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## Making Friends with Death

Wed, 2011-06-01 17:24 — Robin Olson

Our society has such an aversion to death. We don't want to talk about it, let alone, acknowledge it happens. If we can talk about it, it happens to other people, not us. We're fixated on making ourselves appear younger, shooting our faces full of botulism, getting lip injections, face lifts, hair transplants, in an ever more desperate attempt to cover up that we are, with every moment that ticks by, one step closer to "The Big Sleep."

In the early 1900's people held funerals in their own home, in the parlour, the fanciest room in the house. It was reserved for only the most special occasions, like the death of a loved one or a wedding. I have to wonder if solemn, it was also dignified and beautiful to have this ceremony in the most uplifted space a family could provide. Nowadays, we run off to a funeral home, they touch "the body," they prepare it for burial or cremation, they provide the space to have a service for a few hours or days. There is an aseptic quality to death. Someone else deals with the "gorey" details. We bring the checkbook and the tissues while our loved one is hidden away in a refrigerated compartment.

I'm not making a judgment, rather an observation. I ask that we take a moment to think about death, which in turn, asks us to think about life. How do we want to live our life so that when we die, we die with dignity, in a beautiful setting, with peace, instead of being surrounded by hysteria? How do we look death in the eye and make friends? How do we find a way to watch our loved ones with terminal illness, weaken and die, knowing there is no pill to fix this situation. There is no bargain to be made. I think somewhere in that is the key-there is nothing you can do sometimes, but to bear witness, provide loving compassion, then let go. Stop clinging to what you can do nothing about.



©1990 Judith K Feminella. *Daddy with Blue, the cat.*

Originally this topic was on my mind because June was approaching. I hate June. I hate it. June is not wedding month for me. It's "death month" in my family. My father took his own life on June 27, 1999. A few years later, two of my cats died in June and over the years there have been other losses during this month. When June arrives, I duck my head under the covers until July.



©2010 Robin A.F. Olson. Sammy needs a rescue. Read his back story [HERE](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

The other reason I was thinking about death is because of Big O. Big O was one of Kitten Associates' first rescues from Georgia. Big was kicked outdoors when his owner died. Big was declawed and thin, kicked and teased by the neighborhood kids. Mary Jo, a kind-hearted cat rescuer in Georgia, took him in, then started to look for a home for the cat who was called, Sammy, back then.



©2010 Robin A.F. Olson. Big O just after he arrived in Connie's home.

It was early September 2010. I had just gotten Kitten Associates off the ground. I wrote about Sammy's plight, hoping to find a rescue to help him. I got more than that. I found an adopter. My own friend, Connie, who is passionate about helping every cat she meets. Connie has a few...cough...cats. She read about Sammy and decided to adopt him in honor of Lion King, a cat she had lost a few weeks prior. She didn't care what shape Sammy was in or what he needed. She knew whatever it was, she would take care of the problem.



©2010 Robin A.F. Olson. Only the best for Big O!

When Sammy arrived, we had already been calling him by his nickname, Big O (for Big Orange, not big you-know-what). Big had a big personality. He liked to talk and boss the other cats around. His tail was badly damaged by some sort of abuse so it had to be removed. He had hyperthyroid, so Connie took him to [RadioCat](#) <sup>[2]</sup> to have his thyroid zapped with radiation to cure the problem.

Big O had a benign growth on his foot. She had it surgically removed so he would be comfortable.

Big peed all over her house after a few months, then focused on peeing on some furniture, ruining it. Connie was frustrated, but never gave up. We often tried to joke about our cats peeing issues. Connie tried to find out what was wrong with Big O by taking him to the Vet for more tests. They found nothing. Meanwhile, Big started to lose weight, but no amount of food would bring it back.

Yesterday morning, Connie discovered a huge pool of bloody vomit near Big O's bed. She knew he was in crisis and got him to the Vet. They took an x-ray. His abdomen was filled with fluid, obscuring the tumor they suspected was there. Big O, now just a few pounds in weight, was going to die. Connie wanted him to go home to live out whatever time he had left.

I went to see Big O last night. Connie warned me he wasn't doing well at all. When I first saw him, all I saw was orange fur. His body was mostly obscured by the bright green grass in Connie's back yard. Big O was laying flat, his eyes open, his breathing slow and regular. It was a warm day. I remarked at how all my cats were flat, too, not wanting to be completely hopeless for a few minutes more. Death was nearby. We all knew it. I felt like I was on a roller coaster. The car was traveling up the steep rise on the track. I felt my insides tense up, knowing I was about to go over the edge-not wanting to fall-not wanting to feel that sharp fear of facing something that terrifies me.

Big O got up a few times, clearly using everything he had to try to hide under the bushes or under the deck. I wouldn't let him. Instead, I bent down and gingerly lifted him up. There was nothing to him. He was skin and bones. He didn't resist. He basically fell over when I put him down. I'd been crying a lot since I first saw him, but now I needed to stop. I needed to face this for Big O's sake, if not my own.



©2010 Robin A.F. Olson. *Big O rests on my leg last night. He had the softest, nicest fur.*

So I sat with him while Connie tended to her other cats. I did a Buddhist practice called [Tonglen](#) <sup>[3]</sup>. It was very hard to do, but the more I did it, the more relaxed I felt. I allowed my feelings to drop away and just focused on Big O. Focused on being there for him, being calm and peaceful. If it was his time to go, then he would die with as much dignity and love as possible. I wanted him to have a good death. He deserved nothing less.

It was too late to go the Vet, anyway, better to let Big O enjoy being outside. In a way, I wish he could have passed then and there, but in my own fear and my own desire to make it better, I suggested we syringe feed him some water and food. Although Big O perked up after that and we both felt a little bit more hopeful, last night things got much worse. Big O vomited a lot more blood and hid behind the toilet. He wanted to die alone, but Connie wanted to be with him, staying close to him until the morning came.

Connie drove Big O to her Vet this morning. He sat quietly in her lap during the drive. Normally he'd make a big fuss. A few minutes after arriving at the Vet, Big O was humanely euthanized. Connie did the right thing. She stayed on the roller coaster, riding the fear and sadness, then did what needed to be done. She wished Big could have passed at home, but he was in too much agony. It wasn't fair to him. Most of his life wasn't fair, but in the end Big O knew great love and care and is at peace. Sadly, we are far from it.

I'd like to say I've made friends with Death. I know the grim reaper lurks out there, lightly touching the next to go on the shoulder. He whispers; "It's time." They leave sweetly and with love. I wish that was the case, but frankly it doesn't work that way. I can't do it. I still want to kick Death in the ass. He took a great cat to the [Rainbow Bridge](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, one who deserved more time with those of us who loved him.

So Death, you can suck it. The month of June can rot. **Big O fly free and go with love.**

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[One I Hold in High Regard](#) <sup>[6]</sup>

[Georgia Rescue](#) <sup>[7]</sup>

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[Kitten Associates](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

[Rest in Peace](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

## Comments

Wed, 2011-06-01 17:37 — Laura/PetScribbles (not verified)

### **Rest in peace, Big O. . .** [11]

I just happened to see your tweet that linked to this post on Twitter just now. I'm just sickened with sadness to read about Big O. The picture you took of him last night, peacefully laying against you in the grass... reminds me so much of my own Mr. Boober, who I lost way too soon to cancer a few years ago. I hope that Mr. Boober meets up with Big O, as I know that Boober needs some playmates up there in heaven, and Big O sounds like he was wonderful. And yes, his time was way too short. But how wonderful that he lived out the remainder of his life being cared for and loved by your friend Connie. Hugs to you both.

Wed, 2011-06-01 17:42 — JetRedgirl (not verified)

### **Thank you...** [12]

For reminding me how important it is to be there for our dear little furkids, even when it breaks your heart and tears at you soul, they only have their people, in the end, and that is all they want. This is very much the same process I have been dealing with as of late, we were up to 20 cats(not something we really wanted, but it we can't just turn them away) and have had a recent rash of passings in our older group. Lost my precious Tom, Luke and Rikki all between 10-13 years old, in the past 6 months..I sat with them and stayed with them until they left, comforted by the fact they were not alone, and the last thing they knew on this earth was my voice and touch. My other loss was Jamey, only 4 years old, but he had sudden heart failure, laid down, and was gone, didn't have the chance to comfort him, I so much wish I could have been there. It is so important to remember..we have the whole world, but we are THEIR whole world...be there no matter how hard it is, cry all you need, but don't leave them. May Big O be free and happy at the bridge...

Wed, 2011-06-01 17:53 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

### **My deepest sympathies. This** [13]

My deepest sympathies. This took me back to September 30, 2010 when my RumTum left for the rainbow bridge. I am crying as I write because the pain is so deep. We had a great life together and will again. I wish the same for you.

Wed, 2011-06-01 18:37 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

### **big o** [14]

That is my friend, Mary Jo! she does great things for kitties. I remember getting an email about Big O when they were trying to find a rescue or home for him. Mary Jo just told me he went to the Rainbow Bridge..I am so sorry to hear that, but happy he was in a loving home for awhile. Thank you to connie for taking such good care of him.

Wed, 2011-06-01 20:44 — [isilwath](#) [15]

### **I remember transporting Big O...** [16]

He spent most of the trip either in my lap or on the dashboard. He was a wonderful cat and I am so happy his last days were spent in such peace and love.

I think Mercedes, my 21-yr old that I adopted at 20 (yeah, I know, what ass hat dumps a 20-yr old cat at a kill pound?) is fading. I think she will not be with me this time next year, though 21 is a very good, long life for a cat and she has been happy here.

I am sorry for you and Connie. You did all you could and in the end, you let him pass over with dignity.

\*HUGS\*

Wed, 2011-06-01 21:14 — [MARLEESAN71](#) [17]

### **My heart is heavy** [18]

I was so saddened to hear this news. The picture of Big O curled up next to your leg made my flood gates open wide. Although my heart is heavy with sadness, I know that he was very ill and it was his time. It is so comforting to know that he got to spend his last day and hours with you and his Mama. I truly believe without a doubt that the butterfly with the orange stripe you and Connie saw was Big O letting you all know that he is ok.

Wed, 2011-06-01 21:59 — Janice Cox (not verified)

### **My Deepest Sympathies** [19]

I am so sorry for your loss. Like many of us I know exactly how you feel, having had to make that sad last trip to the vet twice myself. I hope you can take comfort in knowing that Big O knew great love and kindness in his life, and that the end of his life came as the greatest gift that Connie could give him. Every day that Big O had from the moment Mary Jo picked him up off that porch and saved his life was also a gift, and I have no doubt he knew it. My oldest cat was a stray so badly treated by life

that he literally cringed when he first saw me putting food out for him and his fellow strays. Seven years later he still oozes love and gratitude (even while he's stealing the food off my plate!) and I'm sure Big O was just the same.

You and Connie are in my thoughts and prayers.

Thu, 2011-06-02 00:02 — Jeanne B (not verified)

### **RIP Big O** <sup>[20]</sup>

I have mixed feelings about June, as my birthday is at the end of the month (so that's good) but my Dad died five years ago on the 7th (so that's bad). Big O sounds like he was a wonderful cat, and so lucky to have found you, Connie, and his last but most loving home. I've lost many myself; my heart breaks for you.

Thu, 2011-06-02 08:48 — [ZoeEmEffGee](#) <sup>[21]</sup>

### **How sad...** <sup>[22]</sup>

Poor Big O. At least his last few months were filled with love. Stay strong, Connie - it may hurt now, but you gave him so much. He's waiting for you at the Bridge.

Fri, 2011-06-03 20:28 — [Bobbie](#) <sup>[23]</sup>

### **Soar high, Big O** <sup>[24]</sup>

You have given a beautiful boy a most loving memorial.  
Many hugs to you and Connie.

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Robin @ [Google+](#)

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