

KEEPING HER



WARM

Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.

1 Corinthians 10:24

CATS ARE NOT KNOWN FOR THEIR PHILANTHROPIC OR HEROIC BEHAVIOR. They do not enjoy a reputation for selfless, sacrificial acts toward others. A cat will not leap into a surging stream to save a drowning child. One does not see “guide cats” leading the blind. Cats are not employed after earthquakes and tornadoes to search for bodies or survivors amidst the wreckage.

This does not mean, however, that cats are utterly devoid of deep feelings and emotions. Just that they express them in a less-obvious manner. A cat may not slather you with sloppy wet devotion, but, to the discerning, the feline can be as loving and affectionate as their near-cousin, the more demonstrative canine.



A little over a month ago our oldest girl, Amelia, reached the point where the condition of her internal organs and arthritic joints became too much for her to bear. And she was laid to rest.

Amelia was seventeen years old, and had been with us since the night her mamma gave birth to her and her three brothers out under the woodpile during a thunderstorm. One day, a few weeks later, that roly-poly, white, gray and gold kitten waddled eagerly toward this writer with expectant amity—and from that moment on she was a part of the indoor family. Her rotund figure betrayed the fact that she had no doubt consumed the lion's share of her mamma's milk. Not surprisingly, she expected a similar level of privilege from her new indoor sisters. Indeed, for the rest of her long life Amelia invariably *took* more than she gave.

Reflections
by the Pond

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To her credit, when the new kittens came into our family a couple of years ago, she accepted them graciously—with only the requisite amount of preliminary hissing and spitting to establish pecking order. To *their* credit, the youngsters—Pooki and Eli—were dutifully respectful to their older sister.

And they were to the end. During her final days, when Amelia was not feeling well, Pooki and Eli sat with her, kept her company, and laid next to her to keep her warm. In the simple, understated way of cats, they ministered to their older sister as best they could.



Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2

God's continuing grace is never more eloquent than when it is extended through the simple kindness of a friend.

We live in the age of round-the-clock cell phone connections. We need never be more than an obnoxious ring-tone away from speaking with anyone, anywhere. Even so, there are times when we must turn off the little plastic wonder, forcing the caller to leave a message. Then he is shunted off to our fully-digitalized, virtualized capacity, off-site voice mail. Thus we need never be more than a recorded message away from anyone trying to make contact with us.

But in a time of grief, nothing is better than a neighbor.

Years ago, when my aunt died, those of us who remained were suddenly burdened with the many details and arrangements to dying. There was the funeral to plan, flowers to order, luncheons to arrange. We had to meet with the lawyer, the pastor, the funeral director. Something had to be written for the notice in the local paper.

Though it was all proper and fitting, it all can become a bit much for those who simply wanted to sit and remember the good times shared with a loved one now gone.

So in a small Midwestern town, when the family needs to run errands, yet at the

same time receive well-wishers—both in person and by phone—it is not a machine, but a neighbor who attends the phone and the doorbell. It is warm, and real, and wildly inefficient.

While we met our obligations for our aunt, instead of using voice mail or an answering machine, a neighbor gave of her time to sit at Mom's house to answer the phone and answer the knocks at the door.



Our God is not invisible. Our God is not a vaporous ghost that exists only in the fevered imaginings of empty-headed supplicants.

Our God is as real as those who carried the person of Christ into our midst by their gentle help, their quiet patience, their willingness to set aside everything else to minister to friends.

The nurse who tenderly kissed my aunt's forehead in her dying moments; those who sat and quietly listened to, or joined in, our grief; those who prepared and delivered the meals which sustained us; those who thought less of their own time than their devotion to a friend—all made themselves available to a loving God who cares for His children through the hands of those nearby.

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Galatians 6:9-10

Here is the grace of God played out in a fallen world. It is the simple eloquence of one cat silently comforting another. It is the homely mercies of one friend supporting another. It is the face of God dwelling for awhile in a hurting home.

