

June 3 Message

Hello everyone! Today I'm going to lighten up & share an interesting cat story I read recently. It was written by Gene Weingarten for the Washington Post Magazine.

I shortened it a bit, changed a few words, but it is his cat story.

I'm still missing all of you. I'm still praying for our recovery from this virus.

I'm still waiting to see your smiles. Much love to you! Mary Lou

Counting backward from nine

While all of us are feverishly attempting to stay alive, I find myself deeply admiring my young cat - who seems to have stubbornly devoted much of his 4 ½ years on this planet attempting, at best he can, to die.

This noble crusade began shortly after his birth, when I found him on the street. He was darting under a car in the mid-teen temperature of a midwinter night, a stray street kitten no larger than a hamster. My son-in-law then spent an hour on his back beneath the car, shivering and squinting into the jet-black undercarriage, trying to locate a small, scratching, fanged jet-black nugget of hissing hostility, so he could persuade it to allow itself to be rescued, rather than defending its God-given right to become an overnight popsicle, freeze-fused to a Toyota Corolla's differential gear. Eventually, the kitten was extracted, and because of my son-in-law's subsequent tedious argument of insidious intent, it suddenly belonged to me.

This was my first full-time pet, a species I discovered I was too ignorant to parent. For example, when I brought this one to the vet's office the next day, I gave the staff the name "Marjorie". The tech took one look at some important kitten parts and said that in her professional opinion, whatever this animal's name was, it was not, and would never be, Marjorie. That was when he became Barnaby.

Though he was likely the product of street cats, Barnaby grew up gorgeous, with a luxuriant onyx coat and a little white Trotsky soul patch, which fit him perfectly. Temperamentally, he became a dissident, then became a committed revolutionary. From the start, this cat's face was expressive enough so you always kind of knew what he was thinking, and what he was thinking was usually some variant of "Oh, yeah? This means war". From the start, it was evident Barnaby maintained a running internal narrative of his life. It featured a central hero, a character of courage and cunning and epic achievements such as dispatching

a mouse or, equally epic-ally in his mind, hopping into a box or peeing where he is supposed to. One Thanksgiving, when Barnaby scrounged a raw turkey neck from the garbage, he strutted around the house with it: "I have captured a turkey neck!".

Barnaby's first obvious stupid trick came when he jumped out of a second-floor window, apparently without having mapped out a further escape plan. He plummeted 11 feet onto a rain barrel. He was panicked by his new straits but instead of instantly running under the wheels of a moving car, he hid under the rain barrel as best he could, which meant his hind legs and tail protruded, making him relatively easy to find.

Barnaby has always charged for his presence - exacting a price for the privilege of your living with The Great Himself. When he developed a food intolerance that made him urinate blood, the cure became a prescription diet that was every bit as expensive as deli belly box with capers and cream cheese, twice a day. When Barnaby discovered he did not like his new scratching post, he took it out on the arms of a fine leather living room chair. His most recent trick resulted in my coining a phrase: "to rat into." which describes what he did, when hungry, to big bags of the dog's food.

If, like me, you deeply love a cat like Barnaby, part of what you love, I think, is his soul, the soul of an absurd, self-satisfied, magnificent, ambitious, pernicious little stinker. It's likely what pushed him to thievery of that non-safe dog food, which may be what burst open his bladder suddenly, two days before I am writing this.

He died almost without warning, after just one day at the vet. He did it his way, of course, the Barnaby way. He held out through a desperate, last-ditch complex surgery. The bill was \$9,000.00. After I paid it, drowning in guilt over the expenditure on a cat, I cut a huge check to the World Health Organization's Covid-19 Response Fund.

You won this round, Barnaby.

Good boy.

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God;
may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

Psalm 143:10 NIV