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Client Notes: Elegy for Louis

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Elegy for Louis

The following is a letter written in March 2005 by Michelle Chasin, a client of Dr. Margaret Gordon, V'02. In a kind of elegy, Michelle details for friends and family the experience of living with her cat Louis, her concern during his illness and the immense grief after his death. Dr. Gordon is an associate veterinarian at a New York animal clinic.

Many of you know that on March 13, 2005, my cat Louis passed away from pancreatitis, a side effect of the cancer he had battled for nearly two years. He is survived by his brother Miles, his cousins Josephine and Little One, and the memory of his late cousin Agnes.

I adopted Louis and Miles from the North Shore Animal League 11 years ago. I had intended to bring home a single kitten, but when I saw Miles and Louis hugging at the back of their cage, their arms wrapped around each other's necks, I was instantly smitten.

I have known and loved many animals, but Louis was my feline soul-mate. Call it chemistry, perhaps kismet, but we intuitively understood each other in the pre-verbal space that the best relationships with animals allow us to inhabit.

“ Call it chemistry, perhaps kismet, but we intuitively understood each other. . . . ”

Many felines earn their renown for their sharp wits, feisty temperaments and finicky preferences. Louis was more of a dopey, goofy lover. In fact, were it not for his distinctly feline luxuriating tendencies, he might even have been mistaken for—dare I say it—a canine. Louis was fond of draping himself around the back of my neck, waltzing with me as I prepared for an evening on the town, sitting with his paws on the edge of my tub as I showered and following me through the four apartments we shared over the years. Louis also never went to bed before I did. Even when I was in graduate school,



Michelle and Louis

occasionally not returning home until the early hours of the morning, Louis would wait up (even Noah eventually fell asleep, magazine on his chest, light still on).

In summer 2003, Louis was diagnosed with small cell lymphoma. After a difficult first few months, by September Louis was back in top form. Despite his twice-daily routine of pills and hydration, and his regular visits with the sage and compassionate Dr. Margaret Gordon, Louis's final year-and-a-half would have been envied by even the most discriminating of cats.

His death, too, remains vivid in my memory as a singular tribute to his generous and courageous spirit. Louis spent his final day on the bed reclining with Miles and me, in a room overflowing with flowers and candles. An hour before the doctor was scheduled to arrive for the euthanasia, Louis roused himself and stumbled from my belly to my arms. A moment later, he stood so as to scrunch himself more tightly against me and took his last breath. His leg shook and then he collapsed in my arms.

Every day that I knew Louis, my heart expanded. He had an amazing ability to rouse my capacity for deep love and nurturing. Though Louis is gone, I carry with me the memory of his benevolent spirit and, in my relationship with my human soul-mate, the great joy of living with an open heart. As a way of maintaining a connection with Louis, I have decided to fund a research study on small cell lymphoma in his honor at the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary School, the alma mater of Louis's beloved vet. Given all I received from him, it seems fitting to mark his death with a gift.

—MICHELLE CHASIN