

Our Big Handsome Man January 11, 2019

Stubbs the Cat was born on the streets of L.A.
Into a feral colony, an innocent stray.
This black and white tuxedo kitten was doing OK
Until someone set him on fire one awful day.

The woman feeding the colony could see he was hurt,
So the rescue network sent out an urgent alert.
Trappers finally got him and raced to the vet,
Stubbs was in critical condition but not dead yet!

His indomitable spirit had helped keep him alive,
Gnawed off two poisoned paws—strong will to survive.
Reading the newspaper story tears streamed down my face,
Could we provide this brave cat a loving home to erase...
Memories of the trauma he had suffered in that forsaken place?

Stubbs' story went national and the donations poured in
People's compassion inspired by this courageous kitten.

~~~~~ RLG



Pam and I applied to adopt Stubbs and after a lengthy process, involving several interviews we were selected to be his human parents, not realizing how our own lives would be forever changed.

Pam gave Stubbs his new name, as a tribute to him, to the volunteer trappers who saved him, and the hundreds throughout the country who responded to his story by donating more than \$45,000 in his honor to the rescue organization that had committed their resources to save him.

We took our very shy, still somewhat terrified little guy home a few days before September 11, 2001, and waited for him to come out of hiding. Having grown up unsure where his next meal would come from, Bravo soon appeared and wolfed down dinner.

It wasn't long before he began to trust and feel safe with us. Since his right back leg now ended at the knee, and the stump had not fully healed, we began a thrice weekly ritual of wrapping a bandage around the bony stump to protect it. We declared that Bravo was a bootyful boy, and he became comfortable with our cutting off the old bandage and wrapping a new one around and under his stump---quite the fashion statement!

Bravo's front left paw was very short and fleshy, and useful mostly to hold in the air, and, cocking his head, look cute! He would even try to sharpen his non-existent left front claws, futilely reaching for the scratching pad.

Our new celebrity made his first and only public appearance in the spring of 2002, when he was honored at the "Stubbs to Bravo" fundraiser at a lovely home in Pacific Palisades. Pam held our scared little guy all afternoon while adoring fans petted him and had their pictures taken with him. By the time we got home, though, Pam's dress had been shredded, so she just threw it out. And that night we promised Bravo that he would never be subjected to another public event.

In the meantime, Bravo was incredibly joyful in his play and though he walked with a limp, he ran fast and jumped gracefully. After Michael (orange tabby) and his brother Nosey (gray and white tabby) joined him and sister Eliza in our family, Bravo's favorite game became fishing pole thingy, or FPT for short. Though Nosey was the MVP of FPT, Bravo was a close runner-up, and loved jumping onto or up

from the bed to capture whatever was dangling at the end of the fishing pole thingy.

Bravo was also an inveterate licker, who loved grooming us as well as himself. To this day, Pam has never needed micro dermabrasion, because she has Bravo to lick her face every morning. And I can count on him to lick the post-workout sweat off my arms.

Because he wasn't neutered until after he was rescued at 7 or 8 months old, and he's a good-sized tuxedo tomcat, Bravo also has a large head. So when our veterinarian in Williamsburg described him as a "big handsome man with a big man head", the label stuck! She also noted in his chart: one-and-one-half legs on each side! And by the way, as much as Bravo hates going to the vet, he is totally compliant in their care, and every vet has clearly loved him.

Bravo's also an alpha male, and our other cats are well aware that he's top cat, in spite of his disability. In fact, he would outwrestle Nosey every time the latter would initiate a match. We also need to acknowledge that he can be a bully, as our orange tabby Ruby will attest—wherever Bravo wants to sit, he simply intimidates Ruby or anyone else, for that matter, to move. Even at his advanced age of 17, he's still the boss, though not as forceful as he used to be.

Life is tough for cats born in the wild. They don't know human touch and are constantly vigilant and alert to potential danger. This helps explain why Bravo still burrows under a pillow when there is so much as a knock at the door, or hides under the day bed ("trundling"), or seeks refuge in the comfort of a "house" of pillows we build for him on our bed. Interestingly, though, Bravo doesn't act so shy with cat people, since he can apparently sense them. Bravo has demonstrated his intelligence in many ways, including behaving like a willful, three-year old child throughout his life. Bravo's communication skills are very good, and since Pam "speaks cat", they usually understand each other. And a number of years ago, when Bravo had begun to pee on a chair in Casey's room (our niece, who lived with us at the time), we employed an animal communicator to good effect. It seems that Bravo was upset with Casey for not showing proper gratitude for what Pam had done for her. So when the communicator talked with Bravo about how he might indicate his displeasure in a more productive way when he was upset, he agreed to sit on a chair under the dining room table.



Though Bravo had never before spent time in the dining room, in less than a week we found Bravo on a chair in the dining room! This was repeated several times before we moved back to California from our Williamsburg home.

We have always been drawn to helping the most vulnerable among us, whether blind students, developmentally disabled children and adults, or abused children, and now, homeless cats. For us it's about ensuring that all living beings have a fair chance in life and the opportunity to realize their full potential. One of our favorite books is "The Power of the

Powerless", which Bravo epitomizes. His legacy will be the thousands of cats who were saved through our rescue work since we adopted him.

With golden eyes not unlike the sun's rays, it felt like we were looking into each other's soul, such a penetrating gaze...

We cannot imagine life without Bravo, though we'll have his press clippings, the Animal Planet video, a beautiful portrait painted by a friend, and his "cuddle clone", a stuffed cat we commissioned who is a remarkable likeness. Most of all, though, we'll have the memories of a precious little being who gave our lives meaning. A standing ovation for Bravo!



### **Epilogue---June 7, 2019**

Bravo was helped to cross by our wonderful mobile vet, Dr. Peter, appropriately enough, on Mother's Day, May 12, 2019. Our "child" had declined in the prior couple months—a combination of kidney failure, anemia, and possibly a fast growing tumor above his left eye sapped all his strength and we realized it was time. We spent the afternoon on our front porch holding hands/paws while waiting for Dr. Peter to arrive.

I was comforted in the middle of the night May 30, to know that his spirit is still with us. I was awake at the time, when suddenly, my body was overwhelmed by a warm and tingly feeling that lasted for several minutes. Nothing like that had happened to me since my dad died 10 years ago. The same thing happened a week later. It had to be Bravo connecting with me and assuring us that he was OK....we're still not, our house seems empty without him, but we're trying to cope.