



Artful Hehl

January 24, 2024

The story of my little man began as so many of the best cat stories do. I was never exactly looking to get a fuzzball of my own and, honestly, at the time, was trying to find his forever home with friends, family members, and neighbors with no success. Eventually, he found it with me. It was undeniable. I was just taking a break from doing dishes and he raced behind my legs to run from my partner's cat and he looked up at me, yellow-green kitten eyes full of mischief and love saying 'You're gonna cover me, right?'

After a rough breakup and an unexpected bout of homelessness, I swore to myself that I was going to get through all of this for him. I needed to get through this for him. That 9 pounds of fluff and fur managed to brighten the darkest corners, soothing all of the very dark thoughts with a powerful, rumbling purr that was nothing short of a thundering windstorm rolling in. He was a fighter, just like his mom, and I'll be damned if he ever let me forget I was just as capable. Eventually, he got an older brother, a dog. He wanted absolutely NOTHING to do with him but he did come to tolerate him and even strive to touch him while he was asleep. He was so much of my anchor that, when my current partner and I started seeing each other, I warned him - 'My boys have to like you if you really want us to be a thing.'

As expected, the dog took to him with a duck to water, but Dodger - it took him 2, almost 3 years before he finally came to accept my partner as a part of his

family. He loved sleeping outside on our hammock chairs, enjoyed catnip like I enjoyed ice cream (which is a LOT), and watched birds, squirrels and chipmunks like his sanity depended on it. He knew tricks, loved with his whole body, hated tuna, always blessed us after every sneeze, and always made sure Mom and Dad were fed (even if it was the same dozen toys he hunted and left on the bed). The final week of his life was a huge fight he eventually was unable to continue doing. But like the entire rest of his life, he continued to remind me - he was a fighter. And he wasn't going to let my arm go very easily.

Friends, if you have a cat, please get them checked, in-depth, for heart disease. If we are able to share his story with even one family and save another furbaby's life, it would help his memory live on.