

# How are you spending your ‘dash’?

**By Jennifer Williams**

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At a funeral I attended last week, one of the speakers read the poem, “The Dash,” by Linda Ellis. The point of the poem is that while there are two dates, the birth date and the day someone dies, what is most important is “the dash” between them.

That dash represents your time on Earth and what you have done with that time – what kind of life you have lived and how you have impacted others.

I know I have done plenty of “not-so-nice” things in life, but I have tried to volunteer often and help others as much as I can.

I live in the city of Baltimore, and while there certainly is crime, there are also plenty of people volunteering and doing good deeds all the time. (The last two snowstorms, one of my neighbors kindly shoveled my steps for me.)

But when I hear of despicable, unfortunate or violent acts, I am reminded of this quote by Mr. Rogers.

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”

I often hear of the helpers, and learning of their good deeds provides solace in a sometimes cruel world.

Recently, I had a unique opportunity to become a helper. Many have probably read of the brutal stabbing death of 51-year-old Kimberly Leto who lived across from Patterson Park in the Canton area. Two teenagers who burglarized her house were arrested in connection with the murder. Leto, who graduated from the John Carroll School in Bel Air and Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore, had waited on me once or twice when she was bartending at a local Mexican restaurant that closed several months ago.

Leto had four cats, and shortly after she was murdered, a post appeared on Facebook seeking a home for one of them – a chubby, 13-year-old orange tabby named Chandler.

I have a 12-year-old orange tabby cat, Phoebe, whose brother had to be put to sleep this past August. I vowed I would not adopt another cat. I was done with all the fur, the hairballs, the extra litter pan, and the sadness of losing a pet. But when I looked at the photo of this cat, at his sweet face and large, round eyes, it was like he was literally tugging at my heart. Plus, wasn’t the fact that it would be Phoebe and Chandler (characters from the sitcom, “Friends”) a sign?

So, here I am, a month-and-a-half later, with a new member of my household. Chandler is a catnip-loving, playful, curious cuddlebug who has definitely warmed

my heart. Kim, if you are looking down from heaven, I hope you know he's in good hands and being given lots of love.



*Chandler enjoys a nap on his cat perch.*

We all only have one dash, and sometimes it's not as long as we would like. The important thing is to make the most of it.

Be a helper.

*Jennifer Williams is web editor for CatholicReview.org.*

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