

# Remembering Pharaoh

My little cat, Pharaoh, died Oct. 25th. My friend, who is the 'mother' of my cats, was with me in Pharaoh's final agony. His final death-bed cry pierced our hearts. We knew it was time to let him go.

It was as if Pharaoh was saying the words of St. Paul: "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. Now a merited crown awaits me."

My friend had invested an enormous amount of love, time, and treasure in pursuing chemotherapy and other treatments for Pharaoh. But lymphoma and leukemia are cruel enemies. They take our companion animals as well as our human companions.

Pharaoh was only about a year and a half old. We had rescued him as a stray. When we first got him, he had an upper respiratory infection and worms. We fought and won those initial battles.

Eventually he even adapted to a friendship with our other cat, Leia. Leia, in the past month, has grieved enormously. She has what psychologists would call an 'agitated depression,' on alert always, jumping at any sound that might be Pharaoh, falling into deep depressed sleeps, and, at night, I am told, she cries for hours. Our pets share our grief as well as our mortality.

There are those who wonder if we will see our pets again in heaven. As I've said so often, once we have loved something, it becomes immortal. Yes, there are those who profess with great certainty that there are no pets in heaven. I'm always curious how anyone can prove a negative. I simply think of the words of Jesus who said, "With God, all things are possible!" What does that leave out?

And St. Paul, the greatest of the apostles, could write to the Corinthians: "Eye has not seen. Ear has not heard, what God has prepared for those who love God." Paul knew that the power of God's love is beyond the power of human comprehension. God is greater than even our thoughts of God.

Our companion animals are channels to us of God's unconditional love. If you look into the eyes of a newborn baby, you know that you're looking right into the eyes of

God. They have come so recently from God. When I look into the eyes of the cats and dogs that I have loved over the years, I'm sure I see that love.

Pharaoh was a unique cat. We took him to various veterinarians and treatment centers over those last months of his life. To a person, each doctor or technician said the same thing: "We didn't have to restrain him, or sedate him. He cooperated completely. He let us do any procedure to him. He is really a unique animal."

The doctor who was with us at the moment of Pharaoh's death commented: "Sometimes the sweetest pets have the most awful diseases."

I've wondered sometimes if there might not be a 'cancer' personality. So many of the gentlest and kindest people I have known have died of cancer. It's almost as if they are so loving and welcoming that they even make diseases welcome.

Years ago I remember reading an article in Reader's Digest, suggesting that the type A personality - competitive, hard driving, etc. - more likely died of heart disease. The type B personality - more laid back, gentle, etc. - died of cancer. I've not seen any studies corroborating those thoughts, but I am curious.

So I begin Advent, my favorite time of the year, with a heavy heart because a certain cat will not be here to share my joy. There's a famous book written by Cleveland Amory, titled "The Cat Who Came for Christmas." I will be thinking of the cat who went 'home' for Christmas. As you look into your manger scenes this Christmas, along with sheep, oxen, a donkey, and various other creatures, look for a small black cat. He'll be lying in the manger with a tiny baby. Perhaps, too, you might hear his joyful meow as he joins the angelic choirs in singing the praise of this child. Why not a cat in the manger, and an angelic cat in the choir?