



# 1985-2002 GOODBYE KITTY

## KINSHIP CIRCLE

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by Brenda Shoss

Kitty crossed over today. The 17-year-old striped tabby leaves behind his human parents, Brenda and Grady, along with animal siblings Stanley, Cleveland, Rebekkah and Tikvah.

When my husband and I wed two years ago at Farm Sanctuary, I acquired more than a good-looking guy willing to inhabit a meat-free home. I inherited three stepchildren ages 9, 13 and 14. I got Elijah, our 2-year-old vegan son. And I got Kitty.

A bold outdoor cat left behind after my husband's divorce, Kitty ruled our backyard with the clout of a wild beast and the heart of a kitten. Much to his chagrin, I immediately dubbed him "Sweetest Pea On The Whole Planet Earth." But behind Kitty's back, I read Grady the outdoor-cat riot act: "You cannot be the spouse of an animal rights activist while your cat fends for his life. Outdoor cats contract feline AIDS, diseases, parasites, fleas. They are prey for dogs or other critters. Pranksters abuse them. Cars hit them. Weather extremes leave them panting or shivering."

Moreover, they never know the comfort of the warm spot between your head and shoulder. They can't block your view of the television from their perch upon your stomach. They aren't present to sprawl across your morning newspaper to purringly accept a chin rub.

I brought Kitty to my veterinarian. I collared him. Tagged him. Chipped him. Restored his dental hygiene. Removed a long-standing benign lump. We set up a heated shelter and fenced off a patio section so he could dine without the interruption of crows.

Then I tried to bring him inside.

Kitty thought I was crazy. He stood at the backdoor and caterwauled with the siren pitch of a bawling baby. Already 14 when I came into his life, Kitty was a curmudgeonly old chap who cherished sunlight on his back and grass beneath his belly. Often, our lawn was



lined with soft indents where Kitty last slept.

Still, he was the "poster cat" for outdoor hazards. Late one night, Kitty lost his back right leg to an unleashed dog who wandered into our yard in search of food. As Kitty tried to scale an air conditioning unit, the dog yanked on Kitty's leg causing it to shatter into irreparable fragments. The next day I carried Kitty from veterinarian to veterinary specialist, only to learn the leg would have to go. Post-surgery, Kitty seemed baffled about the missing appendage. But he never conveyed depression. He carefully calculated each new leap. Soon, he ran, darted, played.

On another routine visit to the vet we discovered that Kitty had contracted feline AIDS, most likely the result of a bite from an outdoor cat. Now when I brought him inside during heat, rain, snow, or sleet, I separated him from my indoor cats, Rebekkah and Tikvah.

Nevertheless, we always found pockets of time to cuddle with Kitty. The backyard warrior turned into mush when stretched across one of his humans. I'll always remember his paws: Kitty had a sixth digit on each front paw that shaped them into two tiny baseball mitts. He sometimes squeezed an oversized feline hand around my finger.

Perhaps no one loved Kitty more than Stanley, my 12-year-old Lhasa Apso. A shaggy black and white one-foot-high wonder with huge brown eyes set in a Muppet-like face, Stanley greeted Kitty with kisses and nuzzles. He waddled behind his three-legged buddy, until the two toppled into a pile of intertwined fur. Kitty didn't seem to mind, for he never tried to escape. He gazed over Stanley with his cockeyed grin, as if to say: "We're cool. Don't worry." One time we found the two of them inside Kitty's cathouse, apparently on a date.

The one thing I could not save my 17-year-old, three-legged, non-symptomatic AIDS cat from was renal failure. When Dr. Brammeier said Kitty's kidneys had begun to shut down, I switched to renal diet food. I upped his water intake and hand-fed him.

Despite my efforts, Kitty lost so much weight his face shriveled to kitten-size proportions. Still, he hobbled around his familiar backyard and managed to eat and drink on his own. Each night, I brought him indoors to sleep on the mountain of pillows and covers Grady arranged alongside his litterbox. Kitty had lost control of his bladder.

On the day that Kitty's remaining back leg caved in, the light left his eyes. My husband called from his car phone to tell me that Kitty was his secret hero--a true survivor able to handle life's challenges with grace and courage.

Toward the end I slept in the basement with him. I gently supported his head near the rim of the water bowl so he could get a few sips. I offered salmon and tuna, normally unheard of in our vegetarian home. He lapped the fish oils with momentary vigor, as if availed by an old memory of feline rhapsody. But then, exhausted by the effort, he crumpled over the food.

I spoke to him frequently, wishing him safe voyage across The Rainbow Bridge. I believe all animals return whole to another place where they are reunited with their animal and human families. I envisioned Kitty dashing upon four strong legs in an endless backyard.

I told him that although he would arrive first, all who loved him would eventually cross over. I don't know if it was the comfort of my whisper or if he somehow understood, but Kitty pressed against my face and softly purred.

October 24, 2002 came without fanfare. I used an eye-dropper to nudge water between Kitty's tightly clenched teeth. I listened for the shallow breaths that barely flowed through his tired body. Kitty didn't last until our scheduled Act of Mercy. Around 3 p.m. his mouth expanded in a series of involuntary yawns and he cried out. Horrified, I called Dr. Brammeier, who told me Kitty had passed into a coma-like state. As Kitty clung to one last bit of life, I gingerly lifted the blankets to cradle him in a makeshift hammock. Kitty died in my arms.



*Goodbye Sweetest Pea. You are free to sleep, run, and play in backyard heaven. Grady is convinced that is precisely where you are now: Forever home in our backyard.*

### **Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.**

When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge. There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together. There is plenty of food, water and sunshine, and our friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health and vigor. Those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by. The animals are happy and content, except for one small thing; they each miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent. His eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together....  
Author unknown..