

Tale of a tabby

By Ruth Ostrow

MY Sydney friend, Gwynne Jones, and her daughter had a much-loved cat, Jack. While Gwynne and I were on a yoga retreat together in Byron Bay, Jack ran away from the place in Sydney where he had been billeted. There were frantic phone calls between my girlfriend and her teenage daughter as, day after day, their pet didn't return home .

Being a cat girl, I offered words of advice. "He's probably just gone sooky because you're away. Cats can become punitive or confused when things go out of sorts." But each day she would come in looking glum, and her daughter would ring on the mobile in tears.

My friend would cry because one small loss can trigger memories of other, bigger losses. And her losses triggered my own, and that horrible feeling of having to let go too soon.

Some days, with the intensity of the yoga and the cleansing process that was going on as memories came to the surface, we would both grieve the passing of loves, friendships, and a time when the world felt safe.

When she returned to Sydney, my friend bought a new kitten. The kitten brought hope into a family that had previously suffered a relationship breakdown. Until sadness again visited. Within a few weeks of the kitten being brought home, it got hit by a car and had to be put down.

My girlfriend and her family buried the kitten, and with it the sense of hope. I once thought it utterly self-indulgent to mourn pets so deeply. I now understand that love cannot be quantified by the size and height or even worthiness of the objet d'amour. Love just is. And its force is unconditional.

Four months after Jack had vanished, on the very night the family was sitting in a circle doing a ceremony for the kitten, there was a scratching at the door. There stood Jack. Returned from his travels. Motley, worse for wear, but proudly sauntering in as if nothing had happened. He had found his way home.

When Gwynne rang and told me this story I had tears in my eyes. It's been such a hard, hard time on the planet with so much bad news. And I really wanted to say this: miracles do happen.

One should never lose hope. And we must celebrate the beautiful personal triumphs of each mundane moment, because that's what makes living worthwhile as we each struggle to find our way home.

www.ruthostrow.com

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