

My cat Simon and Klaudia Birkner

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Simon, the cat, and a tribute to Klaudia Birkner, peaceful warrior and light-worker (October 29, 1972-August 9, 2013).

“And when are you going to write about Simon?”, inquired a reader of my last blog about Clara Belle. “There isn’t much to write about”, I replied. “He is pure sweetness and love. Problem free, playful, easy going, but not a push over, smells like butterscotch and manages to cohabit with Clara Belle.” Only issue: everyday ~ the moment the sun peaks over the horizon ~ he wants me to get up. Because he is so determined and creative about how he achieves his goal, I forgive him at 5:45 AM. However, at 9 AM, when he is in a deep sleep after breakfast and having so much fun, I do admit to sometimes feeling a bit resentful. But not for long...

As I think about Simon, it is obvious there actually is much more to tell. His angelic qualities set him apart. He does have his devilish side, but of course it is supremely endearing and cute. I have never encountered a more guileless being, other than perhaps Klaudia Birkner, also known under her pen name as Julia K. Anderson.

August 10 of last year, a Saturday, I was taking a bit of time to sit in my yard when a young cat walked out of the bushes behind my chair. He sought out my company, and I petted him. “New people must have moved in the neighborhood and let their little guy out”, I thought to myself.

Sunday morning he was back and dashed up to the house, showing

great interest in me and my home. I fed him, but he gave me priority over the food. I put a small dose of flea treatment on his neck area. Clara Belle didn't react negatively when he tried to jump on to my narrow kitchen window sill. I pushed a tall city trash can up to the window so he could jump up and lie on it to peer inside. Still no growling or carrying-on from Clara Belle. He stayed around the house all day, leaving periodically for a nap somewhere and then returning to the window and doors. I had the two cats meet nose to nose, separated by the screen door opening to the porch, and set up a bed for him there too. He soon discovered the squirrels in the pepper tree opposite the porch and started to run up the trunk and branches to chase them. The squirrels sure gave me a piece of their mind about that! He was so keen on human companionship, that calling out was enough to get him to come to me. At that point I told him he was welcome in my home, but only if he could sort it out with Clara Belle. If she accepted him, he was "in". Things were going very smoothly as they interacted and smelled each other on their respective sides of the screen door, so I let him in. Clara Belle had a strong reaction that indicated it was still a bit too soon, so I put him back out for the night.

The next morning, Monday, I opened up the house and looked for the little butterscotch guy. He wasn't there. I started to be concerned and so was Clara Belle. She looked for him through the door and out the kitchen window. She meowed. It seemed that in forty-eight hours he actually had won her testy self over! He finally showed up mid-morning, rather dusty, with a small wound on one ear from an encounter with another cat. That was it, my mind was made up. I opened the screen door, he walked in all happy and tail up, and has been here ever since. He arrived neutered, at about nine or ten months of age and is the very definition of clean. It is obvious he was raised with a lot of love and kindness.

Simon's energy, then and now, sparkles. When he stands in the

light, the flesh inside his ears is seashell pink; and his cream and light ginger colors blend with my home interior. Oh my! I felt this cat had dropped down straight from heaven. He was exactly the sort of cat Klaudia Birkner would have drawn to her, not me. For good reason, I get the problem cases or, at best, the difficult ones!

Two weeks prior to Simon's arrival, Klaudia asked me to come up to San Marcos to have a consult with her cat, Odelia. Usually, we worked on the phone, but I sensed this time was different. A serious, and poorly known spinal cord syndrome caused her to be bedridden for weeks at a time ~ her body as weak as a rag doll. I hadn't heard from her for a while and this latest a phone message came through a friend of hers, not Klaudia herself. Clearly, I needed to make the trip to see her and Odelia.

We met on Saturday afternoon, July 27. I located her apartment in a large, pleasantly landscaped complex in San Marcos. The front door had Klaudia hallmarks: a crafted welcome sign, planters, and a cheerful wreath ~ but the energy wasn't happy. Someone was already visiting with her and I was asked, by her friend, to wait in the darkened living room. That visitor, who appeared tearful and moved, was invited to pick a potted plant as a memento from the patio area on her way out.

Klaudia wanted to freshen up before seeing me, so I waited a bit more ~ taking in her small apartment. I had often visualized it in my mind's eye. It was cozy, cheerful, and had been decorated with care. The wall behind the couch had a lovely stenciled saying. It faced a large flat screen television. On the wall behind the dining room table was a poster-sized photograph of a downhill skier, knees bent, poles balanced, chest and helmeted head facing the slope as she raced past a gate. The skier was Klaudia. At the time, she was legally blind and followed voice commands. Still, she placed at the top, race after race, at 60 miles an hour. Her email address, 5150skiracer@, suddenly made sense ~ it was the racer

number she wore in the photograph. Klaudia had told me about her ski racing days, and how she found sponsors. I had not quite registered the reality of her abilities because of how frail and weak she had appeared since I'd known her. There were so many amazing things about Klaudia's life I still had to discover.

By the time she first came to see me in 2006, her vision was restored enough that she was able to write handwritten notes in a clear print, and she had been able to climb the twenty-five steps to my office door. Nothing indicated to me she had impaired vision. I found her to be a most delightful person. Sensitive, intelligent and heartbased; Klaudia loved animals, hers and those of her friends. She cared deeply about people and, over the years, drew to her the most supportive and helpful kind of friends. This woman was beautiful inside and out.

We had multiple consults; first about Bun Bun her first rabbit, who's company kept her going in some of her darkest hours; then Morgan and Moby, also rabbits. Morgan was a very athletic rabbit who didn't really get along with cuddly Moby, so he went to live with someone who adored him and who gave him the run of his house. Klaudia adopted and then nursed an elderly orange cat, Morris, and she became auntie to a terrier dog, Bella, who lived with her mom in Julian. Finally, she had adorable Odelia, a round-eyed tabby girl brought to her by her sister. Each of these animals had needed Klaudia's intervention at one point or another in their lives. I also worked with her sister's two Dobermans in North San Diego County. From what I could tell, she had a pretty normal family.

Therefore, when Klaudia mentioned in passing she had written a book about foster children and her experience through the foster child system here in California, it just didn't register. During that time she had juvenile diabetes and she told me she had lost her eyesight at seventeen, but that did

not register. (The loss of eyesight was not related to diabetes.) She spoke calmly, without resentment or anger, about her difficulties. They contrasted so much with the individual in front of me, that my mind balked at making the connection.

At that first encounter in my office in 2006, she wanted me to know that a consult with the late psychic, Sylvia Browne, had saved her life when she was lying near death in a hospice a some years prior. The doctors didn't know what was wrong with her. She was fading right in front of their eyes and they could do nothing. I don't know who made the call to Sylvia Browne, but the world renowned psychic found the situation so grave she agreed to make time for her and perform a once-in-a-lifetime reading immediately. Apparently, Sylvia narrowed the problem down to the brain stem and gave enough precise information for the doctors to go on. It saved Klaudia's life. One of her nine lives. I think it was then, that they uncovered a rare, life threatening spinal cord disorder that, among other things, seriously affects eyesight.

Through her animals and our consults over the years, I was privy to a lot of the difficulties Klaudia had in maintaining her health. She was in and out of hospitals regularly. Just as regularly she got overmedicated and had side effects that kept her there longer than necessary. We commiserated because, I too, being very sensitive, have to stand my ground when it comes to medicine and doses, even in the alternative medicine world. With me, Klaudia found a kindred spirit who validated that being so sensitive was a quality, not a detriment. I also confirmed her extra-sensorial abilities. For example, she would take photographs and some would show auras around the individuals. I have one she took where each person in a procession, making their way down the center isle of a Catholic church, has a whitish mist surrounding their shoulders, head and space above the head. The mist formation goes upwards. The priest, holding a tall crucifix, and closing

the procession, has a misty, but more structured and braided cord emerging from the top of his head, also in an upwards direction. I surmised he was reciting a rosary type prayer, with pauses between repetitions. All this I was more than happy to validate for her. Klaudia felt very blessed and pure to me, not unlike my boy, Simon.

Klaudia was now ready for my visit, so my mind wandering ceased and I entered her room. She had propped herself up on her pillows, and applied a tad bit of make-up. Her bed, a real hospital bed, took up a good portion of the room. There was an IV hook up, but it wasn't being used at the time. Around her, at arm's length, were all the things she needed. I saw the empty rows of cubbies along the wall by the bed, where Odelia had kept her awake playing with anything she stored in them. As a last resort, Klaudia had taken everything out and stopped using them. Dark curtains kept the harsh, summer sun from entering the room. Odelia, who I had communicated with often, hid behind stacks of books and underneath the bed. We knew each other's energy, but not in physical form. I tried to make myself as unthreatening as possible because she had a shy temperament. She would come out and then dash back behind something, although she eventually jumped up on Klaudia's bed as we started to talk and laugh.

And laugh we did that afternoon. We laughed at the idea that an afterlife might come as a big surprise to some when they, too, crossed over. I could see Klaudia was dying and, to her immense relief and delight, she talked about it openly with me. Her strength temporarily increased and she was able to see me for more than an hour. For many years she had been taking great amounts of pharmaceuticals to combat the nausea that plagued her daily. It was a horrific, debilitating nausea, most likely linked to the spinal cord issue. The doses of medicine had been increased to maximum levels. Her neurologist, a top practitioner in the area, had prescribed the latest anti-nausea drugs given to cancer patients, but

nothing was working anymore and Klaudia was at her wit's end. Literally. The nausea was linked to the circadian rhythm, which meant it kicked in as soon as the sun went down. She spent night after night, all alone in her apartment with Odelia, wracked with nausea of such tremendous intensity it left her completely drained when dawn broke and the sun rose in the sky. She dreaded sunset as a prisoner dreads entering a torture chamber—and she did so night after night.

This woman, who faced so much adversity from a tender age with great courage, had reached the end of her ability to cope. We talked about it and she shared her concerns. I listened with the ear of my heart, in the same manner I listen to the animals and their people. Without judgment, with great empathy and compassion. She wanted to be admitted into hospice. I told her she just looked too good for her doctor to believe she was dying. When I suggested she use her make-up to look much worse before he came we totally burst out laughing. At that moment, energized and enjoying our conversation, she did look good. Inside, her physical body was in ruins and her will to live was greatly diminished. Guided by her heart and soul, she had no fear of death. The process by which this was to take place was another matter. That final decision is not left to the terminal patient and it was the last challenge she would face in this life, to get her way and be admitted into hospice.

Odelia's well-being and security after she passed was Klaudia's greatest concern. The close friend who had called me, and was in the apartment, was going to take Odelia back to Nevada with her. Odelia took to this woman and I assured Klaudia that Odelia would have no difficulties in being rehomed. This good friend would also be taking care of practicalities for Klaudia for the next week or so.

Klaudia and I hugged and kissed and said good-bye. A final good-bye. We knew we would not see each other again in this life and we were perfectly fine with it. She wanted so much to be gone within seven days. She asked me if this could and

would be so. I truly didn't know, but I said "yes", because I knew my answer would bring her comfort and moral support at a time when she most needed it.

As the days came and went, I received no news about Klaudia. I tried to send out psychic feelers and I sensed she was slipping away but it was difficult to discern if she was still with us. I looked for an obituary on-line, there was none. Then one day in late September, I received a call from her sister, informing me that Klaudia had passed away August 9 (the day before Simon showed up here). Her sister was devastated by her loss and concerned about Morgan, the remaining rabbit, who appeared to be needing frequent vet visits for his teeth. I explained misaligned teeth was a problem he had had for some time and that his caretaker was probably doing the right thing and taking him to the vet as he required.

I don't know how Klaudia did it, but I feel she had something to do with Simon showing up when he did. She would also have selected his temperament. I accept the gift with gratitude and wholeheartedly desire to acknowledge her as the sender from the Otherside.

When I decided to write about Klaudia, I realized how spotty my memory was about the details of her life. I Googled her name and immediately located the information I needed, in the form of a memorial written in an e-publication. Of course, I wanted to read her book. An immaculate, used copy reached me two days later, sent by an Amazon seller in Chula Vista! Chula Vista is also the place she landed, at seven, with her mother and sister when they immigrated to freedom from behind the Iron Curtain.

This small person packed an enormous amount of experience and learning into a short forty-one years. She speaks simply, and straight from the heart, as she recounts how she ended up in foster care. The world is a big, lonely and harsh place for a

young ward of the State. She was not believed when she told the authorities about what was going on in her home and they wanted to send her back. Her straight A record at school was held against her because most abused children do poorly in school, so they thought she must have been fabricating the story about her home life. The fact that she spoke the truth and was not believed was a recurring theme in her young life.

Early on she discovered how many foster homes take the money the State gives them, but do not spend it on the children in their care. Klaudia, a child who saw much, felt the wrongs intensely, talked back, then refused to talk, got labeled as difficult, attempted suicide—was labeled mentally unstable. Klaudia's circumstances resulted in her being transferred to a psychiatric establishment for adolescents.

Juvenile diabetes added yet another layer of complications. Foster homes made sure she had insulin shots, did not understand, or dare I say, care about the importance of a modified diet. She was a problem in a system whose depersonalized approach created the very issues she suffered from. She was lonely, vulnerable, sensitive, unloved, and unseen (unless in a negative light), in short, a case number. The people meant to help Klaudia were distant and professional, when she was yearning for warmth and recognition. She loved art, but supplies were scarce to unavailable. Her book is written to enlighten professionals and the public about the foster care system, and hopefully inspire changes.

Klaudia was a smart and gifted child with amazing spirit. In spite of everything, she used any opportunity that came her way to improve herself and move forward in life. A program for handicapped children in Los Angeles introduced her to sports, skiing and then racing. Despite her physical issues and poor eyesight, she proved to be very good. It was her turning point. She was given the opportunity to finally reach her full potential and make a name and stellar reputation for herself.

She finished high school, went to college in San Marcos, and became a public speaker and member of the National Speakers Association. In that capacity she encouraged others with disabilities and addressed the issues of the foster care system in the most constructive manner. Klaudia received numerous awards in recognition of her contribution, among them: The United to Serve America Diamond Award and the Lifescan Award for Athletic Achievement.

Now, Klaudia, peaceful warrior and light-worker, is shining bright on the Otherside. May she be filled with timeless love, laughter and peace. I look at Simon and more often than not, think of her and her gentle, but ever so strong spirit. She lives on in my heart and in my cat.

For a first hand, sincere account of the trials and tribulations of going through the California foster child system:

Labeled for Life: A Story About Life in Foster Care and Total Institutions, by Julia K. Anderson (her pen name).