

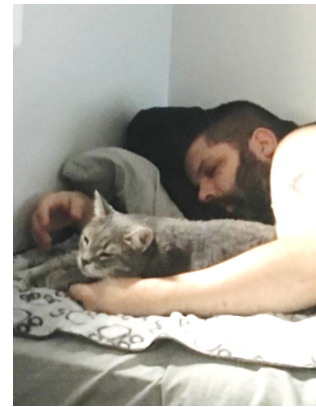
D.J. Ozog

Lindsey Malone (Nee Haines)

EWC4Uba

Oct 15th, 2021

Smokey the Cat



The streets of Toronto can be messy. After a long winter, Torontonians have to navigate the streets carefully. Dodging empty syringes, bags of trash, and dog shit somebody decided to leave for the spring thaw. Spring is great and all, but the odor downwind can be nauseating. I'm not sure why anyone would want to live there, but Toronto was where I had ended up anyway. A block away from the Eglinton station sounded like a good idea, but a decade into it, the construction that was started shortly after I moved there had never stopped. Roughly a dozen high-class and overpriced condos surrounded our small little flat that weren't there when we first moved.

Did I forget to mention the noise? Not only was traffic an issue 24 hours a day, but they decided that Sunday at 8am was the perfect time to build condos. And to be blunt, it wasn't. At all. Construction dirt filled the air, ruining many air conditioners. Red dust stained TVs, drapes, and areas that should've been dusted every 15 minutes but obviously never were. On top of that, getting out of your drive-way could take up to a half hour. Why? Because traffic is non-stop. 24/7.

Toronto was never a goal for me. I never wanted to move there. I never planned on moving there. I barely even wanted to visit, but one faithful day, I got a promotion from Manager, to Senior Manager and off to the big city I went. Then a couple of years passed and I moved on to other careers. A decade and a bit in, Toronto had drained me of any soul I might've had. The constant noise, the air quality, the amount of people traveling throughout the city is fun to watch, but terrible to be a part of. It was time to go, so the Golden Horseshoe I once escaped from called to me once again and I moved back.

Right before I decided to move back, my mother went through some terrible shit. Her best friend Lynne had passed away. Then her best friend's husband, Larry. Then her next-door neighbour. The kicker? They all lived in the same building. Lynne and Larry were right under her apartment. They had grown so close that my mother was their emergency contact for all situations. They travelled the world together. They were family. Then they were gone. It was then that my spouse and I decided we'd look for a place that would be suitable for all of us. My mother is awesome, so it was something I've always wanted to do anyway. Along with her, we'd also be adding 2 fuzzy creatures to our family. Bébé and Gigi, so we decided we'd look for a property that was either close together, or something livable. We ended up finding a house that has two apartments in it near Brock for almost 40% less than what we were paying in Toronto, and a door that joined both of our apartments together inside.

In the midst of the move, my mother called me sobbing. She was crying so hard that I couldn't understand her. Eventually, having calmed down a bit, she said that Lynne's cat couldn't find a home and she was calling to beg us to take him in and not put him down. I'm not sure what made my mother cry so hard, and I'm not even sure why she'd fear asking such a question in the first place, but we're not the kind of people to put pets down. So of course, we took him in.

Lynne and Larry loved that cat. Never having their own children, Smokey filled the void. Because of their relationship with my mother, Smokey was always somewhere in the background. He was spoiled the entire time and loved as much as any cat could be loved. He was around us for holidays. They cooked him food, pet him constantly and let him sleep on their laps. So you can imagine how confused this poor little creature was when he was caged up in his old home for the trip to us.

He wouldn't leave the cage for days. Not to eat, not to poop, not to explore. It was obvious he was scared, even though he's been around us before, and had been around the other cats too. Adrian took it upon himself to spend the majority of time on the floor with him. From doing work, to eating dinner, to simply just talking to the little guy. To be blunt, Adrian doing that really impressed me, as my spouse, and as a person. His kindness and patience paid off and eventually Smokey joined us.

We had originally agreed to letting the cats come downstairs every now and then, but we thought that we'd be able to control that. Instead, they all demanded to roam freely between apartments so we put a cat-door in. After everything settled, Smokey ended up making our apartment his homebase. He'd spend every second with us. He'd be on the couch, or on one of our beds. He'd squeak a little "hello" every time he saw us. He was very kind, and we fell in love with how he tried to meow often, never really realizing this was actually an issue. Until it was too late.

Around the fall of 2019, Smokey was meowing even quieter, and his breath was noticeable at all times. We eventually took him to the vet. In the very same room we put my childhood dog down, we learned Smokey had cancer. It was fatal, but apparently we had some time left with him so we decided to make the best of it. We agreed to visit the vet weekly to get some sort of steroid injection and it was something we could live with. However, should something change, we'd need to make a decision and we'd need to make it quickly.

Smokey and I had grown really close. He was mostly *my* cat, and he spent almost all of his time with me. He'd sleep with me, wake up with me, follow me around the apartment and was basically attached to my side. Once he was diagnosed, I moved my bed to wherever he was in the house. If he was in the living room, I'd drag my bed to the living room floor. If he was upstairs, I'd drag it upstairs too. Each and every night. And I was happy to do so. Each moment he had left would be filled with love and companionship. I would've dragged my bed around the world if needed.

But life is cruel. On Halloween night weeks later, he lost his battle in Adrian's arms and we laid him to rest. I was nearly 40 and while I've lost people in my life, nothing had hit me this hard before and I wasn't prepared. I didn't care when my grandfather died. I was even a pallbearer at his funeral. I didn't care when my father died. I don't even know where he was buried, or if he was, or when he died. I've lost friends to suicide, drugs, and life – yet nothing had hit me like this.

I spent months grieving. I'm not even really sure I've ever got out of it. What was the most painful, is that we have 2 other cats in the house, and they're obsessed with my spouse. So while he was grieving, the cats would comfort him. They'd sleep with him and pay attention to him, and it just made me feel lost and resentful. Eventually they came around though, and I'm writing this with one in my lap. It just took 2 years to get here.

After we lost Smokey, my day-to-day habits became overwhelming loud. The rat-tat-tat of the keyboard. The news, constantly telling me the world was ending. The central-air unit, breathing against my skin in some annoying way. The smoke in the room from the constant pot use. The lack of degrees on the wall. That little piece of flooring that's angled somehow to constantly cut your foot when you walk

over it absent-mindedly. The silence. Something had to give. I couldn't keep trying to push circles into squares. So one by one, I started addressing the habits.

I filled my home with noise. Podcasts, audiobooks and comedy sets played constantly. 24 hours a day, silence was forbidden. I went to sleep with scary stories, I woke up to Dax Sheppard and Tig Notaro. I closed my air grate and opened windows, no matter how cold it was. I quit smoking pot entirely. Going from being constantly stoned for the last two decades to sobriety was unique. I realized that I hadn't spend one second of my adult life sober. Sure, there were some days I didn't smoke up before work. I didn't drive stoned so once I smoked up that day, all travel was off. I fixed the floor.

Life went on. Through silencing the silence, I started healing. The fog from being stoned for 20 years eventually lifted. I had found podcast after podcast, audiobook after audiobook of people that I felt were speaking directly to me. I listened to all these people who had suffered through many of the same issues I had, and they were thriving. I came across a podcast my ex did, who is now a published writer! My envy, no longer suppressed from being constantly stoned, turned into ambition and I went back to school.

Smokey wasn't in my life for long. But because of him I went back to school. Because of him I sobered up, and because of him, my life is richer. His remains are somewhere in my house, Where? I don't know. I'm not ready to see him yet. My reaction to his passing scares me though. If a cat can do this to me, what am I going to do when it happens to somebody I care about?

Writing Decisions

Showing or telling:

For “Smokey the Cat”, I used a bit of both. The writing prompts I chose involved animals, and a photograph. So I made the whole story about an important animal to me, and a photo of us. Throughout the majority of the story, I use ‘telling’ more as I describe situations more abstractly than literally. The “Showing” is in the photo.

Perspective:

I chose 1st person perspective for “Smokey the Cat”. I wanted to write something meaningful and personal, so this perspective is the best for that. And while that’s one reason, another I have is a bit more selfish. I’m about to make my own podcast series and I really need to focus and learn how to tell a good story about myself.

Literary device(s):

I think for literary devices, I focused heavily on only a few. Imagery, with my descriptions of Toronto and how life was after major drama in the plot. I also used analogy and metaphor. For example, “silencing the silence”, “Dodging empty syringes”. There’s also a bit of Foreshadowing when I mention Smokey’s meow for the first time.

Stylistic devices(s):

Some stylistic devices I used include anaphora, in the conclusion with “because of him”, hyperbole with my description of Toronto with “dodging empty syringes, bags of trash, and dog shit”. My main device was “First-person narrator”.

Character Types(s):

Since the story was about me and my cat, I guess the main character type used was “protagonist”. Unfortunately I think Smokey ended up being the “antagonist” and while it’s technically true, I don’t like it. Because he can’t be. Another I used is “Deuteragonist / Love interest” with the inclusion of Adrian.

Sensory Detail(s):

For this assignment, I used a lot of sensory detail. Especially while describing Toronto, “empty syringes, bags of trash, and dog shit somebody decided to leave for the spring thaw”. Also focusing a bit on the massive construction that lasts for decades is a great sensory detail that allows me to physically smell those exact surroundings. In the paragraph where I describe my day-to-day habits was also a lot of sensory details. “The rat-tat-tat of the keyboard. The news, constantly telling me the world was ending. The central-air unit, breathing against my skin in some annoying way.”