

# Treasured tails of a beloved feline

## FIRST PERSON

My calico cat Miranda's independent and curious spirit will continue to fill my life with joy, no matter her age, David L. Clark writes

Calico cats are said in some places to bring good luck. I know that ours did. When we discovered Miranda as a kitten in our yard she had fallen down a hole in the back deck and couldn't get out. Her feral mother, whom we had fed for years, couldn't reach down far enough to retrieve her little daughter. But Miranda called out loudly, and we heard her and we have never stopped listening since.

That was 21 years ago. We call Miranda our wedding gift to each other because we brought her into our lives in the months leading up to our nuptials. Or did she find us? They say that we live only part of our lives with a cat, whereas they live almost their entire life with us, but truthfully that is not at all how my wife, Tracy, and I feel about Miranda. She has so folded herself into our world that she feels like she has never not been part of it. It's not that I cannot recall a time without her. No, it is that that time doesn't matter as much, doesn't seem as complete as it should or could have been. That former time was missing something even if I didn't then know what that absence was.

I realize now that Miranda will never not be part of us in the future too, no matter what that future holds. This calico, she is a time traveller.

Notwithstanding her advanced age, Miranda is still amazingly strong, her orange and black and white coat is as dramatically defined as ever, her short fur is well-kept and velvety soft to the touch. She has never weighed more than five pounds but she concentrates a lot of life into that small frame. She lost her hearing several years ago and yet that changed nothing about her demeanour, her curiosity, her determination. Miranda has lots of what the ancient Greeks called "thymos," a term that means "heart" or "spiritness." She has always been vocal, always has something to say, even if she says things a bit more loudly these days and nights, unable to hear herself speak. She is unsteady on the stairs, so we let her have free range of the lower level

of our home, where there is lots of natural light and lots of spaces to explore.

She sleeps. And sleeps. Sometimes I sit nearby just to watch her sleep. Why is observing a beloved feline while she dreams so deeply pleasurable? I cannot quite describe the joy of watching her like this, curled up, nose to tail, her little chest rising and falling almost imperceptibly. As I sit nearby, I feel my own pulse slow and the weight of day lift. I feel happy but mostly I feel happy for her. We are together, alone. That is enough. She is enough. She has never needed to be anything more than what she already is. Miranda asks for so little... and yet she gives so much. She is wondrously independent, with her own wants

and needs, and yet somehow she also endlessly and selflessly gives herself away. I do not know how this miracle works.

Recently Miranda has begun to wake up at night and cry out. She did earlier this week and so Tracy and I crept downstairs where we squished together on the narrow sofa and let Miranda lie on top of us. She nestled a bit, and quieted, and then fell asleep. We lay there for hours in the dark, big flakes of snow falling silently outside, saying nothing while listening to Miranda's small throaty breaths, her almost inaudible purr. We three were at peace.

The great British poet, painter and engraver, William Blake, whose work I have

taught for decades as an English professor, once wrote these memorable words: "There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find." What does Blake mean by this strange phrase? Create, discover and cherish those fleeting openings in which you turn away from those things that claw away at you and that threaten to make you less than the person you want and need to be.

In a deeply dismaying and disastrous world, shelter the ephemeral occasions for respite, for togetherness, for forgiveness. A little calico can make those moments possible. And she does so by just being herself.

David L. Clark lives in Toronto.

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