

September 18, 2020

Dear Friends,

We hope you, and your pets, are well.

Beth and I now have a *personal* reason to mourn on September 11.

Last Friday, we had to say goodbye to Soots, aka Little, Buddy, Boogie, Sluggo, and other things, our beloved companion of almost 13 years. He had been diagnosed with multiple myeloma on March 13 (yes, the Black Friday when everything went to hell and shut down), and while his small but mighty body was responding to the chemotherapy the wonderful people at Dogs & Cats Veterinary Referral & Emergency in Bowie, Md. were giving him, he had developed anemia so severe that he could barely eat—breaking our hearts when we tried to hand feed his old favorites or new treats—or even move. Clearly, he was not enjoying life. So, with infinite sadness, we did the responsible thing and had a vet from Solace Veterinary Services come to our house, his home, to help him on to life number two of nine.

Sootsie was the best, and we loved him from the moment we first saw him, a tiny handful of black fur chasing his tuxedoed siblings across the floor of his saviors' John and Laura's house. He was very different from Arya, not as inquisitive and exploratory and troublemaking as she was, and so serious. He took care of the things that needed to be done. He woke me up in the morning, settling his eighteen-pound body on my chest, stomping on me with his paws and claws in my face to be sure I wouldn't forget to feed him. (And when I would try to get up to do so, he would resist, a little unclear on the concept, perhaps thinking I had food stashed under my pillow? Again, he wasn't as smart as Arya....)

He was so beautiful, perfect in his pure simple blackness (why do some people not like, even fear, black cats?), with shining highlights in his fur, his noble profile, his size and build, as described by a writer for *Edible East Bay* who visited to report on Beth's plastic-free kitchen: "showing off a rippling body-builder physique like nothing I've never seen on a house feline." A young woman who came to look at the futon we were selling last year remarked, "That is the biggest cat I've ever seen." He impressed people. Friends, vets, everyone.

And he had so many wonderful habits. In our Oakland home, he would climb on the back of my overstuffed armchair to stretch out, and when I sat in it, he would lick my scalp with his sandpaper tongue, which we worried might be accelerating my middle-age hair loss. But I could accept that if the activity made him happy (and it felt REALLY good!)



RIP Soots, September 22, 2021

He would bound onto the storage bench in our bedroom, then onto the four-drawer cabinet, and then up to the top of the armoire and the trunk that lay on top of that so that he could be inches from Ceiling Cat and look down on us as feline lord of all he surveyed. He would chase his sister, pounce on her...and then retreat, chastened, when despite her smaller size, she gave back as good as she got. And after every meal, he would wander through the apartment bawling for reasons we never understood.

The last year must have been traumatic for him, with the loss of his sister, half his soul, and then being moved across the country, eight hours in a box, coming out into a new, utterly unfamiliar place. But at least a familiar face, and smell, and voice—Beth's—were now always present, and there were stairs to climb and descend, and new rooms to claim and camp in, and a sunny porch where he could curl up and hear animals and birds and feel breezes and almost experience the outdoors. We felt we had given him good homes on both coasts.

When we lost Arya in July 2019, at least we still had Soots. We still had a cat. I still had to put out food and clean litter boxes. So much of our daily routines centered around him. He almost made the day begin (I mean, besides the literal waking up.) Now I go downstairs first thing and...there's nothing to do. And I come down during the day, glance around to see if he's on the couch or the porch and of course, he's neither place. I mean, I would notice his absence just for the few hours he would be gone when Beth would take him to the vet. When I sit with Beth on the couch at night, I expect him to come wandering down and leap onto one of us...but he doesn't. As Christopher Smart wrote about his own cat, "For every house is incomplete without him and a blessing is lacking in the spirit." To paraphrase Elton John, or rather Bernie Taupin, "Oh I miss Sootsie...Oh, I miss him so much." I'm not sure which stage of grief includes magical or science-fiction scenarios—alternate universes—to bring him back just for one day!

In our grief, we wondered if the joy he brought to our lives was really worth this pain. But we thought of the song from "A Chorus Line". We always knew we'd one day have to go through his passing and subsequent life without him (though it must be said that since we had never had cats of our own before, we couldn't have known just what it would be like.) We can't regret what we did for love, and we certainly won't forget him.

Vaya con Dios, Señor Gato Negro. Goodnight, sweet prince, and may flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. May there always be food and soft laps and hands to scratch you under the chin and between the ears.

Michael and Beth