

Cancer, Marijuana & Twinkie



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“Do you have anxiety?” the doctor asked over the phone.

I did, actually. It was 9:00 pm on a Sunday night and here I was talking to a doctor I’d never met. I’d found him on the internet. As the doctor prompted me with leading questions, I rattled off a few fictional health concerns. Eventually, I became flummoxed when he tried to determine if this was an acute or chronic case. “Can I be honest with you?” I finally asked.

“Please.”

“My cat has cancer, and I want to try CBD to see if it will make her more comfortable.”

“Oh. Okay.”

Within ten minutes, I had a medical marijuana license printing out on my computer. I didn’t even know what “CBD” stood for. The irony was that I was violently allergic to pot.

Years ago, a friend made marijuana brownies that smelled so good fresh from the oven, I couldn’t resist. I spent the night chasing my reflection in a toilet bowl. Another instance was when I was playing cards with a group sharing a joint or two. I escaped to sit outside with my inhaler, all by my self-pitying self.

I’d heard a lot of stories about how the herb helped animals dealing with various issues, from behavioral to pain management. I was willing to go out on a limb for my twenty-one-year-old cat, Twinkie. She had been newly diagnosed

with bladder cancer. The opiates I gave her helped, but they constipated her. I hoped to buy quality time for my feisty kitty. Incidentally, I had named her Twinkie in a futile attempt to dampen her bullying ways. It backfired. She persisted in proving herself worthy of being the top cat. The song, "The Boy Named Sue" comes to mind.

After work at my job as a Registered Veterinary Nurse the following afternoon, I sat in my car outside the medical marijuana dispensary for a few minutes before going inside. My heart raced. I noticed I had taken up two parking spaces. I took a couple puffs from my asthma inhaler – just in case.

The security guard who unlocked the front door possessed bulging muscles that threaten to shred the fabric of his uniform. I squeezed past him and tiptoed into the lobby. An older, pleasant-looking woman wearing a flowing green blouse greeted me from behind her desk. "How can I help you?" she asked.

"I'd like to get some CBD for my cat."

"Oh no, no, no. You want to get it for you. The law requires you only buy for yourself."

"Of course." I shifted uneasily. The bouncer guy nodded. A good part of me wanted to turn and run, but I'd already come this far, and I had a mission. I began to fill out forms, handed over my driver's license and my new medical marijuana license for the woman to scan into her computer.

"There you go. You're in the system," the woman said as she returned my documents as well as a membership card and a coupon. I wasn't sure I wanted to be in the system or even to be a member. She pointed me toward another door and unlocked it remotely. "Go on in, and a salesman will help you."

A salesman?

I entered the pharmacy and scanned the displays, clueless as to what the various products were. A tall man walked in from a back room and asked how he could help. I looked into his eyes and was struck by how beautiful they were: sky blue and perfectly clear. He had short hair and wore a dress shirt with a tie and nice slacks. To be honest, I had expected a bleary-eyed hippie sporting tie-dye apparel.

"I'm looking for some CBD. I think I would like drops."

"A tincture? I think I have something better."

I slowly inhaled and told him I was hoping to share this with my cat who had cancer. Bringing Twinkie up again was risky, but I felt compelled to try.

"No. I have to advise against giving this to pets. There aren't enough studies to show its safety in animals."

I decided to change my approach. "I'm a real lightweight, so you are going to have to give me the most watered-down version you have."

"I'd recommend this spray. Two squirts under the tongue will give you the fastest delivery." He held up a small spray bottle. "This is the most dilute I have. It has a ratio of 1:18."

Ratio of what? How was I going to squirt it under Twinkie's tongue? She hated having anything shoved into her mouth. I glanced at the healing bite wound on my arm from her latest protest.

"The nice thing about this product is that it is absorbed into the skin. You can experiment with it in places where you feel pain." I pictured it soaking into my own

skin and sending me into anaphylaxis.

"I'll take that," I said.

As he rang up my purchase, he asked for my birth date. I was eligible for their senior discount. It was probably the best news I'd gotten all day. "And since this is your first visit, you get a free gift."

Good Lord. He walked around to another counter and picked out a foil pouch. It was a brownie. "Take a quarter of this, and you'll sleep really well. Actually, since you are new to the drug, take one-sixteenth."

I stared at the brownie and wondered if my expired EpiPen was still good. He handed me my change and put the goods, along with more coupons into a small bag. "Thank you so much!" I said, making my eyes sparkle. Those old acting classes still paid off sometimes.

My knees felt weak as I left the building. What had I gotten myself into?

Twinkie was sleeping in her favorite bed by the living room window when I arrived home. She liked to lie in the sun. I studied her for a moment – yes, her chest was slowly going up and down. My old girl could really sleep like the dead and this alarmed me often, although it would be nice if she could go quietly in her sleep.

I went into the kitchen and pulled the small bag from my purse. I didn't know what to do with the brownie, so I double bagged it and hid the confection in my junk drawer. Then I stared at the spray vial. Gloves. I rummaged in a cupboard and found my box of latex gloves.

I shook the vial as directed and pumped one spritz onto my gloved finger. How much should I give her? The

cannabidiol was dosed for a human, not a six-pound cat. I wiped most of the oily substance off on a paper towel. I approached Twinkie and knelt next to her bed. She had awakened and eyed me suspiciously. Gently holding her head with one hand, I attempted to smear the oil under her tongue.

Twinkie turned into a Cuisinart. Suddenly my tiny girl was a blur of oh-hell-no, trying to bite me and flailing her paws as a back claw ripped one of my gloves. I backed off and sat on my heels. This whole experiment looked good on paper, but it would be easier said than done.

I remembered the salesman saying the drug could be absorbed into the skin. Aha! We sometimes give medications to reluctant cats in a transdermal form. The paste is massaged into the inside of the ear, which has a good blood supply and delivers the drug into the bloodstream. I grabbed Twinkie one more time and rubbed my finger into her ear. She glared at me but seemed calmer about this approach.

At 3:00 am the following morning, Twinkie woke me up, nudging my face and purring. Aw, she is feeling loving, I thought. I petted her head and tried to roll over so I could return to sleep, but she had urgency to her affections. As I became more conscious, I noticed the bowl of food I had left on her pillow the night before was empty.

Twinkie had the munchies.

I rolled out of bed and padded down the hall to the kitchen and dished up more food. Returning to the bedroom, I watched her attack the tasty pate. This initiated a new routine; feeding her multiple times a day and

enlisting my cat sitter to cover midday when I was at work.

So as to not overdose her, I calculated Twinkie's dose of the drug mathematically on the back of my utility bill. I measured the amount of two sprays and did a ratio calculation. All she needed was a drop. I found my cranky little girl become calmer. She still slept hard, but her episodes of restlessness diminished. Her appetite stayed amazingly good, and I was grateful for the extra time I had with my baby.

Many patients with terminal cancer waste away, but Twinkie held her own. I started appreciating the use of marijuana in animals; something veterinarians are now studying more in-depth. Maybe it's time to expand our arsenal of compassionate care.

Twinkie couldn't fight this forever, so eventually, I did have to make the dreaded decision to lift her up to the other side. I donated the brownie to a friend with stage-four cancer. I buried my license in an anonymous-looking folder in the back of my file cabinet. Not that I had to; marijuana had become legalized in California.

What about the CBD? I'm not stupid. I kept it in my safe for the next time I might need it. I take in convalescent and hospice senior cats. I never wanted to have to go back to the dispensary, even if I did have coupons. I felt grateful I could expand my toolbox, including marijuana, for dealing with the myriad of problems these geezers face. I have a cat named Twinkie to thank.