



Source: Michael Gawenda, 'Yes we did suicide attacks, but we are not terrorists', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 28/03/06.

Tags: [animals](#), [death](#), [disease](#), [husband/wife](#)

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Last Friday I had surgery. Nothing big, but enough for my first general anaesthetic. However remote, there was the possibility I could die, and though I wasn't really troubled by the thought, I did feel pretty sure I'd know that I was dead in one of two ways. Either I simply wouldn't know, or else I'd look to my left and see my cat Odette lying with her face tucked into my neck, purring madly.

I believe there is nothing after the current something. That thought breaks my heart. It isn't that I want Heaven, with its stirring music, its gravity defiance, its hierarchies. It's that not so many years ago I met someone who made me want to live forever, because that might be just long enough for all the love. And the someone whom I love beyond death is also the man who gave me Odette. And Odette, now, is dead.

Odette was my husband's greatest gift to me, and I think it's fair to say that I was his greatest gift to Odie—or Podle Cat, Lee Popo, the Rug-Bucket, or any of the other nicknames we had for her. She had more nicknames than any other animal I know, which suggests something about her rich personality. Cats do have them. Odie had been left with him by an ex-girlfriend, and though my husband would never have then given her away, and though he cared for her and loved her, I think she still felt as left behind as she was. She was what many tortoiseshell cats are, yowley and territorial, and she also tended to be grumpy and wary of other people. Before we met, I don't think she felt she was anyone's favourite. But she quickly became my best beloved cat, and before too long she was sleeping on my side of the bed, curled up and burrowed in next to me. She got the nickname Pasha, because occasionally she would decide that the mattress was too hard, and that where she really wanted to be was wrapped around the top of my head on the pillow. Cat Hat, we called it. She also became much more affectionate with other people, and was usually downright friendly, though she was also quite discerning.

She was my by-my-side animal, and went everywhere with me, as long as it was in the house. When either my husband or I came home, she would come running to meet us at the door. She was a very routinized cat, and could be depended on to do pretty much the same things at the same point in the day—though often with surprising variations. Her evening schtick was particularly sweet. As we got ready for bed, she would stand outside the bathroom chatting to us as we brushed our teeth. (We had a lot of great conversations, she and I, though I'm still not sure of the substance of much of it. But she was a great talker.) She would enter the bathroom and sit in the same small corner behind the door for a minute or

two, then go into the hallway and wait for us to get into bed. When we did, she would come around to my side and wait for her invitation—not that she needed to. 'Come to your spot, Odie,' I'd say, and she'd hop up on the bed, knead her paws in the space next to me, and settle down. But only for five or ten minutes. Then she would get up, have a midnight snack, go upstairs to the litter box, and then return, the gait of her descent sounding like a small pony. Then back up onto the bed, where she would throw herself against me, purr like mad, and settle in for a sleep. In the morning, she would leap like a show horse over anything in her way to get to breakfast. She had a short wheelbase, but she was enormous, and I loved her for that.

She was a whiz at getting petting out of people, and had a particularly persuasive way of pushing her head into your hand, and telling you exactly how she wanted to be stroked. And most people listened. I certainly did.

She was nearly impossible to pill. No method worked more than once. This was frustrating, but also impressive. I was always secretly proud of her for being so smart and so quick to figure things out.

I always thought I would grow deep into middle age with her. But as it is I feel incredibly lucky that she and I ever met at all. There are people who discount such relationships between humans and animals, and they are among the blind of the earth. Ours was a soulful friendship, and I am consoled by knowing that her last years were her happiest. They have also been mine.

I walked into the Operating Room under my own steam and got up on the gurney, where they covered me with warm blankets. They strapped my arm to a board and injected me, and also gave me something to breathe. They fixed what was wrong, at least as far as they could, and I woke up feeling much less the worse for wear than I expected. Not so much time later I arrived home. I half expected to see Odette, which is probably why I still do half see her. Above all, I try not to remember her end. It was not a good death—she was euthanased, but because of her particular illness, which they never could name with certainty, there were no veins left to administer the drugs properly. We stayed with her until the end, and after, and I spoke to her the whole time, even though she was probably past hearing me. When they put me to sleep I thought of Odette, and in my drifting mind I held her body, still warm, though she was already gone.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Alexandra Keller.*