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LOST...and FOUND

Mon, 2019-06-10 13:43 — Robin Olson

For the past few years I've been feeling like my life is flowing in too many directions, wild, out of control. I feel guilty. I need to rein it in. I'm always busy, but it seems like a constant state of busyness without a true result. Who am I? Am I a cat-blogger? Am I a cat rescuer? Am I an educator about feline wellness, behavior and nutrition? Am I a graphic designer who designs carton graphics for bobblehead boxes? Am I something else entirely?

It leaves me feeling confused and lost, afraid. I'm wasting time. I'm not young any more. I love to write, but when do I ever do it? I've joked about it for years, but it's not a joke any more. I think I'm going to "*die with a book inside me*" (as [Dan Poynter](#) [1] often was quoted saying). Will I ever get a book published? It doesn't pay much unless you're a superstar, so why why do I even care?

I'm lost in a way I've never felt before. It's deep and profound. I yearn to accept myself for who I am, my skills, my weaknesses, that ring of soft flab around my middle I can't seem to get rid of, the ever-graying hair on my head. I don't like feeling this way. I'm aware of death coming my way with every new wrinkle or visit to the doctor for yet another malady. Whatever it is I should be doing, I better get my ASS IN GEAR AND DO IT.

As a Tibetan Buddhist we call this feeling "*groundlessness*." We're supposed to lean into this uncomfortable feeling of not knowing, stifle the desire that causes us to hope for a specific outcome. Somehow we have to turn it sideways and take joy in how uncomfortable we feel. Step back. Look at it. Yeah, look at how lost and awful we feel. Yeah, it hurts, but shit, we all hurt, baby. ***So just be a pebble in the stream, and if we get caught up on a rock, we know the flow of life will move us along eventually.*** Yeah, right.

Where are the Kittens, Robin? Don't you run Kitten Associates? [2]

Good question.

This is the first May (*and now it's June as I still peck at the answer to this question*) in over 10 years I haven't had kittens in my blue bathroom. By now I'm usually fretting over the runt of the litter, crying that some didn't make it, or taking cute photos as they first open their eyes or reach other tiny milestones. I've been a cat-mama for over fifteen years all said. I'll never be a "*Kitten Lady*," [3] with speaking engagements and book deals and a zillion followers everywhere. Hannah's a bright flame, changing the playing field for the most at-risk animals in the shelter. My hat's off to her. Even though I know a great deal about caring for kittens after all this time, I'm never going to stand out, as much as I think I would like to or be driven to a singular cause. But having a rescue called KITTEN Associates puts a lot of pressure on me to do something kitten-related, right?

The last kittens I had in my home were in July of 2018. The mom, Matilda, and her son, Buzzbee are STILL HERE waiting to be adopted. Ugh. Stripes, Poof and Fluff joined is that Fall, but were in a different foster home and found their forever families last year.



©2019 Robin AF Olson. Buzzbee Bicklefish (and his mom, Matilda) is STILL waiting for his forever home even though his siblings were adopted LAST YEAR.

But there are reasons...

The initial reason I had to stop taking any foster cats after that was because my partner Sam's mother, Elizabeth, fell, and then my little world fell apart along with it (*I wrote about that in detail [HERE](#) (4)*). Since it was clear Elizabeth wasn't going to be able to live on her own again, Sam moved out and has been living in NYC to care for her. **That was EIGHT MONTHS AGO.**

With Sam being gone, all but a day or two a week, it feels risky to take on any additional cats on when I already have fourteen I'm responsible for. It was different when Sam was home. It didn't take an hour and a half (*at least*) every morning to clean up, feed and fuss with the cats, then do it all again each night. And this doesn't count time to do Vet runs, give fluids and WORK as a graphic designer.

I don't really feel free of my duties until about 11pm. It's to a point where I can feel the hamster wheel spinning and I want to get off.



©2019 Robin AF Olson. Late night with Pistachio.

I recognized last year that I was getting compassion fatigue. I didn't care any more about much of anything. I just felt chronically fed up, angry, tired.

The grind of more than 10 years without a vacation got to me. I just wanted everyone to leave me alone and not need me for anything, just for awhile.

I didn't take on more cats over the winter. Part of me did not miss going to the vet multiple times a WEEK. I kept searching for ways to escape, to take a BREAK, but it's just not going to happen because who will pet sit for 14 cats?...so I just kept saying "No" to as many things as possible so I could carve out some time for myself.

What bothers me so much is not the effort it takes. I like to work. I love to rescue cats. As much as cats bug me, ruin my stuff, piss me off; they heal me, they comfort me, they are part of me.

I don't know what to do with my rescue because I've finally realized that Kitten Associates is not and never will be like most rescues. **I felt like a failure realizing that, but it's also the door opening to me figuring out what K.A. really is. We're doing things holistically, feeding raw exclusively now. We educate the public, take on tough cases, help others behind the scenes by paying for vet bills or spending hours on cat behavior issues so cats don't lose their home in the first place.** If I was going to grow, save as many lives as possible, I would do it. I don't want to oversee a bunch of volunteers who will flake out on me. It's too much extra work to oversee that. I know I have the chops to make it happen, but I don't, because it's just not for me to do.

I've seen what it does to me, to my cats, to do rescue in the first place. I've had a virus hit ALL MY CATS at the same time-more than once. They've been exposed to ringworm and all sorts of other things that even with the best hygiene and careful handling, they will still be exposed to and possibly get sickened by. Do I want to continue to do that to my cats? Two of them are over 16 years of age. And every cat I take on, means the others get less of me. How fair is that to them to keep doing this over and over again? I should turn away from rescue and just find homes for the remaining foster cats and call it a day with the 8 I call my own.



©2019 Robin AF Olson. Fluff got a wicked URI and was hospitalized for a few days. Not because he was so ill, but because my Vet was scared what rescue has done to me. He wanted to give me a break for a few days. Instead of feeling grateful, I felt embarrassed that it had gotten so bad.

But...I love to help cats and I love to help people. It's the only way I ever feel halfway happy about my life. I love to watch kittens blossom or a cat learn to trust me so one day they can be happy in a forever home I carefully choose for them. I love it when the light comes on for someone who wants to do right by their cat and because of my help, they finally understand their cat, understand their cat's nutritional needs, understand how their cat sees the world and it changes their life. That means everything to me. **I get so energized by talking to people of all ages about cats. I could do it every day and never get tired.**

But I also **love** doing design work. I've been an artist since I was a little kid. **Creativity is the fuel that fires my heart.** I love doing the carton graphics for [Royal Bobbles](#) [5]. To me it's not even graphic design-it's art. It's playtime plus visual storytelling that comes together to create a unique representation of that person whether it be Bob Ross or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Every carton is different and has a different style. For me it's a joy, not work. I would never want to give that up.



Then, the Wake-up Call

It's no secret that stress effects all of us and chronic stress can have devastating results. Some people who do rescue for a long time get so distraught they commit suicide, others become addicts. We struggle to find ways to cope when typically our resources are nil. We are givers. We are nurturers. We put others first. We do it with a brave heart and the hope that we are making a difference; we are making it better for others.

Then one day we can't do it any more. Our bodies tell us in small ways at first. We lose sleep worrying about sick kittens or are simply exhausted from bottle feeding them every few hours, but we find a way to make it happen again and again. We give up time off because frankly if you have more than a few cats it's not possible to go away for a long weekend unless you board all the cats or you find a miracle-person who will live at your home while you're gone. It's just not going to happen.

Maybe you start smoking or eat junky food to excess because there are too many other things pressing on you and you just don't have time to cook or go shopping. Most of us don't make much of a living. It's assumed we should not be paid for one of the most emotionally draining "careers" there is. **We SHOULD be paid. We should be pampered. We should be taken care of so we can go back and keep doing the hard work most other people can't imagine doing, but we don't. We're broke. We're tired.**

We gave everything we had and we're expected to keep giving.

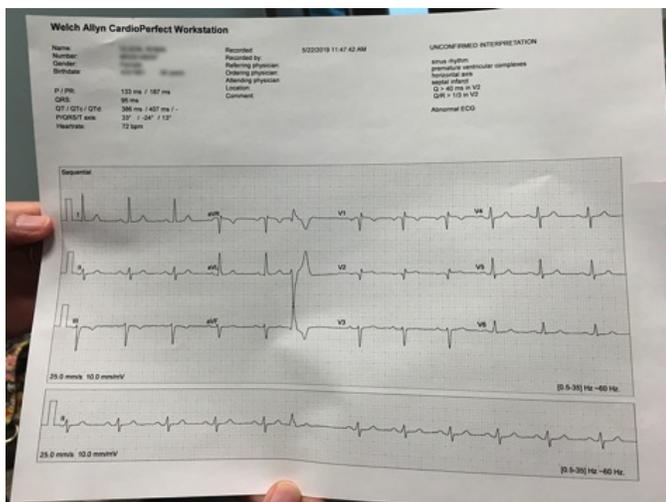
Then **the one day** arrives. For me it was three weeks ago. I'd been stressed and tired beyond the "norm." I complained to Sam on a call one night about the long separation and the stress of taking care of everything on my own was doing to me. I actually kind of pitched a fit about it. The next morning Dood, who I've been having serious aggression issues with, attacked foster cat Annie when my back was turned. All the stress I felt bottled up came out. I yelled at him to get into "his room" (*he lives in my office behind a baby gate other than for a few hours each morning and was out when the incident occurred*). **He went into my office, but this time I yelled so loud and so hard, I think I broke my own heart. I began having palpitations. They didn't go away in a few hours. They didn't go away when I tried to relax, take deep breaths, go for a walk.**



©2019 Robin AF Olson. Annie and Andy. Dood's number one and two victims.

My stomach fluttered like there was a tiny creature inside trying to get out. The fluttering made me cough. It made me feel queasy. I got really tired. I kept hoping it would go away. **It didn't.**

With a family history of heart issues I got really scared. Of course, being upset isn't going to help the fluttering go away. On the third day I saw my G.P. and she said I have PVC (*Premature Ventricular Constriction*) [6]. She made it seem like everyone has it and not to worry. Folks who have to deal with a lot of stress (*like performers who are going on stage*), will experience this, too. I was told I'd need to start a regime of beta blockers. It was used for the heart, but it was also used for anxiety. Really? Anxiety? Okay, so I'm a poor stressed out white girl or what? **This is legit, Doc, not something to brush off.**



©2019 Robin AF Olson. Before the doctor began to explain, it was clear something was terribly wrong.

As I always do, I read about what I was going to take before I took it. Beta blockers have serious side effects. I've never seen such a laundry list of side effects in my life. [7] Most were very disturbing. I wondered how I'd manage if I had any of them. Even though the beta blocker I was prescribed was created in the 1960s, and had a history of working well enough, I still didn't feel safe taking it. I don't even take aspirin. I take nothing other than homeopathy once in awhile.

I was told the palpitations might go away on their own. I gave up caffeine. I tried to re-think and re-act differently to the cats, to stress. I worked on taking it easier. I took more walks. I gave it a few days and decided to take my first pill. I waited until it was a day that Sam was home in case I had problems. I took the pill at noon last Sunday. Within two minutes I got very woozy. I sat down for a time. Fortunately, the feeling went away and I thought I was going to be all right.

Ten hours later I got so woozy I couldn't stand. I was nauseous. I thought I might vomit. I didn't feel like my brain was working normally. Cognitive function was impaired as if I was really drunk. It was tough to talk but I managed to tell Sam I might need to go to the ER. The dizziness was severe. It was terrifying.

Supposedly the body adjusts to these symptoms, but I couldn't believe that. I was due to take a second dose, but HELL NO TO THAT! **I tried to rest while the world was spinning out of control, while my heart was flipping around in my chest, while I waited for something worse to hit me next.**

Meanwhile the palpitations continued on...worse than ever.

I called and spoke with a nurse the next morning. She said of course not to take the meds and she was sorry I had side effects. The only other thing she offered was if the palpitations continued to let her know and they'd send me to the cardiologist and see if he could *"figure it out."*

Great.

You'd think the meds would wear off by the end of the day but they did not. I had cognitive issues and dizziness for a **week**. I'm still not 100%. What the fu@k is in this stuff?! I only took a one pill at the lowest dose. There are people out there who take this four times a day. How do they function?

So here I sit with palpitations, feeling a bit woozy. A few weeks ago my dearest ex-brother-in-law died from cancer. He was two years older than I am. I can't assume I can overcome years of chronic stress and what it has done to my body. I absolutely MUST find a way to take a break. I also need to put myself first once in awhile. But mostly I need to find answers. Maybe what it boils down to is more obvious; *being cursed to not see your own value, realize the magical things you've done, while you're in the middle of doing them...and it's ok not to know what you should or shouldn't be doing as long as you're bouncing along in that stream.*

...and then I went on Facebook and saw this...and everything changed...

...to be continued.

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Comments

Tue, 2019-06-11 00:00 — Connie - Tails ... (not verified)

Minerals ⁽¹⁸⁾

I was diagnosed with PVC a few years ago. It is freaky and scary, yes. I feel for you.

I was drinking the standard TV doctor recommendation of a boat load of water every day at the time and some of my reading led me to believe I was deficient in magnesium and potassium. These are things your doctor can check for you if you are so inclined to look into this. I started supplementing with both and they went away pretty quickly.

A lot of people today are deficient in magnesium. Lack of it can cause sleep issues and anxiety.

I have no idea if this is your issue. I just wanted to share what helped me.

I hope you are able to find an answer that helps you

I can't wait to hear the rest! ^[19]

Robyn,

I don't often post, but I have been following for years, the stories of Freya, Dood, Spencer, YOU, and the whole gang. I've donated through Amazon donations and probably some Facebook as well. I don't do rescue, but I feel sometimes like I do with my efforts to feed the hungry (feral) before myself and get the TNR done if I can. I love what you do and I fully understand the struggle of doing it alone while trying to support ourselves and our brood. The work never ends. I had to get my husband out of the house in early 2015 and I got to keep all the animals. Although they are an expensive burden, it is one I am so grateful for.

I was recently BLESSED beyond measure to find that one friend who was willing to sit for me and care for my home and 6 cats and I went away for a whole week! I could sleep in the bed in any position or direction I wanted. I had no one to feed but myself. I didn't feel lonely or guilty for one minute! Even if my sitter did send me pictures of their daily activities. I had a garage sale and sold enough of my possessions to pay for my vacation AND my sitter.

I hope you are finding peace and that there is some way for you to get your Sam back home. A couple of years ago you blogged about your experiences with him and wondering where he was (he was being distant and withdrawn, spending much time on the computer). That spoke so deeply to my own heart and experiences. You had a sister on the west coast who had just gone through that! I was hoping your story would end better than mine. It sounds like your story with Sam is still being written.

I can't wait to read the rest of your story. My heart is with yours!

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Robin @ [Google+](#)

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Links

- [1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Poynter
- [2] <http://www.kittenassociates.org/>
- [3] <http://www.kittenlady.org/>
- [4] <http://coveredincathair.com/content/lesson-love>
- [5] <http://www.royalbobblies.com/>
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