

Monkey is BACK!

We thought we lost Monkey to the bitter cold this weekend. It was Sunday evening when we realized we hadn't seen Monkey for the last few hours and after an unsuccessful search of the building we suspected she had gotten outside. We had dangerous wind chill temperatures and we were beside ourselves with worry.

Part I

A Little History....

When we first bought our buildings we discovered there was a pretty large feral cat population. So, it wasn't long before we began encountering feral cats on a regular basis. Woodpile aka Woody was discovered in, you guessed it, a woodpile! She was smaller than a soda can when sitting and John was fascinated by her. The day prior we had found another kitten which we took over to a neighbor who fosters kittens until they can be adopted. When we found Woody we planned to take her over to the neighbors to be with the other kitten, but John said he wanted to take care of her that night so we planned to take her over the next day. I knew that kitten would not make it the neighbor's! He did a fantastic job of caring for Woody, she wasn't yet on solid food so he had to mix up milk replacement and syringe feed her several times a day. John had recently moved full-time into the building (I hadn't moved in yet) so it wasn't so surprising that John's meticulous care led Woody to becoming John's best friend and shadow. Anywhere he was working she was right at his side. It didn't matter what type of work he was doing or where, hot weather, cold weather, loud tools, dirty jobs, nothing fazed that kitten. There are numerous concrete patches that bear little Woody's paw prints throughout the buildings. Woody was very much John's cat, she didn't want anyone to touch her except John. She was a serious and watchful cat, a definite loner who would eventually turn into a traveller. She came back daily to check in with John and take a swipe at Minnie.

Minnie and Woody grew up together, Minnie was the first feral we trapped for the TNR program, but when she came back from the spay clinic to be released the weather turned very cold and I was worried about releasing her with her tummy shaved. So we put her into a large dog crate and she stayed in the guitar shop until the weather broke. Woody assumed we brought Minnie in as her personal toy. She would lay on top of the crate and take swipes at her through the cage bars. This would be the basis of their relationship going forward. When the weather warmed up Minnie decided she didn't want to leave and Woody assumed she would be leaving so began a love hate relationship between the two. Minnie loved Woody, but Woody didn't love Minnie in the same way. It was more that Woody loved to torment Minnie. Minnie

didn't mind, she was Woody's faithful friend, on one occasion Woody had gotten locked in another part of the building and Minnie scratched and cried at the door until we heard her, opened the door and discovered Woody sitting on the other side. The scratch marks were nothing to sneeze at, I think that cat would have clawed her way through the door if she needed to. Another occasion occurred when Woody took a ride in the pickup truck bed to the grocery store. After John had returned he called for Woody as she always greeted him upon his return, but she hadn't this occasion. He searched high and low for thirty minutes before he noticed Minnie on the rear bumper trying to get into the bed of the truck. The truck was full of empty boxes and when he pulled them out he found Woody huddled in the corner, a little chilly and shook up, but otherwise fine!

As Woody got older, she began leaving the property to explore. It began with a couple of hours here and there and then it turned into full day excursions. She came in each afternoon to check in with John and grab a meal, but because she didn't value food other than a necessary survival tool her visits were more about seeing John. Sundays were special days for her and John, they would spend the day hanging out in the garage putzing around. John and Woody had a beautiful and strong bond, there was never any doubt why Woody made her pilgrimage back to the shop each day. My relationship with Woody was always tenuous, she tolerated my presence for practical reasons like food and water. Sometimes I could pet her when she just woke up before she became fully awake and fully irritated. She would also accept my nursing abilities if she was sick or injured. Woody was wise, she seemed to understand that I was helping her. One such occasion occurred when the neighbors dog got a hold of her and she ended up with 70 stitches, a collar of shame for two weeks and locked in the basement. She was not a happy camper as she was a traveler full-time by that time and she didn't spend as much time here. I spent a fair amount of time with her during those two weeks so she wouldn't feel completely alone because John had a hard time with the situation. He could hardly look at her with her whole back and hind end shaved. It was pretty awful. She made a full recovery. On another occasion she had gotten bitten or scratched causing an abscess to develop under her chin. Ten days of antibiotics which had to be mixed in her food at the perfect ratio because she wouldn't allow you to give the meds by hand. She had a lack of food motivation and she was an extremely picky eater so you can imagine the difficulty of mixing the antibiotic in the food so it could be disguised, but not giving too much food, otherwise, she wouldn't eat it all. She recovered from that one, too. Then she got sick and we didn't know from what, but she would stop eating. It was about four months of ups and downs, trying to get her to eat. She seemed to prefer human food. I went to get her fresh fast food every day for two weeks, but she just didn't pull through mostly because we couldn't get her treated at the vet. She had to be anesthetized anytime she went in. When cats are semi feral, there aren't many treatment options. Some vet clinics won't even take them in for basic health

maintenance, let alone any type of overnight treatment with IV's or multiple tests. If I would have found a place that was willing to find out what was going on I felt the process would have killed her. I didn't want to risk her last moments scared, mad and alone. I spent hours online trying to find any type of homeopathic miracle all the while second-guessing my decision to not take the risk of taking her into some vet clinic. When Woody died it was just tragic and it felt like it wasn't supposed to have happened that way. She was gone, it was a horrible. John was a mess, I was a mess. I don't know that I was as affected by any other animal's death than hers, not even Cujo, Draco or Wendell. I have plenty of experience with animal death, many times there's an understanding that it's the right time, but there was just something off when Woody left us, like there was unfinished business. It wasn't her time.

There were a handful of pretty strange occurrences after she died that suggested she was close to us, but it didn't necessarily make us feel better. The day we brought Woody's ashes home John laid down for a nap. In his half asleep state he felt a cat jump on the bed and lay down behind his legs. When he turned over there was no cat. He even got up to see if a cat had jumped down and went under the bed, but that wasn't the case. No cats. Was it Woody? John so wanted it to be. There was a cloud of regret and helplessness that wouldn't blow over. Her death, it was just wrong. Not supposed to go down that way- it wasn't her time, I knew that, I don't often feel absolute certainty, but on this I did. They say time heals and in some situations it does, but other times it really doesn't. It only allows you to think about those individuals that have passed on without completely breaking down every time. Sometimes you can have a good memory and maybe smile a little bit, but most of the time I have to bite the inside of my lip to keep the tears at bay when I remember my loved ones that are no longer with me. Every time I look at a picture of Woody, there is still such a profound sense of loss and the first thought that comes to my mind is that "I am so sorry that I couldn't help you". Maybe if I had noticed her appetite was off a day or two earlier then we could have gotten her eating something else and she would have had just a little bit more strength to fight whatever it was that had invaded her little body. It did teach me to be more vigilant about watching the other cats and whether they are eating properly so I guess that could be considered a good thing. I think we all believe to some degree that certain life experiences are supposed to teach us something. John said that there was no lesson in Woody's death and I, myself, find it hard to see what that lesson might have been other than the death of a six pound cat has the capability to bring two adults to their knees with grief.

Anyway, fast forward two years to when Monkey showed up under our dumpster on the same day and same month that Woody showed up all those years ago, with not one flea, completely clean and completely alone. The dumpster isn't a common place for cats to show up in our area. It's along a very busy road and there is much more accessible area of quiet with food around the corner in the back alley. I'm not sure how

she ended up in that spot, but she did. She walked right into the live trap I set, I don't think I had it out for more than five minutes. We know it was the same day because we have photos of that particular day when we found Woodpile. There are many things that are strange with Monkey, she does a lot of the same things as Woody did. She will follow John out in the cold, wet and heat to assist him with whatever job he is doing. She doesn't care to be touched all that much. She is showing signs that she may turn into a traveler like Woody. I have to wonder if Woody is in Monkey's body or maybe it's just that Woody had something to do with Monkey's arrival. Lots of examples, but suffice it to say that there's a strong feeling that Monkey belongs here and Woody had something to do with it.

Part II

Off To Narnia....

Our best guess is that Monkey got out early Sunday afternoon, because when our neighbor left, the back door was a little frozen and didn't shut properly and then she couldn't get back in because the cat door was also frozen shut. The wind chill was well below zero and temperatures were not expected to rise anytime soon. We estimated she had been gone for about seven hours before we realized she was missing. We started going through the building calling her name, we looked in every nook and cranny. We have three connected buildings so there's a lot of territory to cover. Monkey typically comes when we call her so it became apparent that she was not inside the building. Four of us went outside and started walking the streets and calling. No sign of her, no sign of any life because of the cold. No birds, no squirrels, no rabbits, no feral cats, no cars, you get the picture. We had our neighbor pull his camera footage so we could maybe see where she went. I couldn't understand why she didn't go inside any of our unoccupied cat houses. She had explored them before. When Elliot was a kitten he had figured out how to get out the cat door, but didn't know he could get back in and I found him with another feral cat in the heated cathouse! I hoped she maybe got picked up by someone and taken inside, maybe she got locked in a garage or found another den with other feral cats. Feral cats will hunker down together when the cold gets bad enough. Three days with us envisioning all sorts of horrible things. Two trips to the humane society because cats with similar descriptions had been dropped off from our area. Flyers made, lost reports submitted. Tears cried. Because she disappeared on a three-day weekend we had hopes that she would return Tuesday morning if she had gotten locked in a garage. But she didn't return on Tuesday. No phone calls. No messages. Nothing. She was gone.

Remember when I mentioned the many similarities between Woody and Monkey? Well, Woody also went missing on Martin Luther King Day weekend on that Saturday. It was also very cold that weekend and it had snowed. We assumed Woody had gotten locked in a garage and anticipated she would return on Monday. When she

didn't come home that Monday we became even more concerned. Once we discovered it was Martin Luther King Day we felt renewed hope because maybe she would show up Tuesday when whoever went back to work and, in fact, she did just that. John had gone out calling for her in his car when he saw in the distance what looked like a ball bouncing. When he got closer he could see Woody making huge leaps through the snow! She politely refused the offered car ride, but she did follow the car all the way home! Thank you, thank you for Woody coming home!

With Monkey being gone, I spent the weekend with that sick worried feeling you get when you cannot resolve the conflict no matter what you do. When she didn't show on Tuesday I prayed to all my people and animals that have passed to help me get John through this. I told John to visualize the route of how she could get home so she could see it. He has a strong Native American lineage and he's walked the red road in his lifetime so there is power behind his prayers. I told him to call on that power. I kept envisioning waking up and finding her laying with Elliot in front of the heater. My prayers were tinged with anger, I told the great decision-maker that this was absolutely not supposed to happen this way, that a mistake had been made and I don't know who has the ability to fix it, but fix it they must. John and I both had moments where we could feel her presence very strongly. I was worried what her strong presence really meant and I began preparing myself for the wave of grief that I could hear rumbling in the distance. The night she disappeared we left the garage door open a crack so that she could get in without having to scale the back fence and snow drifts to get to the cat door that we made sure was no longer frozen shut. When I get worried or stressed I try to stay busy so in the basement I reorganized the Christmas decorations and ironed table linens left over from a prior theatre event. I felt like I was hiding from my future heartbreak in the basement.

Wednesday morning John's level of worry had lowered just a little or, maybe, it just became more muted. It occurred to me that whether his mood change was intentional or subconscious it was for my benefit. I am very sensitive to other's moods so it can be a heavy load handling my own thoughts and feelings plus his. Don't get me wrong, he was still very much heartbroken, but he is practical, if anything, and we had to move forward and open the doors for business.

When we left the garage door open a crack the temperature was so cold that a water line froze and blew so I didn't have water in my bathroom. I had to go into the basement and use the downstairs shower for two days. As I went down the stairs to shower I heard a cat crying and I assumed it was Maize that got locked in the Xmas storage room when I had been up and down and organizing the prior day. I go to open the door, no Maize, but I can still hear crying. I open the old fire door to the theatre basement, no cat. Stop and really listen, go over to a metal cabinet and I open it and out comes Monkey. Time stopped. I should have been shocked and surprised, but I wasn't. It was as if I had seen Monkey coming out of the cabinet 100 times already. So many

emotions all at once; shock, relief, amazement, gratitude. All I could think was that John was safe from a broken heart, at least for today. I grab her with shaking arms, actually my whole body was shaking and go up stairs, calling John. He is on the iPad so I have to tell him to look at me standing there with Monkey in my arms. He had almost no initial reaction like he had been expecting it. Later he would tell me that when he was watching tv in the basement the night prior he kept having the vision of me walking in the room carrying Monkey. I would later ponder the realization that Monkey allowed me to carry her which is a strange occurrence in and of itself as Monkey does not allow that sort of thing, like ever. She does not like being picked up or held. You will feel her kitty wrath immediately! This is a cat that has to be sedated prior to going to the vet, yet another similarity to Woody.

Okay, so now you will believe that we just missed her and didn't do a thorough search. Well, I can tell you that three adults looked inside that wardrobe cabinet on three different occasions, one of the adults being a cop who knows how to do a thorough search! This particular cabinet is not one we use very often and as we backtracked the only recollection we had of anyone being in the cabinet was on Saturday, not Sunday. I had been in the basement more than usual while putting away Xmas decorations, ironing table linens and, also, taking a shower down there. The wardrobe is right there! We walk by it all the time. John had gone through it the day before, looking for his old snow boots. I cannot understand why, if Monkey was in the cabinet the whole time, that she didn't once meow when I spent so much time down there the last two days or pop out when the door was opened three different times. When a cat is missing you are always listening for them whether it conscious or not, so even if she would have made a soft sound I would have heard it. Perhaps she wasn't in the cabinet the whole time? Yes, that's crazy talk, but really that is really how it seemed - like she wasn't really in there! It's like someone listened when I said that a mistake had been made and Monkey needs to be with us, at least for now. Somehow, the powers that be decided the best way to get her back safely was to put her back in the building somewhere. Three and a half days she was supposedly in there and didn't make one sound? There wasn't any messes inside and she didn't use the litter box when she came out. When we fed her, she ate, but not like I would think she would have after not eating for three days. This cat has a voracious appetite, she will eat a whole can of cat food in one setting if you let her. She ate 1/4 of a can, maybe 1/3 and then plopped down like nothing happened.

So, the mystical Monkey is back. She came back through a portal! I say that with a little bit of seriousness as we had a psychic in the building many years ago that told us there is a portal in our old upstairs apartment and that was how Woody came to be here. Sean and Jonovan usually take our stories of all the strange happenings around here with a grain of salt. If they had not been a part of the search themselves and physically opened the wardrobe I doubt they would have believed Monkey wasn't inside.

What does this all really mean? Is Monkey really Woody. Did Woody send Monkey because Monkey needed a place to live and Woody knew this was a great place for cats? There are a lot of “coincidences “ from Monkey appearing on the same day Woody did to going missing on the same weekend to all of the similar personality traits. There are kitty paw prints throughout the buildings where Woody walked through wet concrete and, not long ago, Monkey did the same thing so she now has her own permanent paw print. The other cats have never offered to walk through wet concrete! Yes, there are many cat behaviors that are common among all cats, but the similar traits between Woody and Monkey were traits specific to Woody. Living in these old buildings has exposed us to all sorts of strange occurrences. As Dan Fogelberg said: “there’s magic every moment, there’s a miracle each day”. Perhaps, little miracles happen all the time, but we are so consumed with our lives that we don’t notice them. It’s easy to believe we might have embellished here and there for the story’s sake, but I’m not very good at that sort of thing! John is, he’s a great storyteller, but he didn’t need to add anything to this story! So that’s the story of our own “lion, the witch and the wardrobe “! We will now refer to it as the Monkey, the Witch and the metal cabinet! I hope you enjoyed this tale as much as I did writing it. Stories with happy endings are the best!

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