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Thu, 2013-06-27 09:04 — Robin Olson

Caring for my cat Fred ^[1], as he slowly weakened and until he died, was emotionally crippling. One of the worst aspects of providing palliative care for a cat is you can't talk to the cat about what you're doing and why it has to be done. They can't understand why they have to bear the discomfort of syringe-feeding, in the hopes that the food will comfort and maintain life. You can't tell your cat; "This is for the best. This is because I love you so much." They may understand the loving tone of your voice, but they can't understand the meaning of the sounds. They can't forgive you for forcing irritating drops into their eyes. They can't know that the nasty medicine might cure what ails them.

But what do you do when it's a human, not a cat, who is nearing the end of their life? What do you do when that person was your ex-husband and you can't talk to him because his wife would flip out, but you want to say goodbye and offer him some comfort?



©1988 Robin A.F. Olson. Steve ready to bowl. We loved to visit old bowling alleys. Steve was pretty good (though I admit the view from the rear as he was throwing the ball was my favorite).

My brother-in-law called me this morning. I don't refer to him as my "ex..." because I still have a heart-connection to the Olson clan in Minnesota. We may not speak often, or get invited to a family wedding, but when the need arises, we are there for each other. We still care. We still say, "I love you."



©1987 Robin A.F. Olson. Steve in his studio holding his cat, Chanel.

He told me that my former husband, Steve, was on his deathbed. Salivary gland cancer first reared its head as jaw pain and maybe a bad toothache that went unchecked last year. Steve didn't have insurance, so he wouldn't go to the dentist. When he finally went to the ER, in excruciating pain, they told him he had a suspicious growth in his jaw that needed to be checked out. With no way to pay for expensive care, his second wife urged him to go to her homeland of Bulgaria, thinking they could get the treatment Steve needed for free (*it didn't turn out that way, sadly and still cost over \$10,000.00 just to get started*).

So Steve found himself in Bulgaria, hoping to find a cure. *They diagnosed him as being in Stage IV, which has a very few percent chance of survival over 5 years. Life expectancy is typically much less.*



©1988 Robin A.F. Olson. Chanel on the stairs (yes, we let her outside back then).

I was told that a few family members are hoping to make it to Bulgaria to see Steve one last time. His parents are in their late 70's/early 80's. It would be too hard on them to travel so far, where they don't speak Bulgarian and I'm not sure they have a very comfortable relationship with Steve's wife. **Steve made a choice to remove himself from the people who love him most and who are hurting over their inability to do anything more for him. If only he had stayed in the USA, his brother would have found a way to pay for his care. I was even going to tell him he could live here with us and we could take him to Yale New Haven hospital for care.**

For me, the problem is that I can't even call him or email him to say goodbye. I know his wife would freak out, as she has the handful of times I've ever tried to talk to him. I even had to change my phone number because of her angry calls in the middle of the night after I talked with him once. It's ironic that she was the one who wanted him so badly, to get her precious Green Card. I bet she figured she had a good meal ticket in Steve since he was a workaholic to the extreme. She'd get to live in the USA and have someone pay her way, but she ended up getting the short end of the stick when the job market dried up and Steve was left floundering and scrambling to avoid bill collectors.

But here I go, thinking dark thoughts, when I should let this all go. It's time to put aside the bullshit and focus on life lessons.



©1988 Robin A.F. Olson. Scenes from our wacky wedding featuring a cake with bowling ball trophy figures on the top.

Before the cancer and the mistress and the all the misery of divorce, was a beginning—a story of two people who thought they were in love forever, who got married in a renovated Munsingwear Underwear factory and who had bowling ball centerpieces on each table at their reception. Steve and I were that happy couple who left on a 6,000 mile road-trip-honeymoon in our 1951 Pontiac Chieftan Deluxe ^[2], we called *Morticia*. It was a fresh start buoyed along with a trunk full of maps, bowling balls, the tingle of a new journey and dreams of a magical future.

Steve was a snappy dresser. He loved to preen in front of the mirror. What a narcissist, but I thought it was also charming that he dressed better than I did. He kept me on my toes.



©1988 Robin A.F. Olson. Steve, smoking. Oh how I wish I could have stopped him doing that, perhaps this story would have ended differently.

He often wore a wide-brimmed Fedora, his red, white and blue vintage 1950's high school letter jacket, tight black jeans, a black shirt with bold geometric patterns on it, and his signature Tony Lama cowboy boots. He always wore glasses, which he needed but made him look even cooler. With dirty blonde hair and clear blue eyes, the glasses gave him a know-it-all-look hence my nickname for him - Mr. Peabody ^[3] (Of course I was his sidekick, *Sherman*).



©1988 Robin A.F. Olson. My mother with Chanel.

Steve was gregarious and loved art and design. **He had a cat named Chanel; the first guy I ever dated who had a cat.** I could talk for hours with him about anything. We got along so well that I did everything I could to get him to fall in love with me. It was stupid and desperate, and though we didn't have great physical chemistry, we had this amazing ability to be together without any trouble at all. **We loved doing the same things, especially going to flea markets and tiny antique stores that dotted the Midwest, where we lived at the time. We would drive 1000 miles in a weekend, before Ebay, before cellphones. All we had were flyers, maps and the lure of the open road. Steve taught me it was okay not to know your destination; that the journey could be better than the goal and he was often right.**



A post card from our honeymoon. Paul & Babe the Blue Ox are in the [Trees of Mystery](#) ^[4] in Klamath Falls, CA.

Steve also smoked constantly. My father smoked, so I was used to it, but I didn't care for it and I often encouraged him to stop. **After our first year of marriage he decided to quit. He ended up weeding the entire yard and eating so many carrot sticks I thought he was going to turn orange.** There wasn't a nicotine patch then, so he had to do it cold turkey.



©1990 Robin A.F. Olson. Steve and I dressed up for the Star Trek convention where I ended up sitting on [James Doohan's](#) ^[5] lap.

He managed to quit for almost a year, until a friend came to visit who offered him a cigarette. Steve thought he

could have just the one, but not long after that he was smoking again, though not in the house. It was too nasty on all our collectibles and on me. Now I wish he had managed to stop for good, or even stopped after we divorced.

It's so difficult to look back and clearly see the mistakes you've made. You can't do a thing about most of them and it's fairly likely that you won't be able to stop yourself from whatever destructive path you're on now. It's so tough to see things from a point of clarity as they're happening.

Steve was my peacock and sometimes I really wished it had worked out, but I wanted something from him I could never have and that was him to stop being a workaholic and be willing to be part of a relationship instead of avoid any confrontation or partnership with me. Steve was perfect about knowing exactly what to say to get me to back off, but do it in a nice way. **He always told me he loved me and that his working for days in a row without a break would end and we'd have time together, but it never happened. He'd often fall into a death-like sleep after his work-jags. I could not wake him up.**



©1989 Robin A.F. Olson. Steve and Chanel share a cat nap.

He slept through our First Wedding Anniversary and didn't understand why I was so upset (*because you never have another First!*). He slept through my birthday and I had to go to a concert at the last minute with a friend. He was either working or asleep and rarely available to me, to us. I knew he wasn't cheating on me because we often worked together, **but what I couldn't fathom was that I was some times his boss or his co-worker and I could go home at 5 or 6pm and still have a life, whereas he had to stay and work with a coffee in one hand and a cig in the other.**

He would clean his desk and organize his files all night long and not do any real work. He never got anything done until the VERY LAST MINUTE when everyone in the office was screaming at him to hurry up to make the client meeting or deadline. He always made it at the last second, coming up with a brilliant concept that always wowed the client. Although his talents were truly special as a Creative Director, how he accomplished his work had ripple effects that gave me such horrific anxiety I went into therapy. After all, I was part of the design team so what he didn't do, I had to get done. I ended up realizing I was "managing" his life and turning into a nagging harpy—something I never imagined or wanted to do.



©1989 Robin A.F. Olson. Steve and I a million years ago.

I gave up who I was to be with him and when I realized I was okay with that, I knew I was in trouble. Steve was never there for me when I needed him and the less he was there for me the more neurotic I became.

Our marriage lasted for 11 years, but most of that was spent living apart. Even when it was over and we were with other people, I longed for the way Steve and I could just be together. I think we could have been really great friends and not husband and wife. One of the last times I saw him, I gave him a book that changed my life. ^[6] It's about the Tibetan form of Buddhism called Shambhala. After reading the book and beginning my journey to become a less neurotic person, over the years my path focused on becoming a Buddhist. I was finally able to step back and focus on forgiveness and understanding. I also began to live independently, something I protect about my life even now. I'll never live in someone's shadow ever again or foolishly believe I can change someone. I know better now.

Sadly, once Steve's girlfriend (he hadn't married her yet) found the book she freaked out and threw it out the window into the street below. I think it would have helped Steve a lot to read that book, but it was not meant to be.



©1998 Robin A.F. Olson. *One of the last photos of us together.*

I had to forgive myself and him for our failings and move on with my life.

This morning after I hung up the phone, I looked around the room. Most of the décor in the house were things Steve and I bought on our trips. We divided a lot of things up in the divorce, but he left some of it behind.

I look around and I see an item that sparks a memory of a trip to Iowa or one to Wisconsin, what we bought, the songs we listened to, the diners where we never tired of ordering the hot beef open-faced sandwich. We joked about doing a glossy book featuring photos and reviews of the hot beef sandwiches of all the diners in the country. We'd just drive, write, antique, take photos, eat at diners. It could have been a perfect life.

And now my dear Steve, your last days are here. I look back at photos from our Wedding and know all the sadness that would come after that day-all the people who have passed away, the divorces, the misfortunes. **It makes me wish I could have cherished that day, instead of be worried and upset about whatever stupid things I was bothered with at the time.**

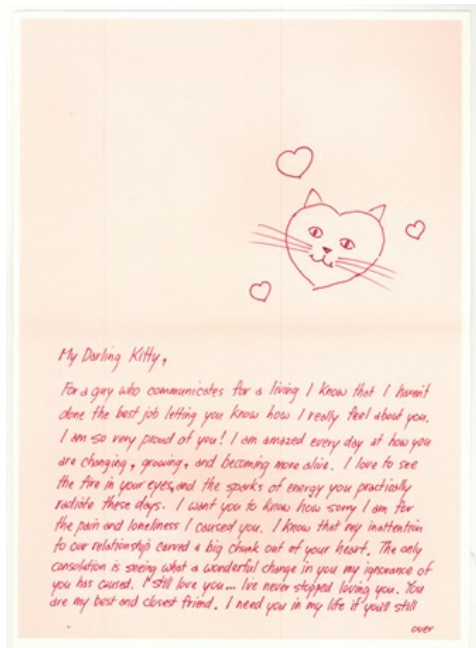


©1989 Robin A.F. Olson. Steve and his beloved, Morticia. I hope there are gorgeous classic cars in heaven and that Steve can drive a different one every day.

I look back and I wish so many things. I sadly recall something my mother often said to me about "If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride." [7] I wish I could see you one more time and say goodbye, but I'm grateful my message got to you and that you had a few last words for me. My brother-in-law told me that Steve sent his eternal love and that I'd know what he meant.

I think I know that he did love me, even if it wasn't going to be a happy ending for us. He put the bitter days behind him and I did, too. **We can rest in knowing there is peace between us that brings stinging tears to my eyes. It is a goodbye to what once was and what will never be and I have to be okay with that and so does Steve.**

Steve can no longer speak. The cancer stole his voice, but he understands and communicates by writing or nodding. I've been told he's on pain medication and the doctors are keeping him comfortable. I don't know if he's in a hospital or in his own bed, or if he even HAS a bed. I just know if he could hear me, **I'd tell him I love him and that I'm so very sorry for everything and that if I could I would take this pain away.**



I burned most of the cards Steve gave me because I felt betrayed and angry during the dark days of our divorce. Going through photos, I came across this lone survivor written not long before we called it quits. His words cut me through the heart. Now I can read them and accept them, but then I could not. Did he really mean what he said? I'll never really know because that leads to a road of what could have been that shall never be. In his own words: "I want to put that sadness behind us whatever that takes, whatever that means. I know our relationship is at a crossroad right now. I know that new roads lie ahead, I also know that I would like to travel those roads with you. I truly love you, Robin. I always will."

When it comes down to it, Steve taught me a lot-a lot about myself, about graphic design, about music and about letting go of expectations. I thank him for that and for the Olson name I've had all these years. Now it's time for me to say my goodbyes and to wish him a very sweet, painless journey to whatever lies beyond.

...a few weeks later...

June 26th 2013, 5 AM, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Steve is gone. He died peacefully in his sleep. It's too soon to know if there will be a funeral or even what country his body will find it's final resting place. All I know is my ex-husband is dead. The man who made me an Olson is on his journey to the Great Beyond. **My heart is broken, even after all these years of being apart. I can't stop crying. I look around and see all the silly things we bought on our trips. They remind me of him-of what once was and what is now gone forever. There is no putting something off until tomorrow. This chapter, as Steve used to say, is closed and the story is over.**

Rest in Peace, my sweet-Steve. You will forever be in my heart.

Steven Leon Olson

April 28, 1956—June 26, 2013.

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Comments

Thu, 2013-06-27 10:03 — HollyAnne Dustin (not verified)

So sorry for your loss ^[12]

So sorry for your loss Robin. Heartbreak is never fun. I hope the sun will shine in your life again very soon.

Thu, 2013-06-27 11:04 — Connie & The Crew (not verified)

Our thoughts are with you ^[13]

Our thoughts are with you during this difficult time. Very few journeys have that perfect ending, and I have come to believe that accepting what is, is part of that journey..

May you find peace through the pain

(and kittens.. kittens help a lot)

Thu, 2013-06-27 11:25 — [ZoeEmEffGee](#) ^[14]

I am so so sorry for your ^[15]

I am so so sorry for your loss.

I'm also sorry that his wife was so insecure that she wouldn't allow you to say goodbye. Wherever he is now, he knows how you feel. <3

Thu, 2013-06-27 11:37 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

Hugs ^[16]

Oh Robin, I am so sorry for your loss! May your good memories sustain you through this know and that Steve is in a much better place right now and free of pain. I am sure that the comfort of your kitties will hopefully help.

Thu, 2013-06-27 12:30 — [Clea \(not verified\)](#) ^[17]

I am so sorry for your loss, ^[18]

I am so sorry for your loss, Robin. But also so glad that you could look back on the good times and remember Steve for who he was (and who you were) back in the day. Know you are loved.

Thu, 2013-06-27 15:42 — Doreen D (not verified)

He could hear you then.... ^[19]

....and he hears you now, you'll see. (I just got goosebumps, the good kind.) Cats are great for comforting us humans, obviously you are well aware of that. I am sure Steve was greeted by his old cat pals, too. Thinking of you....take care, Doreen

Thu, 2013-06-27 15:49 — jmuwj (not verified)

RE: ^[20]

My deepest condolences go out to you, Robin. I have tears running down my face after reading your post, as it seems in some ways we have (had) parallel lives. I had a very similar relationship that lasted a little bit longer; when it ended I felt as if I'd had my heart jerked out and mutilated, and I've never been the same since. "He" smoked too; I quit (best thing I ever did for myself) and as far as I know, he still smokes. I don't know about the girlfriend. Ah, well. I, too, have thrown away the cards and many of the wedding gifts etc., but of course I still have a lot of mementos, including five of the many cats we cared for and loved together. I have a lot of bitterness and self-pity at times, but then again, other times I remember all the GREAT times we had and rejoice and give thanks for the many goodnesses that came about because of our relationship, those cats being the paramount ones.

How does that cliché go about 'Don't be sorry it's over; be glad it happened'? I try to bear that in mind and I hope you will as well. The wonderful life you had together -- and it looks and sounds like a REALLY wonderful life! -- will always be in your heart and memories, as will your love for Steve and his for you. I don't drink alcohol, but I'd feel like drinking a (non-alcoholic) toast to all of that, annually, or even a lot more often. Some people never find any kind of love or good life. You did, and you

have. <3

Thu, 2013-06-27 19:02 — [Lynda](#) [21]

So sorry. [22]

Oh Robin, I'm so sorry for your loss and what you are going through. When there are no words, know that the silence carries thoughts and hopes for peace to you.

Thu, 2013-06-27 20:09 — another volunteer (not verified)

Very sorry for you loss. love [23]

Very sorry for you loss. love and light

Thu, 2013-06-27 21:07 — Maria Romano (not verified)

Steve [24]

Thank you for sharing your story. My thoughts and prayers are with you. I too had a very close friend who smoked and died of lung cancer. I was not able to see him the last six months of his life because he was married and his wife was very jealous. It took a long time for me to get over this loss because he was very kind to me and I learned a lot of about people and music from him since he was a jazz musician and also very people oriented. You will work through this loss because you have the tools to deal with it. Just this past year I was able to reconnect with my friend's son and share some pics of his father that he did not have. He in turn shared some pics of his father that I had never seen. People who mean a lot to us will always be in our thoughts and memories whatever their foibles. I am glad that Steve was a cat lover too.

Fri, 2013-06-28 06:40 — Roxan Walden (not verified)

Robin, I am so sorry for the [25]

Robin, I am so sorry for the loss you are feeling and the pain you must walk through at this time. I have a feeling Minnie and the kits will be seeing a few of your tears.....I've always found crying on my kitties so comforting. Thank you for such an honest sharing of your life with Steve. I'm sure it couldn't have been easy to write. Cat bless you through this dark time and always. ~Roxan

Fri, 2013-06-28 09:25 — [Ellen Rubell](#) (not verified) [26]

condolences [27]

Robin - How brave of you to open up about your life. It's so emotional but I think it helps with the healing. Our stories are similar but in my story I would have to substitute alcoholism for workaholism, similar but different. My ex was remarried when he got sick and when asked if he wanted me to visit (he was at home for the last 6 weeks of his life), he said he didn't. We had been divorced for 8 years and he was remarried. Oh, well, so much for saying good-bye! It's odd trying to figure out what to do with the feelings. My heart goes out to you. It sure has been a year of loss for you but you will get through it.

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