

Cancer survivor rescues two cats

By Jodi Schneider McNamee
Correspondent

Last April, when retired airline captain Gary Joseph of Sisters was told he might never walk again following surgery to remove lymphoma cancer, he defied the odds. But when Joseph's cat Baby recently passed away from cancer, his resistance crumpled.

"Baby passed away five weeks ago, and it was the most devastating thing that happened to me. We were partners; she was always there for me. And for most of her life we lived alone together on my 42-foot sailboat in the San Juan Islands after I retired from the airlines," Joseph explained. "She meant everything to me."

For many people like Joseph, a pet is not "just a dog" or "just a cat." Pets are beloved family members and, when they die, there is a sense of significant — even traumatic — loss.

"I finally sold the sailboat because I was getting older, and it was just me and Baby and I figured it's time to head back to my roots, because I didn't want anything to happen to me out on the boat,"

said Joseph. "And my roots are in Sisters. I had been coming to Sisters since I was a teenager to go fly-fishing in the late '60s."

"A friend of mine from Sisters that I had known from the early 1970s offered to rent this place to me and Baby last February."

Joseph's roots in Sisters go way back to 1973. He lived in Sisters until 1981 when he took a job in Alaska as a bush pilot.

"My whole life was flying; it's a passion of mine," Joseph said.

Then in early April of last year Joseph started feeling ill, with pain in his back and abdomen.

"I ended up in St. Charles diagnosed with lymphoma cancer, Stage 1. I had surgery immediately," Joseph told *The Nugget*. "They went through my back and took out as much of the cancer as they could. But what had happened was very rare. Normally that kind of cancer affects your lymph nodes, but mine ended up wrapped around my spinal cord on the number-17 vertebrae and pinched off my spine. I was at St. Charles over a month in rehab. My landlord, Rob Cravens, and

his family took care of Baby.

"The doctors said I'd probably never walk, but I said, 'Yes I will.' When I finally got home, St. Charles home health took over and gave me therapy for three months. I am now using a walker and getting stronger all the time."

About a month after Baby passed away, he decided he was ready to adopt a cat from a rescue facility.

"I missed having a cat so much that when I saw an ad in *The Nugget* about CRAFT, Cat Rescue Adoption & Foster Team, although I was skeptical, I had my neighbor take me over to CRAFT in Bend to check it out. I walked in with my walker and found that I really liked one of the cats they had named Sadie. And when I found out she had past issues, possibly abuse, I didn't care. I have all the time and patience in the world for her. She is extremely shy and hides most of the time."

Joseph remembered seeing another cat that CRAFT had up for adoption during his visit named Bosko. Bosko was outgoing and affectionate and already knew the shy Sadie. Joseph had the idea of bringing the two back together, which might help



PHOTO BY JODIE SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Gary Joseph at home with Bosko.

Sadie's shyness at the same time.

"I went back over to CRAFT and adopted Bosko, a very sweet outgoing cat that had been at CRAFT for over a year," said Joseph. "Bosko adapted to my home immediately. He follows me around and is helping Sadie come out of her shell. We are all helping each other. Sadie comes out at night and they both play. He is a great companion for both of us."

Cats are not just great

company, low-maintenance, and independent; they are also very good for you. Looking after a pet can bring structure to a person's day; reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness and act as a link to other people.

Joseph's passion for flying hasn't burned out yet; he still flies — but a little closer to the ground.

"I own close to a dozen RC planes, gliders, and helicopters and am a member of High Desert RC," Joseph said.

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