

Samantha: A Dear Friend, Has Passed Away

by Dr. Jackie Gai, DVM



The PAWS family is saddened to report that Samantha the mountain lion has passed away at the age of 22 years.

Samantha was born in 1992 at Wild Wilderness Drive Through Safari in Gentry, Arkansas. At that time, the park bred lions, tigers, mountain lions and other exotic cats, and incredibly, many of the cubs and kittens produced were sold as pets to park visitors. Little Samantha was taken from her mother before she was three weeks old and placed in the "petting area" of the park. A park visitor bought her at four weeks of age for \$400. "She was starving and I bought her to get her out of the place," Samantha's purchaser said at the time.

Two months later her new owner contacted the Humane Society of the Ozarks for advice because Samantha was "getting out of hand." The family planned to have her declawed to calm her down (an operation that can create a lifetime of crippling pain), but after a family member became allergic to her they began having second thoughts about the suitability of a mountain lion as a pet. A cruelty investigator for the humane society persuaded the owner to surrender the young mountain

lion for placement in a more suitable facility. Thankfully they agreed and Samantha was sent to PAWS.

When Samantha arrived at our Galt sanctuary in January of 1993, she weighed a mere 10 pounds and was in such poor condition that she was unable to walk. Suffering from metabolic bone disease, the result of being fed a completely inappropriate diet, she dragged her little body along the floor by her front legs, her hind legs dangling limply behind her. Despite everything Samantha had been through, she had a strong spirit and an incredible will to live. With a healthy diet and 'round the clock loving care from PAWS co-founders Pat Derby and Ed Stewart, "Sam" gradually regained the use of her hind legs and grew stronger each day.

Many predicted that Samantha's life would probably be shortened because of her poor health during early development. A wild mountain lion's life expectancy is 8 to 10 years, while captive mountain lions average 15 to 20 years, with a small number living into their early 20s. Samantha's eventual good health and longevity can be attributed to the excellent care that she received at PAWS, along with her indomitable spirit and joie de vivre.

Known for her cheery disposition, she would always eagerly respond to us with her unique "chirp" and her expressive voice. She would come to the fence, purring and rubbing her head against it. She especially loved Pat and Ed, and would talk, rub and purr loudly when they visited her. She even greeted me, her veterinarian, with a warm purr and enthusiastic chirp. Samantha aged gracefully and seemed timeless to us. It is hard to believe that she is gone.

In her late teens Samantha developed arthritis. To make her more comfortable she was moved out of her original habitat with its myriad of climbing structures, into a large, flat, grassy habitat. Here she had a gently sloping ramp leading into her den which keepers lovingly filled with a soft bed of hay each day.

In late 2013, Sam was diagnosed with chronic renal failure, a common condition in older cats. She was given medications and supplements to



help with mobility and analgesia, and to treat her kidney disease. Each day her keepers would carefully hide her medications in chunks of meat.

During the early part of this month we noticed she was slowing down and was not her usual cheery self. On the morning of April 9, Samantha had two seizures. The heart-wrenching, but most compassionate decision was made to euthanize her that morning.

Sam passed gently and peacefully from this life surrounded by people who loved her. I know that I felt Pat's presence that morning - a calm and loving light that surrounded this special little creature, and I'd like to think that they are reunited - chirping and singing together.

Rest in peace sweet Samantha. You will always be in our hearts and we will miss you tremendously.

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW SAMANTHA VIDEO](#)

All photos of Samantha by Janice Clark

