

Herbie

Herbie was my mom's cat. He had to be put to sleep today. I was in the room with ma and Herbie when he passed, and I want to apologize to Herbie.

Herbie had been having trouble getting his business done for the past half year or so, especially the past week, so mom called her cat doctor, who was on vacation, so she called another cat doctor and made Herbie an appointment.

Herbie was 17½ and lived four of those years with mom and dad, five more with mom alone. Herbie would smush his 25 pounds of coon catness beside dad on the recliner, and dad would pet Herbie all evening, while all three of them, mom, dad, and Herbie, watched television. When dad died, and you don't have to care or believe me, or believe in the spirit of this, but when dad died, Herbie mourned him by not getting up into dad's recliner for nearly a month. Herbie would sit in front of the recliner, look at it for a good spell, and go rest somewhere else. Good soul.

After dad died Herbie became mom's main man. His giant green eyes looking after her like his life depended on her. Which of course it did.

Mom feared Herbie might not come home from the doctor's this time, but she hoped the doctor would be able to get Herbie flushed out enough to send him home for one more run. I hoped the same. We always want a little more. "Fries with that?" Yeah, fries, and another two weeks with ole Herbie around would be just fine, thank-you.

So when ma got the call this morning saying Herbie's kidneys had done their last work, she wasn't surprised.

I watched the slow but dignified death of my father, saw him lying passed away in his bed. Saw my aunt lifeless in her bed at the nursing home too. I've been around my share of old, and very sick, and extremely hurt people, but I've never been witness to putting an animal down, which I feel is why I screwed up.

Ma and I were in the room when a nurse brought Herbie in, two IVs held with gauze and stuck in his little forearm. On the table Herbie cawed a bit, but it didn't seem like he was in pain. I'd like to think his caw was more from discomfort than blatant pain.

Ma kissed Herbie and told him she loved him and that she will always love him. I petted him and listened to what the doc had to say. I put my ear down to the bulk of Herbie's body to hear if he was purring. He wasn't.

Cause she doesn't stand long stretches well at 80, ma settled on a bench a couple feet from Herbie. I stood behind Herbie as the doc went about presenting a sedative into his arm. I lightly stroked Herbie's back a bit, but when the doc plugged the shot of relaxant into the IV, I let up petting.

Herbie fell into a medicated haze, a sleep, basically. I walked over to ma and put my hand on her shoulder, tapped her a couple of times, then the doc quietly said, "this will stop his heart," as he administered the second and final dose.

Gentle ending of a gentle giant, a 17½-year-old, green eyes the size of marbles, nice as can be, at one time 25-pound cat.

Why do I want to apologize to Herbie? Because I wasn't chatting with him as the doc gave the first sedative. For some reason I thought getting in too close to Herbie could muddle the procedure. I've always had good instincts, known what to do and say to folks who're hurting. But this was different. This was someone who was going *out*, right then and there, and my usual dead-on instincts let me down a little bit and I succumbed to the odd certainty of the moment.

So I'm sorry Herbie that I wasn't chatting with you as your end came. I should have been right down with you, loving you up, going about all normal saying, "Ole Herbie, he's the feller, he's a good boy, a handsome feller, you're my buddy Herbs."

Sorry about that ole Herb, cause maybe going about normal could have made the very, very end a bit more comfortable for you.

I'm not worried Herbie that you didn't have a subtle end, I'm just thinking it might have been a tiny bit better had I talked to you through it. Live and learn for me, for you Herbie, die and teach. I'll be better next time.

Thanks Herbie, for everything.