



Part 2a

July 18, 2024

(Long entry, so split into 2a and 2b)

Mom's death day was July 16th, 2 days ago, and I chose not to write. I was down, of course — it's always a tough time. Called my sisters and had messages sent to my brothers, who both kindly acknowledged them. Spent a lot of time thinking of how much time has now passed since Mom did the same. 12 years. It really doesn't even make much sense.

How can 12 years of ANYTHING have gone by already? Much less, that? In any case, I didn't write. The day of Mom's death is the start of a pretty intense string of powerful milestone memories in my life. Today, July 18th, is Darrell's birthday, of course. It's always one of the very worst for me. I had strange dreams last night. Darrell wasn't in them, but Mom was, and so was my cat... or maybe some fantastical dreamscape agglomeration of various of my cats. Mostly, she (nearly all my cats have used the she/her pronouns) she seemed to be Waldo, which makes sense since Waldo was the last in a long line of feline loves in my life, plus she's the one who Mom took to so strongly in the end. Dad too, even, but he really wasn't part of last night's subconscious adventures at all. Point is, Waldo was well-loved and most recent, yet I strongly sensed that this dream cat also had elements of Meow and her mother, CJ. All three had the same grey/white/black coloring, more or less, and all had particularly close relationships with me, as well as sharing similarly tragic ends. Waldo's end I don't even really know, except that after my own death, Mom finally took her fully in, perhaps as a sort of psychic proxy for me, and I like to think that if Waldo missed me at all (it's always hard to say with cats, even those closest to you) the Mom's long-delayed full adoption of her may have eased things for both of them in my absence. But then Mom died, too, and Waldo was sort of re-abandoned, though then my dad stepped up and cared for the cat more than I'd really expected. It was touching. Like Mom's relationship to Waldo after my loss, I think Dad's relationship to her became a sort of bridge to help him deal with Mom's loss. And then Dad died as well, but for Waldo's purposes, that mattered not a bit, as he had already left Palmdale — and Waldo — some years before. He later told me he regretted that, leaving "the cat" behind, but it was done. Our house went into foreclosure after he'd abandoned it, and new owners eventually came along, and through all that, I have no idea how Waldo survived, or for how long. At any rate, it's safe to say she's dead now. I've resisted assuming it for years, but I first found her (or she me) in Winter 2004 or 2005. It's now Summer 2024, so she'd be at least 19 1/2 years old now, which seems especially unlikely for a twice-abandoned stray outdoor cat. I hope our decent and kind neighbors — we had such a set on either side — opted to give her some food

Mom & Dad!

So Gangsta! LOL! 😊

and a modicum of shelter or safe space.

So, that was my Waldo. Meow and CJ were the cats of my pre-teen through teenage years. I guess CJ came along when I was about 10 years old, when I chose her from a litter my Dad's friend was giving away at an Oxnard bar called BoJangles. Long story short, she came home with me, grew up, had a litter of kittens herself, from which we kept one - a similarly colored grey/white/black cat, only she was long haired rather than short. I called her Meow.

While Meow herself was still very young, in fact, before all her litter-mates had found homes, CJ attacked my sister, who herself was pregnant at the time. She and my brother-in-law had come by to visit one day, to pick me up to go dirt bike riding, and fatefully, they brought their dog, a black lab named Sharky. CJ caught the dog just as they exited the side yard, where they'd passed the open garage side door, where CJ's kittens lived. CJ launched herself at the much, much bigger animal, who was now being held up by his leash and collar a few feet off the ground as my brother-in-law tried to lift him above the onslaught. Poor Sharky had no idea what was happening - first he'd been ambushed by a tornado of claws and teeth that bloodied his muzzle, then he was hoisted into the air by his master as well as his neck, surely choking as he writhed at the end of his leash that had suddenly become a noose. It was very sad and not a little terrifying.

Well. My sister, always good hearted, decided to try to comfort CJ after the attack cat had bolted back into the garage to protect her brood. Maybe it was an act of motherly solidarity? Charlotte might have felt some instinctive kinship, or just a compassionate sympathy, for this aggressively protective mama cat, since she was so close to giving birth herself. Either way, it was a lovely gesture but atrocious judgement. Possibly no one could've safely approached CJ in those adrenaline spiked moments after the attack, but if anyone at all could have, it was probably only me, or possibly Mom, but certainly not this largely unfamiliar human who also had arrived with the furry black threat. Charlotte held out a sheet of paper towel, clearly recognizing the cat was not safe for interaction, yet still wanting to help her calm down and see that everything was ok. It was the best of impulses. The paper towel was sliced in the cleanest straight line right down the middle (as I recall it, anyway, but memory is funny, ~~so~~ it was probably much more ragged in real life), and with the towel, a clean slice right over Charlotte's hand. The blood flowed immediately, and a new crisis was born. My mom, who is Charlotte's mom, joined the Protective Mother Convention and sprang into action, tending to her wounded offspring (who, of course, was also carrying her unborn grandchild), totally forgetting whatever protective instinct she'd originally felt for CJ, her youngest son's cat and a minor member of the family herself.

I don't recall what all was said in the next 20-30 minutes before we had my dirt bike and gear packed and left for the track, but I seem to recall feeling uneasy, like Mom ~~may~~ ^{may} have

threatened some action against my CJ. I really can't say. All I know for absolute certain is that when we got back a few hours later, my cat was gone. Mom had called the pound to come pick her up. I, of course, was instantly a sobbing, screaming wreck of devastated outrage. I had never felt such loss yet at that age, and for it to be compounded by the overwhelming sense of betrayal, the treachery of my own mother... it was a tough one. I'm sure I raged and ranted, but I don't really recall any of that. My next clear memory is laying curled up on my bedroom floor, crying inconsolably as I held onto Meow and told her whatever a ten year old might try telling a kitten about the loss of her mother. I recall that she didn't seem to appreciate the gravity of the day's events, and I wasn't sure whether that was good or bad. I'd wanted an ally in my anger, but of course I hadn't wanted any more pain, not for anyone.

I don't remember when or how I came to forgive any of the human players in this drama. I'm sure the timeframe was short; short for forgiveness, but not so short for sadness. That one lingered for years. I still feel it today, sometimes. The cruel consequence of a parade of horrors, but with no one really deserving of any great blame.

Mom eventually apologized, recognizing that she had probably acted too rashly. The accepted story was always that she'd reacted with her own intense motherly emotion to a perceived threat, to the idea that CJ was capable of such feline violence, and with a human baby on the way, the risk was just too great. But the truth was, we all knew CJ wasn't volatile, she was just protective. Sharky was the second dog she'd dispatched from her home turf, the first being my other sister's young pit bull, Motley. Or was it Choppers? She and her husband at the time had two, fairly close together. Anyway, absent any canine encroachment, CJ was docile and loving, no threat to any human. I always knew Mom's decision to exile her was less than perfectly rational; that on some level the motivation was retribution for injuries done that day rather than a dispassionate assessment of future risk. Mom was only human, of course, and she absolutely could, let's say... fly off the handle. That was no secret. Still, I understood that she also probably - almost certainly - really did fear the threat of our cat's proven track record for considerable violence (if only in very particular circumstances), and I know she genuinely regretted dooming CJ to a probably very uncomfortable, confused, frightened, and I suspect significantly shortened life. Mom realized she'd overreacted, I clearly perceived her sincere remorse, and to whatever extent her actions were propelled by animosity rather than sober judiciousness, I believe that ratcheted up her guilt by an order of magnitude. Mom always, always, had a heart; always had compassion. She had all the emotions, each in considerable measure. Sometimes that caused moral inconsistency and conflict.

Finally, then, that brings us to the last of the grey tabbies, my kitty Meow (who actually came between CJ and Waldo). What became of her? Nothing good. Maybe the worst lot of

those three ill-fated felines.

Meow was a true long-termer in my life, lasting from late prepubescence until my early adulthood. She met all my closest friends in my first life, from Chris Ortiz to Mike Scheppelle, Darrell, and Nolan. I believe she was 9 or 10 years old at the end, and unlike Waldo, I was with her the whole time... though in an unpleasantly attenuated fashion in the final months of both our lives, when if I'd not been so artificially distanced, maybe she'd have lived a full, natural cat's life, another 5 to 8 years or so. Like Waldo, though, Meow was destined to lose me to the unbounded viciousness of humans, even if she had lived to see my demise.