

Yet Another Cat Tale
by Gary Saunders
Courtesy *Truro News/SaltWire*

Ever feel that you're losing it? Going crazy amid a welter of issues and problems, not to mention COVID variants Delta, Omicron and now XBB.1.5? Next stop loony bin?

I have. It happened a few weeks ago and involved our beige-and-white cat "Miracle", whom readers have already met in this column.

It began the fall before last, when that feral kitten arrived. "Oh Gary," said my spouse on spotting it outside our sliding glass door. I say "feral" because there's a dairy barn next door, which means spilled feed, which draws rats and mice, which leads to farmers acquiring cats to curb them.

"Oh Gary..." Beth repeated, "she's adopted us...even brought her suitcase!" (Whatever that meant.) "Which likely spells trouble; but she's so-o-o sweet..!"

Well, I too fell for her. After all, we always had cats and kittens when our kids were small here. And now, with all those COVID lockdowns and the kids having grown and flown, we needed a pet, sweet or no, in our rambling, 8-room farmhouse. So, we opened the door and in she came.

What followed wasn't trouble so much as adjusting to a new family member, one who moreover was an astute reader of human moods. Despite my former notion that cats were less loving than dogs, Miracle displayed genuine affection to us both. Which is why nursing homes often keep one or two.

At first, to train her and to protect our winter feeder birds, we confined her to the sun-porch. Come morning, I'd feed her there, and we'd cuddle. For added living/sleeping space, we kept the sun-porch/basement door open. This also let her escape strangers when they came knocking.

Later, her training complete, we gave her the run of the house downstairs. Still, I fretted about the woodstove. What if she scorched her fur or somehow set the house on fire while we slept? Besides, I didn't want her walking on our kitchen counters and table—or onto my PC's live keyboard upstairs.

As for me, last in bed at night and first up come morning, I saw to these things and my system worked fine—until it failed. By now she mostly slept in the living room, where my wife has slept since her 2019 fall downstairs. There "M" would cozy up to her, eventually sharing her pillow and even gently patting her forehead. Precious, healing moments.

However, now and then Miracle would scratch Beth's bare arms. Just in fun, no doubt. Still, seeing the claw marks and knowing that cats' claws are always dirty from covering their feces, we feared infection enough to again confine her to the porch/basement at night. Which she liked anyway.

Then the strangest thing happened. Three mornings in a row, I came downstairs to find her back in the kitchen or living room. Thinking that Beth had let her in (and half hoping she had), I asked her. Nope. Then how...?!? A secret passage in the cellar ceiling? I checked. There wasn't.

Baffled now, I asked again: "You're sure?" Same answer, a bit annoyed. Had the two a secret pact? Or perhaps we'd accidentally left the sun-porch/kitchen door open overnight? Now I began to doubt MY memory – even my sanity. Were there TWO identical cats? A GHOST cat?

Then one morning Beth said, "I think I know what's going on."

"You do?"

"Yes. Waking this morning, I saw Miracle come out from under the cedar chest by the window there." I peered under it and, sure enough, the furnace's warm air register was flipped over.

Then I remembered how, after we got the living room heat pump, handyman son Danny had disconnected that duct's register, pipe and all. So Miracle, roaming the dark cellar, seeing a patch of light overhead and curious, had simply climbed the rough stone wall, squeezed through the opening, dislodged the small metal grid with her head, and...Voila!

So I'm not crazy after all. Such a relief! Well, not THAT crazy.

