

## Dr. Phil Zeltzman, DVM, DACVS, CVJ

Dr. Phil Zeltzman is a board-certified veterinary surgeon and author. His traveling practice takes him all over Eastern Pennsylvania and Western New Jersey. You can visit his website at [www.DrPhilZeltzman.com](http://www.DrPhilZeltzman.com), and follow him at [www.facebook.com/DrZeltzman](https://www.facebook.com/DrZeltzman).

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*Kelly Serfas, a Certified Veterinary Technician in Bethlehem, PA, contributed to this article.*

### A diagnosis of liver disease

Ms. Smith doesn't give up easily. Her family veterinarian had diagnosed liver disease in her 12-year-old cat Toby and recommended an ultrasound to see what was causing the problem. She immediately took Toby to a referral hospital thirty minutes away. When she arrived, she was told that the ultrasound specialist could not make it to the hospital today.

As I said, Ms. Smith doesn't give up easily; she asked for another recommendation and was sent to a second hospital thirty minutes away from the first. Unfortunately, when she arrived, she was told that the ultrasound specialist had to leave for a family emergency. Still determined, she asked for a third recommendation.

That's how Toby first arrived at one of my referral hospitals (I am a traveling surgeon). Finally, a specialist performed the ultrasound Ms. Smith had been seeking. Changes in the liver were confirmed, and the specialist recommended taking samples surgically.

I performed the surgery, and took the biopsies. They were packaged up and sent to the lab through a FedEx carrier. Toby recovered smoothly and went home the next day.

### Transporting biopsy samples

Samples, like those I took from Toby, often need to be sent out via courier to be analyzed.

A few days later, as we were finishing a surgery at another one of my referral clinics, the anesthesia nurse told me an incredible story. A few days prior, her veterinarian had taken biopsies from three patients. The biopsies were packaged up and sent to the laboratory through a FedEx carrier.

The next morning, the clinic received a courtesy call from FedEx. The representative explained that the truck carrying the sample got into an accident and burned to the ground!

Hundreds of packages, including the three biopsy samples, were incinerated. The nurse and I agreed that it was an unbelievable story. I certainly had never heard anything like it in my entire career. This was a case of Murphy's law at its cruelest. The only good news was that the truck driver was safe.

### Delayed biopsy results

Remember our kitty, Toby, and his owner, Ms. Smith (who never gives up)?

Ten days after Toby's surgery, I was wondering why I still had not received the biopsy results. I called the laboratory; they had no record of any biopsy under Toby's name — strange.

I next called FedEx to ask why the biopsies apparently had never made it to the lab. To my amazement, the representative explained that, unfortunately, Toby's biopsies had been destroyed after the FedEx truck was in an accident and burned to the ground. It finally dawned on me that Toby's biopsies were on the same FedEx truck as the biopsies sent by the second clinic.

I wondered what on earth I was going to tell Toby's owner, who was still patiently waiting for the biopsy results. I gathered my courage and called her. I told her the whole crazy story and she — fortunately — understood that it was "one of those things." She was very courteous about it, but I felt terrible for her and Toby after their previous bad luck finding an ultrasound specialist. There was only one solution available: I had to repeat the surgery to obtain more biopsies and send them to the laboratory a second time.

I'm happy to report that Toby's biopsies did not show any sign of cancer. He is now being treated for liver disease using a special food and supplements. The

moral of this story is to be determined as a pet owner. However, please don't forget that we live in an imperfect world. You may need to be patient with your veterinarians and find creative solutions.

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*