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Bob's Battle with Lymphoma: Fly Free. Part 5 of 5

Fri, 2011-09-09 09:25 — Robin Olson

Sam and I drank toasts to Bob's life, then we did something I never imagined—we set up a place for Bob in our bedroom. It was late at night and the Vet wouldn't be open until morning. We decided to keep Bob near us—not in our bed, but nearby. I put a small blanket over Bob's body, foolishly, to keep him warm. I could see his head resting on another blanket. He looked comfortable. I kissed him good night with tears in my eyes. It was very surreal.

Sam fell asleep, but I could not. I kept thinking about Bob, reliving watching him die, wondering if I did right by him or if there even is such a thing as the "right thing." I gave up trying to sleep at 3am. I went downstairs to my office and put together a little memorial page for Bob to be posted on Covered in Cat Hair. I wanted to close the door to this blog—in his honor. My heart was broken and my voice, silenced. There were no words for me, for now. Just tears.



©2011 Robin A.F. Olson. Rest in Peace.

The next morning, we drove to the Vet. I sat in the back seat with Bob's body on a cat bed next to me. His body was cold and hard. I petted him anyway. I thought about all the drives we made to Wappinger Falls, NY, for Bob to get chemo with me sitting next to him, his head resting on my hand. How I could feel his purr through my palm...the time he sat on my lap, he saw a truck passing and HISSED at it through the closed window—how it made me laugh. I remembered, too, that Bob never hissed at us.

I thought about how Bob was a stray cat that showed up at my Mother's house in 1999; that my Father let Bob in the house, against my Mother's wishes. My Father had dementia from numerous strokes, but he loved Bob and wanted him to be part of our family. Tragically, Daddy killed himself later that year. Bob stayed on with my Mother.

People will say he was her cat and that now he would go to Heaven and be with her, but I would argue that point. My Mother never cared for Bob. She fed him crap. She petted him, but she NEVER took him to the Vet. For the past five years I struggled to help Bob overcome the fact he had FIV+ because my Mother didn't neuter him...how the FIV caused him all sorts of issues and probably caused the cancer to develop, too. I was so angry. Bob never had to die like this—and maybe he could have had an even longer life if he had just been neutered when he was young. My only solace was imagining that there were little "Bobs" all over northern Trumbull, CT. It made me smile as I looked down at my dead friend's body.

We arrived at the Vet. We had to go to the back door of the building—of course, so the other clients wouldn't see a dead cat and get upset. There was a big freezer by the door. I knew what it was for. I asked if we could put Bob in the body bag—that was protocol—a task they would normally do for their clients, but I didn't think it was right for anyone but Sam or I to handle him.

They brought us a black plastic bag and some tape. We left Bob on his favorite blanket and I kissed him goodbye. Sam slipped his body and the blanket into the bag. I didn't want to leave his body—I guess that's pretty sick, but I did not want to let go. It's our nature to feel this way, I knew that, but it didn't make it any easier to leave him. I took another deep breath and carefully sealed up the bag. I wrote Bob's name on the tape and drew hearts on either side of it. I knew they would place his body in the freezer, until the person from the pet crematory arrived to take him after the Labor Day holiday is over.

Bob will come back to me next week, but this time it will be inside a little tin box. I hate those boxes. I have a collection of

them now. Each one reminds me of a life lost, of a friend I will never see again.



©2011 Ryan Feminella. This is the only photo of have of me & Bob together. It was taken a few weeks before he died.

My only comfort is knowing that I fought hard for Bob. I didn't put him down months ago when he was starting to go downhill, I kept fighting for him—for his dignity—for the right to die in a natural way no matter how grueling it was on us and as long as Bob wasn't in obvious pain. He was a living creature who deserved that basic tenet. Through this experience I've learned a lot more about being patient, being gentle with myself and others, and to deeply appreciate the little things. I look around and see my seven cats. This story will be about them, one day, but today we're all together and we're all basically fine. We have our obstacles, like anyone else, but maybe now just the fact that Spencer sits beside me washing his face after having his breakfast is just as wonderful as if I won a Lottery. He's healthy and robust, relaxed and content. This moment is not ignored, it's quite the opposite. This moment, like each moment today, should be revered because it isn't always going to be like this. I won't always have this moment. I don't want to look back and realized I didn't know how much I had, as the saying goes, until it's gone.



©2009 Robin A.F. Olson. Beautiful Bob as he once was.

Bob was a magnificent creature—so perfectly calm, cool and collected with a big, big heart. I never heard him growl. He mooched food off my dinner plate and hated to be picked up, but there was something about him that always made me smile. I was honored to be part of his life and now, his death.

Rest in Peace, Robert J. Dole. Fly free.

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Comments

Fri, 2011-09-09 10:18 — [Teri and the ca...](#) (not verified) ^[7]

[Such reverence...a very](#) ^[8]

Such reverence...a very spiritual life experience. One of the most tender and heartfelt journals of your time with Bob as his life ended. I, too, when I lost my 'heart' cat to HCM in the middle of the night...I placed him in a pretty round bed, put his paws round his face like he often did when sleeping, curled his tail around his legs as cats do when contented...and when it was time to take him in to my vets, he just looked as if he was peacefully sleeping and that is how I remember him, too...

Fri, 2011-09-09 10:22 — [Teri and the ca... \(not verified\)](#) ^[7]

When my very first cat was ^[9]

When my very first cat was close to losing her fight with intestinal lymphoma, I had a friend come over and take some photos of us together, and I treasure those photos (I need to scan them and get them in my computer) as like you, was always the one taking photos of her but didn't have any of us together...

Fri, 2011-09-09 10:34 — [Sally \(not verified\)](#) ^[10]

Bob ^[11]

Yes, I know too well that collection of little tins. Ours are on our fireplace mantle. I want their ashes mixed with mine.

Fri, 2011-09-09 11:50 — [Debby \(not verified\)](#)

Bob ^[12]

Robin,

You are a very brave and strong woman for choosing to honor Bob in the way you did, and for sharing this journey with us. It helps everyone to understand that there is no right way to do things, but however you choose to honor your cat and his/her passing to the Bridge is okay.

We recently lost one of our kitties, and were able to bury her in the garden with our other kitty. Both died from lymphoma. I like knowing they are "home" and when the beautiful flowers bloom there, it is a reminder of who they were and the beauty and joy they brought to our lives. And I can totally relate to what you say about noticing every little moment with the people and cats who are in our lives now -- every little thing mine do is worthy of a photograph and a kiss so we can soak up every moment together.

Life is too short for all of us. I wish that cats were able to live as long as parrots...my friend has one for a pet and they will share most of their lives together. If only.

Fri, 2011-09-09 12:48 — [Catnymouse \(not verified\)](#)

I found you through twitter, ^[13]

I found you through twitter, since I'm a follower of Sockington and Sockelganger. I have two cats myself, and I have to admit I wasn't expecting to visit this page for the first time and get choked up....but I'm glad I did.

I don't know you, but as a cat parent myself, I offer you my deepest sympathy for your loss. It is clear from this post that you took fantastic care of Bob, and this is as loving a tribute as you could possibly have given him.

~ Miss Bookish Girl (@Missbookishgirl on twitter)

Fri, 2011-09-09 13:18 — [Kelsey Kruse \(not verified\)](#)

You and Bob ^[14]

I really admire how you handled Bob's life and his death. Such caring and respect. I learned a lot about myself too in your journey.

Fri, 2011-09-09 15:48 — [jansfunnyfarm \(not verified\)](#) ^[15]

RIP Bob ^[16]

We read all 5 parts. It was hard to read but harder for you to go through. It is painful to watch a furry friend grow frail and die. It's never easy. Gentle purrs and tail wags.

Fri, 2011-09-09 16:32 — [Abby \(not verified\)](#) ^[17]

One soulful journey ^[18]

Robin

Bob now has been released from all the physical struggles. You and Sam gave him such love and tender care, he knew how to appreciate it. You also allowed him a graceful exit from this world to the next, at a tremendous cost to yourself. I know you did it for him, he knows that too. There will be people who will not understand your decisions, but I am not one of them. Those of us with hearts filled with love for our cats understand and weep with you. We rejoiced when Bob got better and we cry now with you over his loss. He gave so much to you, Bob's gift just for you and Sam, but especially for you.

Fri, 2011-09-09 16:34 — Jane (not verified)

Thanks Robin for sharing with [19]

Thanks Robin for sharing with us Bob's last days! These are the one of the most beautiful and touching articles I have ever read. Through your words, I feel I was there with Bob in his last days, and seeing how he was loved by you and Sam, how he went to rainbow bridge peacefully bring comforts to me and others. Bobs was a very special boy and I will always remember him. RIP, sweet Bob. You were a very good boy! I wish to meet you one day on the other side of the rainbow bridge! Fly free beautiful Bob, with you newly earned angel wings!

Sat, 2011-09-10 20:16 — [Clara \(not verified\)](#) [20]

Love to you [21]

I started fostering cats for Austin Pets Alive this year. In June I had my first ever encounter with Rainbow Bridge as an adult. I had to send little Nash over. It was the hardest thing I ever did. But I somehow found the strength to hold him the whole time. He was never alone. It was totally the right thing. I'm now hospice fostering a tough little Manx named Sandy. She's got squamous cell sarcoma and it's a matter of time. My prayer is that she goes quietly in her sleep. I'm glad Bob was home and with you. Your words give me a chance to think ahead about what I'd like to be able to do for Sandy. Thank you.

Wed, 2011-09-14 23:56 — [Jeanne B \(not verified\)](#) [22]

In Memory of Bob [23]

Robin and Sam,

Please accept my sincerest condolences in the loss of Bob. I've only just caught up on my blogs and learned of his passing. Reading this five part journey has me sobbing in tears, remembering my own similar journey with Vincent, who was my Cat of a Lifetime, and whom I shared 10 years and six days with before he passed from cancer in February 2000. The last hours we had were so similar to yours with Bob, it was heartbreaking.

Vince was also a diabetic (and orange). I gave him insulin shots every day for two years after diagnosis. The day before he died, when I went to give him his shot, the bottle slipped from my hands and smashed on the ceramic tile. I had the most awful feeling. Somehow I knew, he wouldn't be needing shots anymore. That night, the cat who hated to sit on laps crawled into my lap and laid there while I petted him and watched Thursday night TV, trying to pretend I didn't know what I knew: that this was his way of telling me thank you for rescuing him as an adult foster cat, and for loving him and understanding him for his last ten years.

Other cats have come into my life; one is another Cat of a Lifetime, but of course, he'll never replace Vince. They are all so special. Bob was gorgeous, and he had a wonderful purr. He was very lucky to have spent his last years with you. RIP, Bob. Say hi to Vince for me.

Sat, 2011-12-24 12:40 — El (not verified)

Thank you [24]

Hi Robin,

I've only just found your blog as I've recently started on the long cat fostering journey myself, so am a little late to comment on this and the other posts. I hope you get to read this though.

Last May I lost the love of my life, an obnoxious, mischevous, accident-prone ginger cuddle monster called Buster, who was with me for 18 years and brightened single every day of those years. He saw me through my childhood years from age 8 up to my getting married at age 26. He was such a hugely special part of my life and I still feel like there is a hole in my heart even now, not least because I had to make the decision to take him to the vet to help him stop suffering after a long, protracted battle with his own body when the time came. When he finally went, it was calm, content, with a little puff of relief, as if to say 'ahhhh, now I can REALLY sleep in peace'.

Reading your blog - from beginning to end - and learning about Bob and what a magnificent creature he was, and the enormous struggles he put up to make it through with your incredible love and care, really magnifies for me just how much we love our cats and how vitally, vitally important it is for us to keep on loving them when other people don't understand what we do, why we do what we do, or what the point is - they're just cats, after all, right? The overwhelming love, the pain, the suffering, the happiness, the joy is no different than if it were your sibling or your child, and it's people like you, and cats like Bob, that give me hope and strength to continue fighting the good fight and doing all we can with that love.

I greatly admire the selflessness and restraint you showed in letting Bob go in his own way, at his own time, on his own terms. I wish I could have done that for my Buster too, but unfortunately he was just in too much pain, and in my own case, letting him go naturally would have meant prolonging his suffering for my own relief. I still grieve to this day. You should know that you absolutely did the right thing for Bob and I have no doubt that if he could tell you how grateful he was for your love and affection and resilience, he would have done.

Thank you for writing this blog, and for doing what you do. Bob - rest in peace. x

Fri, 2012-06-01 13:37 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

Your Bob died less than a ^[25]

Your Bob died less than a month after we lost our 17-y-o Bessie (7th August).

However, Bessie's passing was extremely sudden and unexpected - she walked over to us to see what was happening, then just suddenly lay down on the floor, and was gone.

But one thing they have in common is that they were both loved and are much missed.

They are now both on the Bridge telling others about the kindness and love they had.

Hugs.

Wed, 2012-06-06 20:10 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

Thank you for your touching tribute to Bob Dole ^[26]

As a cat lover, your story touched me in so many ways. Your loving care that you provided to this magnificent cat was simply one of the most endearing love stories I've ever read. Listening to his purr made me weep, it was lovely... he sounded as though he was singing while he purred.

God sends us these special animals for only a brief time. I always wish it could be forever since it's so hard to say goodbye. I do believe we will be able to be with out loving animals again in an afterlife. I have so many I wish to see again, as I'm sure you do as well.

Hugs and love, many, many thanks for your touching story about your magnificent boy, Bob Dole.

Thu, 2012-06-07 15:14 — [Robin Olson](#) ^[27]

Thank you ^[28]

Thank you for your kind comment. It's odd that today, for no reason at all I started to cry I was missing Bob so badly. I still see him out of the corner of my eye and I still miss him every day. He was a great cat who just had something so special about him that with him gone the house feels empty. Thank you for visiting my blog and hope you'll come back soon.

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Robin @ [Google+](#)

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