

Going Dental With Gracie

CatChannel humor columnist Peter Gerstenzang brushes his cat's teeth - and at least she enjoys it.

By Peter Gerstenzang

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Not long ago, Gracie was getting a checkup when her vet suggested that I start brushing the cat's teeth. Maybe "suggested" isn't a strong enough word. Dr. Lockhart shrieked and then called to two people in the waiting room, "Come here and look at these teeth. I've never seen anything like them!" I thought there was room for interpretation regarding this last sentence. So I stood there like a soldier waiting to get a medal.

Instead the doctor acted like she was going to tear off my epaulets. "Peter," she said. "A cat needs to have her teeth brushed, just like a dog." I couldn't tell her that I wasn't brushing Happy's teeth either. I was afraid she'd take me in the back and perform some weird, animals-only surgery on me. Instead, I bought two toothbrushes and toothpaste from the doctor and went home to make amends.

Following the printed instructions, I first dipped a finger in a bowl of tuna-flavored water and called Gracie in a cheery voice. Keeping it cheery was pretty hard. See, tuna-flavored water is also tuna-scented water. That stuff could be used instead of tear gas. Gracie came over and licked my finger. Step one, getting the cat used to my fingers in her mouth, was accomplished. By then, tuna fumes were engulfing the room. The cat and I both ran to the kitchen, but the smell had beaten us there by five minutes.

After rubbing gauze on Gracie's gums, to warm her up, I got the toothpaste and toothbrush and started. Of course, my instructions were so detailed that meant skipping from Page 1 to Page 15. But I think I did the right thing. There was just too much text ... as well as footnotes and sentences in Latin. I let the cat taste the tuna-flavored toothpaste (it never ends, this tuna business) and brushed.

According to a codicil on Page 17, I was supposed to start with just one tooth. By that timetable, though, by the time I got through brushing all of her teeth, the first one would have fallen out. So I did several. Gracie liked this strange new process. That's putting it mildly. Toothbrush in mouth, she purred, rolled over and began rowing with her paws. In short, she showed all the impulse control of Gary Busey. So I finished the job.

But I may have created a monster. Now, every day, Gracie finds the toothbrush – wherever it's hidden – and brings it to me. I tell her that she doesn't need her teeth brushed so religiously; then I remember she only understands simple declarative sentences. Still, there's a solution. I need to start brushing my dog's teeth, too. And this activity is starting to lose its novelty. But maybe with some diagrams, I can teach Gracie to brush Happy's teeth. She'll get to play with her favorite new toy. The dog will start smiling during group photos. Everybody wins!