

Sometime around 1995, we can't quite exactly agree when, a little black kitten showed up at our house. It was a dreary, damp, rainy spring day, and I kept hearing something that sounded like a kitten meowing. I had looked outside several times but could find no sign of a kitten, yet every time I went back inside the house I would hear it again.

I went out on the back deck, and could hear it plainly. When I finally got down on my knees, I saw the little squirt under the grill. I reached under and pulled out a scrawny wet black kitten that could not have been more than five or six weeks old.

Finding a kitten was kind of unusual, because we had no cats and we live at the end of a long dead end lane off a dead end road. We didn't really have any nearby neighbors, and this little booger wasn't big enough to travel very far on its own.

We fed him, so of course he adopted us.

The weather was still cold at night, so I let him into my studio where he seemed very much at home. He would sit on top of the speakers or sometimes on Jack Bonsell's shoulder, while we played music. Loud music did not seem to bother him at all. He could sleep through a full volume band rehearsal. He was just the "Sound Cat."

Whenever he was outside he had a bad habit of sitting on top of the tires on my panel van. At the time, I was doing a lot subcontracting and used the van for tools, equipment and ladders. I would always blow the horn before starting the engine to make sure he was not under the van when I took off.

One morning I was in a hurry, and I forgot to blow the horn. I started the van and put it into reverse. As soon as the van started moving, I felt a bump, heard a yowl, and saw "Sound Cat" running over the hill into the brush.

I stopped and got out of the van. I could hear him "screaming" pitifully somewhere in the brush. I picked my way through the multi-flora rose and blackberry bushes until I found him sitting on a downed tree limb meowing very loudly.

I could see that his left front leg was in an unnatural position, so I carefully scooped him up and headed back to the house. I called Doc Richmond, and excitedly explained how I had run over our kitten, and how I thought his front leg was broken. Doc told me to come right out and he would check him over.

When we got to Richmond's, Doc picked the little Sound Cat up by the scruff of his neck, and kind of shook him. The leg dangled loosely. Doc commended me on my diagnostic skills, and confirmed that the cat's leg was broken.

After X-raying and treating Sound Cat, Doc told me that the break was not in a place that would lend itself to a cast. So instead, the leg would need to be otherwise immobilized in some sort of a sling contrivance for at least four to six weeks. I thanked Doc, and left.

About six weeks later, Doc called and told us the kitten was ready to come home. Honestly, he had been at the Richmond compound so long, we had almost forgotten about Sound Cat. I remember thinking the bill for that long term care would likely be very high. So I headed to Doc's with my checkbook.

Sound Cat had a bit of a limp, but otherwise he had recovered completely. He was full of energy and ready to get out of his holding pen. I asked Doc for the total, and when he said \$50, I was astonished. That seemed like nothing for all the care and feeding, and medical attention. I paid the bill and headed back home with our little black Sound Cat.

We finally decided Sound Cat was part of the household, and he needed a better name. Since he had cost me \$50, we dubbed him "Ulysses," for Ulysses S. Grant, whose face is on the fifty dollar bill.

Ulysses lived the good cat life for the next several years.

In about 1998, our old faithful Australian Shepherd, "Pepper," died. We were all pretty devastated, and it took a while, but we finally decided we needed another dog. Somehow we ended up adopting two small male dogs that were "brothers," but clearly had different fathers. They looked nothing alike. They were also completely undisciplined and seemingly un-trainable.

Ulysses hated those dogs. They chased him and tormented him, and generally made his life miserable. So he left. He hit the road.

We would see him, or thought we did, every once in a while. He would be in a field a mile or so away, over on the next ridge. I even thought I saw him at my mom's farm a couple of times. But we were catless for many years.

In 2000 we moved back home from Malaysia, where we had lived for the better part of a year. While we were gone, those dogs had decided they did not like living at my mom's farm where they were boarding, so they vanished. They were never recovered by the dog warden, so they probably found themselves a home they liked better. Meantime, my mom decided we needed animals around, so she had gotten us two female cats that were Siamese mix.

One fine summer day, we were sitting on the front porch when a black cat just walked up out of the woods and started eating the cat food from the bowl that was filled for the Siamese sister cats. As we watched in disbelief, the black cat walked over to Connie's chair – with a slight limp – and jumped up on her lap and lay down.

Ulysses was back. The two stupid dogs were gone, so he decided to come home.

He never left again. For the next 12 years he rarely left the porch. If he did, it was to go to the deck for food, or to the weeds for a nature call. As he aged, we would let him in

the house when the weather turned cold. He would sit contentedly on our laps for hours, and he slept at the foot of our bed.

By November of 2012, Ulysses was an old cat. He had allergies that made him sneeze in the summer, and his eyes would sometimes water when the right pollens were thick in the air. He had gotten so he didn't like to move much. Probably arthritis in that broken leg. He would sit in one spot for what seemed like hours, and would only move if it was for an opportunity to sit on our laps.

Then one day, as I happened to be looking out the front window of our house, I saw Ulysses heading out the driveway. He was trotting! He turned and trotted down across the field through which our driveway winds and he disappeared into woods. He was moving like I had not seen him move in years. He looked full of energy. He was on a mission.

But it was Ulysses' last mission, from which he would not return. We think he knew it was his time, and he wanted to go on one last hunt. Or perhaps he just wanted to die in peace, back where he had come from, wherever that was.

Rest in peace, Ulysses the Sound Cat. We miss you.



Ulysses and friend, Lucy, summer of 2012