



Part 2b

(July 18, 2024, continued)

I need to say, before telling the absolute end of Meow's story, that my most vivid memories of that cat are also the most hauntingly awful. As I wrote in the last part, Meow was part of my life from late childhood to early adulthood, roughly 10-19. What I'll tell now I believe I've written a bit about before in this journal, and it's something I don't like to think or talk a lot about. ~~The~~ ^{The last year} of her life is a period of deep shame for me, along with my visceral empathy for the pain she suffered.

My parents moved out of the home I grew up in when I was 19. I also had to move out because I couldn't afford my portion of the rent. Gary stayed behind though, and he kept a solid link between me and my real home. So much that was part of my life remained in that house (so much of my life WAS that house), minus my parents, of course. Meow was one thing that stayed there with Gary, very much keeping home "home". (Purr, the maniacal black kitten Darrell and I had rescued from the bushes along a Wells Fargo drive-through, was still there too, but she's a whole other story.)

I don't recall whether Meow's chronic injury first occurred while we all still lived in the house, or if it developed shortly after our dispersion. I hate to admit that I suspect it was the former, as that time frame only extends the travesty and deepens my shame. Either way, at some point I noticed that my Meowser-owser-woo-woo had blood on her front paw. I didn't think much of it at first, she was an active outdoor cat and wounds happen, but after a week or so it became disconcerting, Meow leaving bloody pawprints on my shirt each day as she greeted me from her favorite perch near the front door, reaching out from the planter ledge where she often sat, slept, or just waited for a human to come let her in. I began to think, Jesus, that seems painful... why isn't it scabbing over? Healing?

Eventually I overcame my famously weak stomach for gore enough to put Meow in the sink and clean her paw. Rivers of red ran down the drain, along with a lot of dirt and gravel that had caked onto (into?) the wound. As much as I cared and wanted to help, I ultimately just couldn't "dig in" like I needed to to see what was truly going on down there. I've never been ok with seeing torn flesh. Blood isn't bad, but meat... no. I really can't. Still, for Meow, I tried mightily, and

I was fairly sure I'd succeeded in cleaning up her ragged paw about as well as could be done. Then I tried to bandage it. Meow is a cat. That bandage lasted less than one minute. I cleaned and bandaged her multiple times over the following days, always expecting her natural healing to take over soon and relieve me of the unpleasant task. But every single time she greeted me, paws to chest outside the front door... blood. Sometimes a lot of blood. She just wasn't healing, and I began to assume this was simply the burden of a cat who preferred the outdoors, yet I also knew that that couldn't be quite right. Cats heal, indoors or out. They aren't lepers. I was no longer living in our home by this point, just stopping by a few times a week to... Well, I don't exactly know why, really. In large part to visit Meow, I guess. I still had plenty of stuff in the old house, but my room was empty, renovated (all the holes in the walls were patched up, the door hinges repaired and broken door replaced...), and soon to be rented out. My stuff was relocated to the rafters in the garage. Sometimes I came to pick up this or that to transplant to my new room in a house just a few blocks away, but mostly I came back simply because it was home. My soul was still there. One day I knocked myself out flubbing a bike trick in the street. I got a bad concussion, some lacerations on my face. I was fuzzy headed but I still knew who I was and where I was... I didn't go to my new house to recover. I went home, instead. Where I grew up, the familiar bathtub in the familiar bathroom, collecting my wits. Point is, I frequently returned to the house where Meow still lived, and every time, I'd find bloody little tracks on the concrete, sometimes even on the linoleum in the kitchen.

It was good ol' Gary who eventually came to the rescue. The perpetually reappearing evidence of ongoing trauma was inescapable, so Gary, who'd taken charge of my childhood home as my parents and I abandoned it, finally took charge of ~~the~~ our furry family member's wellbeing, too. He strongly suggested I take Meow to the vet (as strongly as he ever suggested anything, anyway; he almost unfailingly polite and humbly deferential to me and everyone else in our house, even though it was his contribution that likely kept my family afloat in Ventura for a year or two longer than we could've managed without him)... but I just didn't have the money. He said he'd pay. I was grateful. Still am. I'll always feel a debt to that man.

Once we got Meow to the clinic, she was immediately diagnosed with a "torn pad", which

is something rather worse than a mere cut or gouge — more like a couch cushion with the stuffing coming out. It was a wound that would never heal on its own; it required surgery. Thanks to Gary, my Kitty got fixed up, and I felt like absolute dog shit for having so stupidly left her in such an awful condition for so long. And then, beyond the guilt of all that, there was... well, I'm not sure what to call it. I was truly, like, Literally, overwhelmed at the sight of Meow sitting in that little kennel cage, clearly expecting me to open the door and bring her home in my arms, but I had no realistic choice but to leave her right there, scared and alone, in addition to the probable pain she was in. There was nothing more I could do for her — this terrible state WAS what I could do, it was the right thing... but what must she have thought?? It was all I could do to hold back my tears, which I did only because Gary was there, and the staff too, and I knew I was being a bit ridiculous. Dramatic. It's hard to say why it hit me so hard. I guess it's a deep seated, maybe inherent, instinctual hatred of confinement. At that time, still only school had stolen my own freedom (which was enough!), but I had always been hyper-sensitive to the idea of anyone being "locked up". It just seemed an inconceivable cruelty to me, and even as a young child I'd struggled with hard emotions as I saw the starkly vicious jail busses transporting prisoners from my school bus window, en route to my own version of prison. It made me a bit nauseous. When I was about 7 years old I heard my dad was jailed, and I was broken inside. They were only to keep him for a week or two, and he went by his own choice! (preferring a stint in jail to paying some abusive fine), but that didn't make it any better to me. If anything, it was worse. It's not like I thought he was never coming home, or that I couldn't conceive of a "short time", as my Mom kept describing it; it didn't matter to me if it was only for one hour! "My dad doesn't belong in jail, PERIOD!" I was thoroughly pissed, filled with 7 year old indignation and outrage at the faceless, subhuman Jacobins who dared confine my father... who had coerced him into this pseudo-voluntary state of debasement. So, yes... I say all that to convey my long and apparently untutored history of contempt for cages, even commonplace pet carriers, to explain why my leaving Meow there, staring at me, now a prisoner as well as my victim after enduring months of preventable suffering, left me such a wreck inside. And some of my wrecked-ness came out that day, I'm afraid. That stiff-upper-lip quivered considerably, though I mostly held it together. A few cracked-voiced words and the hot sting of unshed tears, not much more. It was mostly an internal devastation. The kind that perhaps long-familiar pets can sense.

So. Fast Forward. Meow is healed and healthy, parents are established in Palmdale, all their stuff moved out after many trips over many months. My life in the new house down the road is taking root, and my visits to the old house become fewer. I still had responsibility for Meow, buying her food each week if not actually feeding her myself more than once or twice. Some months passed, then came

what Brian Holliday and I now refer to as "D-Day" — it was the beginning of my end. Within a month of D-Day, I'd been jailed myself, bailing out only thanks to the love and generosity of my sisters. After that week that seemed like a full year of being caged, I left Ventura, I couldn't stay — home wasn't home anymore, I exhausted the list of available couches from friends and family, and soon I was back with my parents, now up in the Palmdale desert. I still went to Ventura a lot, once a week or often more; it was just an hour and a half drive. I visited Meow and Gary, kept her food stocked, but I saw my kitty much, much less. She was often nowhere to be found when I stopped by. I don't recall the details, but there came a time I didn't see her at all for many days in a row, and neither did Gary. I got worried. I'd already experienced some vandalism of my car and ugly looks from old acquaintances, a small string of odd events, like being watched, followed... Meow's disappearance felt wrong in this context. I asked our neighbors for any word of a Meow sighting, and in the process of canvassing I got a terrible lead. My nearest neighbor, someone I trusted quite a lot, felt sure he'd seen Meow, her body, in the gutter along the street we lived on. It made no sense — Meow was an outdoor, front yard cat for nearly a decade. As far as I knew, she'd never ventured into the street at all, and rarely even near it. How could she get hit by a car? It didn't add up. When I got home, my new home, in Palmdale, I called Ventura County Animal Control about roakill pickups on my street. They weren't entirely sure, but thought that yes, there had been one pickup recently. The "carcass" was no longer available to view.

I was devastated. I suspected murder — still do. No one specific, could be any of a half dozen people, maybe 2 or 3 most likely. I'd wanted to see if she'd been hit (broken, bloody) or maybe poisoned. But I never even found out if it was actually her, or if any cat had truly been found in the gutter at all. People, like my neighbor, make mistakes, or even fabricate info just to have the answers someone is looking for. All of this still haunts me, even today. Obviously.

Today, July 18th, is Darrell's birthday. Happy birthday, my friend. I ate a Cookies & Cream Hershey bar in your honor. I remember they were a favorite of yours, not above a Butterfinger, but still up there. I always accused you of having boring taste in candy bars, remember? 😊 I also had a root beer, which I don't really recall as a favorite of yours but sort of feels like one you liked? Well, my choices are limited these days. I'd like to have had lemonade, which I definitely remember as one of your top drinks, for sure.

On July 16th, not Mom's birthday by any means but certainly a day with her on my mind, I ate a small piece of Hershey's Special Dark. She loved those.

Friends, Moms, Meows... I'm pretty emotionally exhausted now. I love and miss you all very, very much.