

# Voices

## So long to Otus, the Head Cat; companion, friend for 17 years

How do you say goodbye to a daily companion of 17 years? With difficulty, I've found out.

Otus the Head Cat, part of our family since 1975, died on April 28. He was the first cat I'd ever owned.

Jerky 8-mm home movies show a spunky little black and white kitten chasing his tail and dashing up trees after imaginary prey. But in his last declining years he mostly sat on the back of the couch or in my lap and contemplated his memories.

We thought we were going to lose him a couple of months ago when an arterial blockage paralyzed his hind legs. The old rascal seemed to be pulling through, however. He'd drag himself around the house complaining and fussing, grimly determined to be his old self. We thought he was going to make it.

In his last weeks he'd wait by the door, asking to go outside. He'd sit in the side yard with half-closed eyes watching for squirrels and dreaming the dreams of old cats. He seemed content.

But he was still unsteady on his feet and in the end that was his undoing. There's a tiny pond



in the side yard that used to hold goldfish. Perhaps he thought he spotted the fish. Or maybe he just slipped while trying to get comfortable on his favorite rock. We'll never know.

His half-Siamese heritage meant he was a talker and complainer. And he certainly talked to me. Those who have never had cats won't understand, but the rest of you will. Our lengthy conversations were the inspirations for his column. I like to think I was only taking his dictation.

That incorrigible, irascible, sophistic observer of life was his public persona. Privately he was, simply, just a good cat. He was a calming reassurance through all the trials 17 years brought — a certain routine comfort that served to smooth

life's bumps and remind me to never take things so seriously.

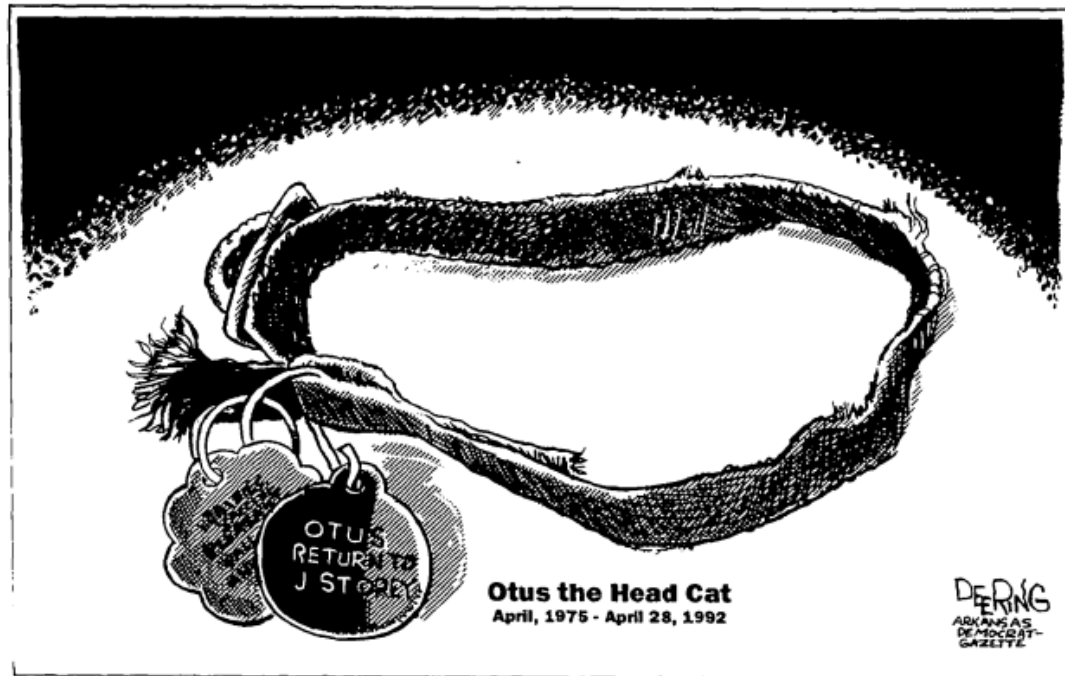
After so many years it was easy to think he'd always be there. After all, I was only 26 when he joined the family. Ahead lay a career at the paper, the end of one marriage and the beginning of another, the birth of a son, the death of a father and the countless other passages of life almost two decades bring.

Otus was there for all of it.

It will be a long time before I quit looking for him on the couch or underfoot in the kitchen.

So how do we say goodbye? For me I guess it was that last morning when I stopped on my way out the door to give his ears a good scratch. For Celia it was watching him sitting happily in the sun that last afternoon. As for Ben, our 10-year-old, he wanted to say goodbye in his own words:

*Otus was the first cat I ever knew. Otus was old, icky and gross, but I still loved him. I always thought he would be alive. Well, I was wrong, very wrong. The day Otus died, I had just come from school. My mom told me that Otus was missing. We searched for*



**Otus the Head Cat**  
April, 1975 - April 28, 1992

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/John Deering

*Otus. We could not find him. When I took a rest, I looked at the pond in my yard. The water was very black. I thought that Otus may have fallen in, but then I thought, "Na, he couldn't have." Well, he did.*

*Otus was the best cat I've ever had.*

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To his extended family of readers who also came to know and love him over the years, there is this comfort: Otus once told me that he planned to keep sending me his column from wherever it was he was going to after he was gone. "You can't get rid of me that easily, Bucko," he said with a twinkle. "I'll always be a part of you."

And so, I guess he will.

— Michael Storey

Otus the Head Cat's column will return next week. He once suggested that after he was gone, a small gift in his memory to the Humane Society of Pulaski County would be just swell. He was one of the lucky ones and he often thought of those who weren't.