I looked a vet in the eye and said you are not going to put him down, not today. I asked one more time was there anything else he could do. He said he was aware of some drug trials maybe I could get him in one.

So the vet sent us home with a lot to process. The next day I start researching the hell out of FiP and these drug trials. I come across the drug trials for GS-441524. The study was led by Professor of Veterinary Medicine Dr. Neils Pedersen at University of California Davis. Dr. Pedersen is an angel and a saint. I read about the numerous studies he had performed. The most recent study all 10 cats were cured. I sat there staring at my computer screen. How could this medicine cure 100% of the cats in this study and the vets not know about it? I read everything Dr. Pedersen had published. The more I read about this man the more I knew this medicine is legit. I search the internet endlessly looking for a place to get a hold of this medicine. No luck, I can't find it for sale anywhere. I decided to go to the source. I emailed Dr. Pedersen. He emails me back instantly and explains the situation a little better. So yeah GS-441524 works, and it has no significant side effects. The treatment plan is 1 Subcutaneous (under the skin) injection once a day, for 12 weeks. That didn't sound fun, I have never given an injection before, but with my back against the wall and with no alternative what choice did I have.

With a ray of hope the plot thickens. GS-441524 is not FDA approved and the company that owns the patent isn't manufacturing or distributing it. So where do you get something that isn't available for sale in stores? The black-market of course. Apparently Chinese pharmaceutical companies don't really care about American patent laws. Part of drug trial laws it is required to publish the chemical formula for the drug being tested. The Chinese pharmaceutical companies have everything they need. They have scientific peer reviewed data and the chemical formula. I email Dr. Pedersen back and tell him I understand the risk of injecting my cat "with Chinese manufactured black market pharmaceuticals". Yeah that's something I never thought I would say. Dr. Pedersen tells me about a network of people that are importing this medicine and selling/distributing it and how to contact them.

Now let me remind you this is still the day after we saw the vet. In the past 24 hours Michele and I went from Venom is going to die its 100% fatal to if we can get this medicine its 100% curable. Oh and another thing about FiP the part about "weeks not years" is very true. It's a very fast moving virus. Cats often die I believe from organ failure in a few weeks. I contact the people Dr. Pedersen told me about and instantly people are messaging me asking me where I live. The first person is about a 5 hour drive away. She says if she can't find anyone near me she could overnight me some of the medicine or if I want meet her half way or I can drive to her. She puts me in a group chat with 2 people both about an hour away. For one last time I think about what I am about to do. I am about to buy Chinese manufactured black market pharmaceuticals for a cat. You can say that as many times as you want and it will never sound like something even sort of normal. I ask myself one last time am I sure I am doing this because this is a pretty freaking weird situation. I pick the person that lived in an area I was kind of familiar with. They gave me their address I hit the ATM and we are on our way.

We arrive at the building they live in and we pull into their parking garage. I am in a parking garage buying Chinese manufactured black market pharmaceuticals for a cat, again that will never sound normal. All I can think of is I bet nobody else has been involved in a drug deal for cat meds. I message the guy and let him know I am there. He come strolling into the parking garage with a brown paper bag

in one hand and a fist full of syringes in the other hand and walks up to me and says “you got the money”. My only thought is this is going to be fun trying to explain this to the police if a police officer happens to walk up on us right now. The medicine is in little vials in a box with a picture of a cat with Chinese writing on it. Yes sir these are Chinese manufactured black market pharmaceuticals for my cat. That alone would probably landed me in the psych ward. We do the deal and head home.

Meds and syringes in hand we give Venom the first of 84 injects just over 24 hours after seeing the vet. All things considered we did pretty well with the first shot. The next day I call the vet asking for help and at first they don’t understand exactly. I say I have the cure to FiP in my hand can you show me how to do an injection. They’re like whaaaaaat. They tell me to come in and they will see what they can do. I give them copies of all of Dr. Pedersen’s work. The vet takes a minute and read the drug trials. He seriously can’t believe it. He thinks about it a little and because it’s not an FDA approved medicine and is basically from an unknown source. If he were to do the injections for us he could risk losing his license. I offer to sign any wavier he puts in front of me. No deal though he can’t do the injections for us it’s too risky for him. He does however use saline water and show us how to do injections. Poor Venom must have gotten 10 injections that day. They showed us, then Michele and I did one then they show us again, poor Venom. Then they watched us give him the medicine.

After only a few days of medicine he is noticeably improving. His belly is shrinking and he is gaining weight. Considering he is losing fluid and gaining weight we know he’s gaining real weight. A few weeks go by we are steady giving him an injection every day. When we started giving the injections he had little energy and didn’t fight us. Now after a few weeks he is feeling better and is getting tired of needles. Every day these injections are getting more stressful for all of us. During an injection the plunger part blows the needle part off the syringe, while the needle part is still in Venom. This was when we said enough is enough. At this point I am ready to beg, bribe, and kidnap a vet, vet tech, human doctor nurse, blood drawing tech or anyone I can think of that knows how to give a needle.

Michele happens to be off work the next day and she finds holistic vets in the area. A friend said holistic vets might be willing to bend the rules a little. The first place Michele calls she cries on the phone and pleads with them to help us. One of the vets there calls Michele back and agrees to help us. It was like the stars had aligned. The vet tells us she had recently just learned about Dr. Pedersen’s work and was almost hoping someone in our situation would find her. At first she’s ok with a wavier releasing them from liability. The next day she calls me and says the owner of the practice is afraid of losing their license but before I can start crying she says one of their vet tech has agreed to come to our house and do the injections for us. Our prayers have been answered. Our new friend Kelsey the vet tech is a saint, she really is. I save her number in my phone as “St Kelsey”. She is already doing house calls for nail trimming, insulin shots, and stuff like that, also she happens to live right down the street from us.

Now we have a pro coming over almost every day, bam injection done, bam done. Venom being the little brat that he is doesn’t move or fight Kelsey at all, like she is using kitten calming magic. On the days we give him the shot he fights and screams. After one of the injections we did we noticed Venom was favoring his one leg. We look to see what’s going on. Under his fur we find an open wound with a wet discharge. I send pictures to Dr. Pedersen. Dr. Pedersen says that if the injection goes to deep and goes into the muscle it kills the skin cells at the injection site but it will be fine. He told us to treat it with hydrogen peroxide for a few days and it healed up just fine. During this time I talk to Dr. Pedersen several times as does our new vet. We get blood work done about every 3 weeks or so. Each time I send

it to Dr. Pedersen and he emails me back every time. At day 64 of 84 we get some blood work done and Dr. Pedersen says Venom is on track to be cured. Day 82 one more blood test.

Dr. Pedersen says "The **blood test results are normal**. I assume that Venom is now completely healthy and gained a good amount of weight during treatment. If so, **he is good to stop treatment**. The next 12 weeks of observation is always a tense period for everyone, **but the chances of a cure are high**."

Finally "**chances of a cure are high**". I felt so relieved to read those words, and from the leading expert.

1 week post treatment I am petting Venom and feel a hard knot on his side. We shave his fur around it and find another sore. This time it was dry with a hard center. I send pictures to Dr. Pedersen again and he says it's a more severe type of injection site reaction. Same as before the injection went too deep and when into the muscle causing an area of necrosis that broke out onto the surface. The hard central area is a piece of dead skin that is slowly being sloughed off. The wound appears to be healthy and not secondarily infected by bacteria. Later this week Venom is going for a vet visit to get checked for fluid buildup and to have this sore looked at.

That brings us to today. Now we wait another 72 days. If he doesn't relapse in the first few days he probably won't. So after the vet visit this week we will feel pretty good.

When we make it to the 84<sup>th</sup> day Venom will have defied the odds and become "CURED of the incurable"

"weeks not year" we shall see it's been 13 weeks now and we have reverse all the symptoms and corrected his blood work.