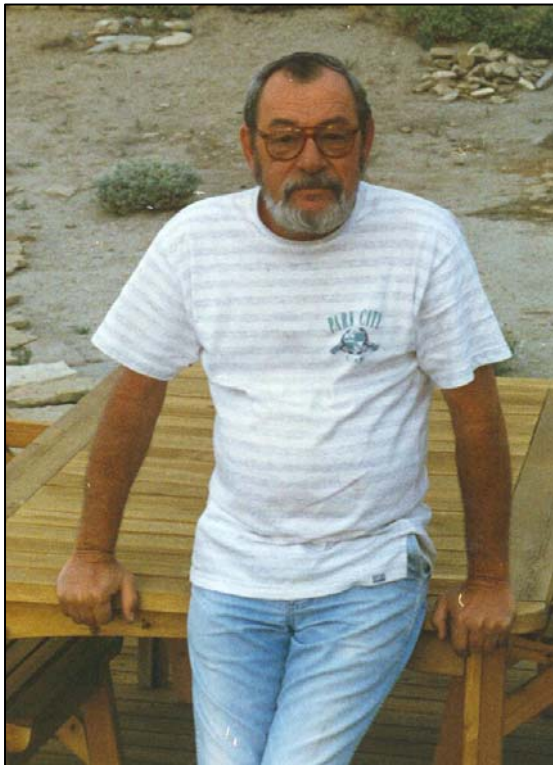


MY FRIEND BRO by Chuck Harrison

I am not a cat person. Oh, I can put up with the beasts, but I think my "problem" is that I'm an "in charge" person....and so are cats. There can only be one "in charge", and, as everyone knows, nobody, or thing, is more in charge than a cat.

I first met Bro about ten years ago. He belonged to my lady-friend, Lew. She had another cat, a female, named Hooker. At that time Bro was ten years old. Hooker was four years his junior.



Hooker was a character.

Mischievous. Bounding here and there at times, looking to create "something happening". Twinkle in her eye. Oftentimes a smile on her face. Took pride in her appearance. All in all, your typical pampered housecat.

Bro was an "observer" cat. Never got involved in things very much but always knew what was going on. He observed. He took notes. Never did smile much. About 60% of the time he looked pretty "gruffy". He just pretty much laid around, got teased by Hooker, and observed.

Six or seven months back, Lew had to have Hooker put to sleep. Hooker was sixteen years old at the time. Except for the last couple of weeks, she was still "frisky" and mischievous. Her body parts just wore out and it was necessary to put her down. Lew is a strong lady and made the decision to do what was necessary. She cried a little.

So did I....but not in front of anybody.

After Hooker was gone, ol' Bro pretty much had the run of the house. Nobody around to pester him during his frequent naps. Supper dish to himself. Didn't have to worry about which litter box was his. Pretty much the life of Reilly. And I think he kinda felt like he deserved it. After all, he'd been around for about as long as Methesula and he was going to enjoy his final days in the sun.

Literally.

The last few months, his favorite time was early in the morning when

the sun was just coming up over the Grand Mesa. Lew wouldn't be up yet. I'd let Bro out the front door when I went to get the morning paper. He'd walk to that point on the sidewalk where the shadow from the house ended and the sunshine began, then turn to the east and take a long time to settle on his haunches. His eyes closed to the sunrise of a bright new day. Remember, he was an "observer cat." He had taken notes. He knew his sunset was near. That particular time of the day was when Bro allowed himself to smile.

For the last few weeks Bro has been "down". Because of his age and arthritis he has been staggering around the house like the family drunk. But now he was starting to have problems with his vital body functions. Continual diarrhea. Etc.

When I was in high school I worked for a veterinarian after classes. Cleaning kennels, feeding animals at meal times, mopping floors, and such. Well, one thing that I learned from Doc Suda was that there was reason to be optimistic about an animal's well being as long as you could get them to eat. I can still hear it to this day. "If we can get this dude to eat, he'll go home to a happy owner."

Bro ate everyday. Two or three times. Special meals...poached trout...turkey (from the table, with dressing)...chopped sirloin, medium rare...slightly zapped baby food, chicken preferably. Bro ate...but he was losing weight.

It was obvious that the old cat was not a happy camper. He had lived twenty pretty good years. In his prime he was at least 14 inches tall at the shoulders and weighed in at close to twenty pounds. And he had a magnificent long tail. When walking, with his tail straight up, he made a two-and-a-half foot profile. A proud, handsome animal.

Yesterday Bro weighed barely seven pounds.

Today I went fishing at Rifle Gap Reservoir with my buddies Tooter and Kingo. When I got home Bro was gone. Lew had put him down. Eating or not, she couldn't bare to see him suffer any longer.

I expressed my displeasure. Then realized that she was right in so doing.

I'll miss him. Bro was my friend.