

MEMORIES OF JOY

I got Joy in 2007 from a local cat shelter when she was about six months old, and she was with me for 14 of her 16 years. When I moved into an apartment in 2018, they originally said no pets were allowed. After two years in another home, I found out it was not working out for her or them. Joy never did get along well with other cats and this was no exception. So I talked to my landlord and got special permission to bring her back home with me. The reunion was full of tears of joy and settling into a new routine for both of us as she explored her yet again new surroundings.

The following is what I wrote shortly after I handed her over to her new home in 2018.

Joy, you brought me so much happiness and joy for the 11 years we lived together—your warm body next to mine, listening to you purring, watching you play or get beside yourself when you saw another animal out the window, hearing you being “vocal”, looking up at me with that look that said you wanted to play or be petted, pesting me to go out onto the screened-in patio, letting me know in your own way when you needed food or fresh water, and showing me any bugs you might find. Whenever you found a spider, ant, or stink bug—whether it was in your reach or up on the ceiling—you just stayed with it and stared at it until I came to look and take care of it. I was always so thankful for that! I never knew half of what you were meowing about, but when I came home from somewhere, you greeted me with a long string of meows as if you were telling me all that went on while I was away, and followed close on my heels until I stopped, emptied my hands and picked you up or got down on the floor with you.

I loved watching you and your brother, Snuggles, rough-house together when I first got you as kittens. At times I thought you would kill each other but it was just play! Then there were the times when you were still just a kitten that Licorice, my Black Lab, would bark to put you in your place and you would dive under the furniture and hide for a while where he couldn't reach you. Licorice would then lay down in peace and take a nap. Then you would sneak up to him and snuggle in next to him where it was warm and cozy. That was fine until he woke up and saw you lying there. Then he would get up and go somewhere else. After he settled into his nap again, you would follow and snuggle again. This time Licorice would bark and you'd go run and hide. The only thing that scared you more was when the trains went by and blew their whistle just as they got to our house. You ran every time and hid under my bed.

Snuggles was a snuggler—that's why I gave him that name. He liked to be held and petted, but you didn't so much. You liked to follow Snuggles around which got you into trouble when I'd catch both of you up on the kitchen counter or the table. I tried all kinds of things that are supposed to scare cats, but it didn't work for you two. Funny thing is, I never saw you up there unless Snuggles was there first—you were a follower. So I thought if I sent Snuggles back to the shelter that you would calm down. Hah! That didn't happen, and more than once I kicked myself for sending him back because you two were such good company for each other, and would have been even more so after I found a good home for Licorice where he could run off-leash and play with two little boys.

Over the years with me, you became a snuggler, but never on my lap. Whenever I sat down in the recliner, you were right there, looking for me to put the fleece blanket over my legs and the edge of the chair where you immediately jumped up and snuggled in, “kneading” the blanket until it was to your liking. Then you'd sleep there next to me until I had to get up which would disturb you. But you would not let me hold you on my lap. Once in a while I “stole” a kitty hug, but that only lasted 30 seconds or so. Then in return when I put you down, you would grab my leg to play.

If you were awake and I fell asleep, you would jump up on my lap and nudge me, walk back and forth across my lap, and when you were sure I was awake, you'd settle down next to me. If I sat at my desk too long, you would pest like a kid, putting a paw up on my lap, meowing at me as if to scold me. You weren't satisfied until I got up and walked away from my desk for a while. At night when I went to bed, I waited for you to come to bed with me, and finally after snacking and running around the house a few times, you would come snuggle next to me in bed and usually stayed there for the night. Although sometimes you'd get into mischief in the middle of the night waking me up with a noisy toy or a crash because you were up on my desk or somewhere you weren't supposed to be and knocked something over. You ate a whole spider plant one day while I was at work and I thought sure you'd get sick but you didn't. Then you started chewing on artificial flowers so I had to remove all flowers from the house.

I tried twice to bring a kitten into the home so you would have a playmate, but you were queen of the house and vetoed it both times by hissing and growling at both the kitten and me. I was burnt toast until the kitten was gone from the premises, and even then you took your time making up to me, as if to make sure I wouldn't try it again. Finally I agreed that it was just you and me until something happened to one of us.

I was always concerned about what would happen to you if I died first. My son loved you, played with you when he was there, and petted you, but he could not have a pet in the apartment he lived in and then when he married, his wife was allergic to cats. I would cry to think what might happen to you when I die. I would just pray that someone would give you a good home and asked my son to do everything he could to make sure of it.

When I decided to sell the house and move into an apartment, I didn't realize at first that I would not be able to take you with me due to no-pet rules. When I found out, I was devastated and cried. But then God gave me peace about it and I tried to find a home for you. I wanted it to be a home where you would be the only cat, but it didn't work out that way. However, you did have a good home and a cat playmate now as well as a couple of children. Then when I die, my son wouldn't have to be concerned about you, although I think he missed you a little, too.

I miss you, especially at night when I sit in my recliner. Part of me keeps waiting for you to come jump up to sit with me. Then when I go to bed, I miss having your warm body lying next to me. I love you, Joy, and always will. I'm sorry I had to send you to live with someone else—it breaks my heart—but I'm glad you're safe and sound. I hope you'll be a good girl and make your new family just as happy as you did me. I look forward to spending eternity with you because I know pets will be in Heaven—why else would God create animals if they wouldn't be part of us forever?!

Returning home in 2020:

I picked you up and brought you back home to me on New Year's Eve just before the Covid quarantine happened in 2020. I think you were confused and had to explore your new surroundings but you soon warmed up to me and we snuggled in together, played, and got back into a routine much the same as our first 11 years. I was so thankful to have you back and have that company during those long days of not being able to go out or have company. Life moved on and we made adjustments to apartment living. You kept going to the doors as if you were looking for the one that led to the screened-in porch but there was no such thing here.

My final memories of Joy:

Now 3-1/2 years later, we have parted until eternity... When I brought Joy back home with me, I knew it wouldn't be forever but somehow I didn't think it would be this soon. I don't remember exactly when it happened, but the first thing to go was her hearing and that changed her personality.

She always knew when I came home because she would hear the beep of the remote on my car and then the key in the apartment door, and she was waiting for me just inside the door. If I couldn't find her, I would just rattle the treat jar or call her name and she'd come running. Gradually those things were missing. One day I came home and walked right up to the chair she was sleeping on, clapped my hands, stomped my feet, and called her name, but no response. I could see she was breathing so I nudged the chair and then gently her, and finally she responded as if she was afraid—like any human would be if someone startled them from a sound sleep. Then I knew for sure she had lost her hearing. She was about 14 or 15 at that time which is around 98-105 in human years.

When the hearing left her, she became more vocal and louder. I think she was confused at first because she couldn't hear herself or anything else. When she was looking for me, I had always called her name and she heard my voice and found me. Now that didn't work for us anymore. She still meowed, but I had to physically get up and go to where she could see me before she came running to me. Even though I knew she couldn't hear me, I still talked to her in the same way, and when I was holding her, I think she could feel the vibrations from my voice.

For about two more years we enjoyed each other, but her personality kept changing. One minute she wanted to play and the next minute she was totally not interested. One of her quirks was that if I was sitting in the den in my swivel rocker, she loved to lay on my lap. But if I sat in the recliner in the living room, she wouldn't come up on my lap, but would lay next to me—maybe she liked the fleece blanket better which was always there to protect the chair from all her hair.

Of course cats are nocturnal animals and she was definitely no exception! When I had my house, Joy always slept with me and rarely woke me up during the night. But after she returned to me and lost her hearing, she started waking me several times during the night either meowing, running around, or jumping up on the bed. She would walk across me, crawl up to my face, nudge me, and purr in my ear—all things I didn't mind...when I was awake! I felt like a sleep-deprived [cat] mama.

Joy always ate well and drank water. She loved to lick the tuna can when I made tuna salad and loved her treats, but was never one to drink milk or eat table food which was fine by me. At least I knew she wouldn't be swiping my snacks. LOL In the last two years she began vomiting more—sometimes just a hairball and sometimes food that she hadn't even digested yet. After I switched her to all senior cat food versus a mixture of indoor hairball control formula and senior formula, it seemed to lessen some.

Have you ever heard of a dainty cat? I think Joy was a prime example! She didn't like the litter on her paws, but instead of walking on the carpet that would catch it, she preferred to walk on the tile floor and traipsed it everywhere. Then her personality changed again about a month ago when I noticed she wasn't covering her business in the litterbox. She would come looking for me and kept meowing until I

went and covered it. I also then began to notice that the box was getting filled up much quicker and I had to empty it twice a day or she wouldn't use it. As soon as I emptied it, then she'd return to use it.

During her last couple of weeks another change in personality became apparent. Joy became whiny and clingy and was sleeping 95% of the time. She wanted to be close to me or on my lap when she was awake, and if she wasn't with me, she was sleeping. When she was awake, she was constantly whining or crying softly or even wailing as if in protest at times. Call me a crazy cat mama, that's OK, but I'm going to tell you what I think she was trying to tell me with her eyes, actions, and behavior.

Mommy, I'm very tired. I can't keep on like this. Something is wrong. I don't feel well but I can't explain it to you. Nudge... Do you understand? Do you see my sad eyes? Nudge... I'm trying to tell you that I don't have any energy to cover my business—thank you for doing it for me. Nudge... I don't mean to throw up the food you give me. It's good but something inside me is protesting. Nudge... When you tried to pet me, sometimes it made me feel worse so I swatted you away or took a nip at you. I didn't mean to hurt you, but how else could I tell you to stop? Nudge...

I could see your loving but sad eyes watch me. Nosers (I loved to do nosers with you—one of my ways of showing I love you, too, rubbing my nose against yours)... I hate to leave you. I see your tears and hear you crying. I always came and comforted you at such times when you were sad or upset. Nosers... I don't want to let go because I'm afraid you'll miss me too much with nobody to comfort you. Nosers... I'll always love you just as I know you'll always love me because you told me so, but I can't bear to be away from you. Nosers...

OK, that may be putting words into Joy's mouth, but I think if she could talk, that's what she might have been saying to me. It felt like she was holding on for me even though she was hurting, and I didn't want her to suffer or struggle on my account. I wanted what was best for her. I know how it is when I don't feel well and struggle to get up and get something to eat or get a shower or even talk to anyone. It's no fun, takes all your energy, and is not the way I would want to live the rest of my life. The Bible tells us to be merciful to others if we want to be shown mercy, and as I meditated on that, I knew it was time to give her up and put her down.

So my beautiful, soft, loving Joy, go to sleep peacefully, rest in peace, enjoy the eternal rest you've earned by being such a loving, faithful companion to me here, and I'll see you on the other side to share eternity with you. Until then...