

FELINE PORTAL JUMPING

By Casey Gauntt
December 2011

I'm pretty sure our cat lost her hearing. I've been conducting a series of experiments over the last several weeks and the results all seem to point to a diagnosis of stone-deaf. Originally named 'Prince' by our kids until the vet upon closer inspection begged to differ, Princess is 21 years old. I'm not sure what that works out to be in cat years—it's seven to one for dogs, I think—so if she was a dog that would make her 147.

When she was a kitten we thought she was mute—she never meowed—never made a sound. Perhaps that was in deference to Garfield, a slightly older and very dominant masculine feline. Garfield was all black with an attitude. He spent the night outdoors—a carouser—and would not hesitate to brawl with the other rascal cats in the hood or the occasional skunk, possum or raccoon. Garfield did not possess the longevity gene and died of natural causes about eight years ago.



Princess taking over Jimmy's saxophone case.



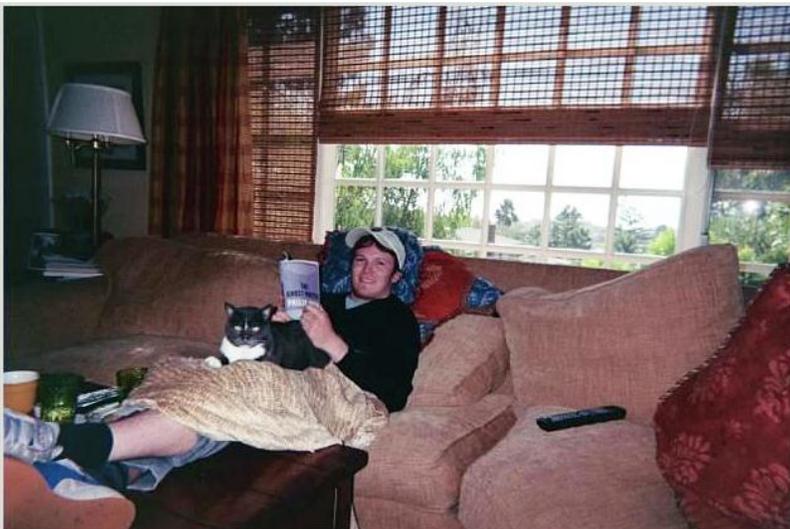
Garfield--with an *attitude*.

Princess was the runt of her litter—small, grey, with white paws and a white star in the middle of her forehead—a princess. She was not built to fight and was a full time house cat. That's not to say she wasn't curious. She'd sneak out of the house occasionally at night, but would soon climb the tree next to our house and make the five foot leap onto our second story patio—pretty impressive—and spend the night safely curled up on one of the padded chairs. We don't think she can do that anymore.

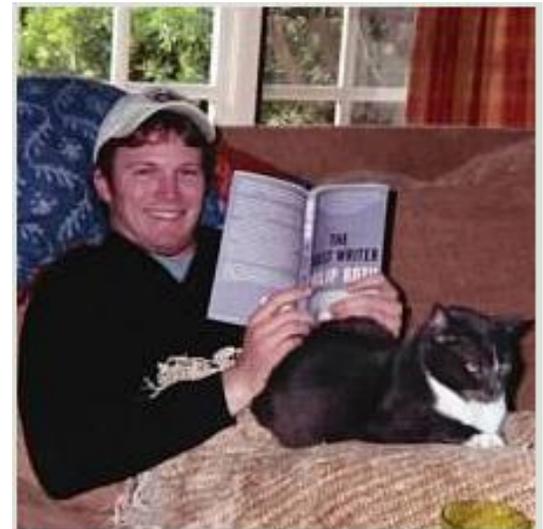
Over the last several years, Princess developed an annoying habit of rubbing up against our bedroom door in the middle of the night and causing it to rattle and, as though on a timer, letting out body piercing wails at precisely 5 a.m. each morning. She spends most of her days sleeping in our bedroom in one of the easy chairs next to a sun-filled window—but not nights, and I suspect she is offended by that.

One might assume I like cats—or at least our cats—because I’m writing a story about them. And one would be wrong. I’m allergic to cats and thus have a natural aversion to the species, but I’ve developed an acceptable level of tolerance to their fur and dander if not their aloofness and independence. I never really liked Garfield, God rest his soul, and I am quite certain the feeling was mutual. On the rare occasion when I did feed him, more often than not he would nip at my hand to speed me up or get me out of his way. I honestly think Garfield thought of me as his butler. I gladly opened the door to let him out at night, and let him back in the next morning as I went out to retrieve the papers. That pretty much sums up the extent of our interaction.

My feelings towards Princess hover around neutral. She is sweet, passive and craves attention but, make no mistake about it, she was, and will always be, our son Jimmy’s cat. One hundred fifty thousand percent. They adored each other and were inseparable. Jimmy was even more allergic to cats than I, but he would nonetheless bury his face in her short fur and she slept with him every night curled up at his feet at the end of his bed. Even after Jimmy went to college at USC in Los Angeles, and then lived in Santa Monica and Laurel Canyon, Princess did not deviate one bit from her loyalty and affection for him. She would patiently wait for his return visits and they would immediately retreat to their rituals of affection—she performing a coy dance around him until she allowed him to catch her and rub her back with long, forceful strokes from her head to tail, forcing her tummy into the ground, her face grinning ear to ear.



Princess: “she was, and will always be, our son Jimmy’s cat.”



“Jimmy was even more allergic to cats than I, but...”

Come to think of it, Princess began her nocturnal screams shortly after Jimmy died. We do not suffer alone.

So we began putting Princess in the garage at night. It was a logical choice since that is where her food, water and litter box have always been. I got a fluffy down sleeping bag from the attic and made it into a little bed for her. It looks cozy—she seems to like it.

I usually let Princess out of the garage around 7:00 a.m. when I leave for work. Typically she is curled up in a fetal position and buried down deep in her down bag, and when I open the door her head immediately pops-up, she rises into a nose down, tail to the sky stretch and lets out a hoarse, muted, screech, which I’m not sure whether to interpret as “good morning” or “thanks again, asshole, for imprisoning me in the garage.”

However, over the last month or so I've noticed that when I open the door from our laundry room to the garage, Princess either remains asleep or, if she is sitting up and facing away from the door, she remains in those positions and does not raise or turn her head even as I loudly say "Good morning, Princess!" She doesn't rise or look my way until I approach her bed and get into her field of vision. At first I thought it was only more indifference to my presence.

A couple of nights ago I initiated the consummate test. Princess was dosing on Hilary's lap on the couch in our living room upstairs. Hilary has admirably assumed the back-up position as a source of affection for Princess. It's not the same, but Princess is nonetheless grateful. Among my many, but not well-known, talents is I can do a pretty good imitation of a bobcat in heat. It's loud, resonates from deep in the throat, with close to perfect pitch and some spit thrown in. This sound would always send Garfield and Princess into a complete frenzy. Their ears would reach for the ceiling, the hair on their backs would stand up and a look of fear, or in Garfield's case lust, would flash across their eyes. Without fail. This time Princess didn't make so much as a twitch. She snoozed on. Hilary was the first to say it, "Princess is deaf." That is also when I first took notice of her portal jumping.

As I was driving home from work earlier that evening, Hilary called and said she was really worried. "I let Princess out late this morning and I haven't seen her since. I checked the upstairs patio but she wasn't there." She said a flash of fear seared her core. What if Princess had tried to make the leap from the tree to the patio and didn't make it? "I got the flashlight and looked in the tree and on the ground beneath it and fortunately did not find a wounded Princess." I tried to assure her, "I'm sure she'll show up."

There had been a couple of times during her teens when Princess ran away from home. One time she was gone for almost a week, and the other was over two weeks. Both times we thought the worst—coyotes or car. Before Garfield and Princess, we had another cat, Mr. Nichols, named by Brittany after her sixth grade teacher. Before he turned one, Mr. Nichols was run over by a car in the street in front of our house with Brittany and Jimmy both watching the whole thing. I was summoned from work with an emergency call from Hilary and when I got home I retrieved the lifeless Mr. Nichols from the street and performed a very emotional burial ceremony in our back yard. Brittany and Jimmy were devastated and they cried for hours on one of our sun-faded blue sofas in the upstairs family room.

Come to think of it, both times Princess took off Jimmy was living in Los Angeles. We seriously doubt she made it that far, but no one knows for sure. And then Princess would just show up. We expected her to be bloody and stick thin, but she looked perfectly healthy and as though she had not missed a meal or a good night's rest. We never did figure out where she might have gone.

When I pulled into the driveway it was pitch dark and my headlights reflected in Princess' eyes as she strolled on the walkway that leads from the street to our front door. I opened the garage door and got out of my car. As I walked towards her she seemed to not recognize me—she was wary and frightened. My voice did not soothe her—but then she's deaf— and she acted like she was trying to follow the movements of my feet, or perhaps their vibrations, upon the stone walkway. "What if she's going blind?" I wondered. She finally went into the garage and began her slow, arthritic, climb up the stairs to our family room. I shouted up to Hilary " She's home!" I found myself experiencing a mildly surprising sense of relief and gratefulness—not unlike both times she ultimately returned from her previous sabbaticals.

After the hearing test, Princess remained curled up sound asleep next to Hilary in their favorite spot on our couch in the family room. Our couch is L-shaped and wraps around a low slung solid oak block of a coffee table that most nights also serves as our dining table—we like to watch T.V. during dinner. I was in my brown leather recliner chair with the leg rest kicked up on the far side of the legless table looking over at the girls. And that's when it first happened.

Princess stood up, stretched and then dropped down from the couch to the floor behind the table where I couldn't see her. Hilary got up a minute or so later and headed into the kitchen. I remained reclining in my recliner. I waited for Princess to make her stroll between the couch and the table, slide under my footrest with her tail slightly brushing the underside of the rest and then make her way into the kitchen to see what Hilary was up to and get a drink of water from her bowl. Princess always does this—it's her routine— and the same sequence is repeated two or three times a night. I suppose that is what grabbed my intention. I hadn't seen her since she dropped off the couch a few minutes earlier. I called to Hilary in the kitchen, "Bun, is Princess in there with you?"

We call each other 'Bun.' It started on our honeymoon flight from San Francisco to San Juan Puerto Rico 38 years ago. We were both terribly hung over from our reception the night before and slightly blown away by the whole concept that we had just promised one another that we would be there for each other 'forever.' Forever? We were both 23. On the plane we were playing 'the newlyweds' and saying things to each other like, "Oh, honey bun I love you so much. Are you really my honey bun forever?" Stuff like that, and laughing hysterically. It got us a bottle of cheap champagne from one of the stewardesses (no flight attendants back then) who thought we were "so cute," which was the last thing we needed. I recall leaving it on the plane. Over the years we shortened 'honey bun' to 'bun.' It stuck.

"No, she's not in here." That, too, was strange. I declined, got up and went to look for Princess in all the usual places—our bathroom upstairs where she frequently climbs up on the toilet seat and drinks out of the bowl—that's another reason I never kiss Princess—our bedroom, Jimmy's bedroom downstairs that we use as a computer room and home office, and the garage/Princess' master bedroom. She was nowhere to be found. Strange. I came back upstairs, tilted the chair back and watched some news on T.V. Hilary remained in the kitchen making dinner. A few minutes later, Princess sauntered back into the family room, cruised under my footrest and prowled between the couch and the table. After she made her way to the other side of the table where I couldn't see her, she sprung back up onto the couch, curled up in her spot and went back to sleep—or at least closed her eyes. And then it got really weird.

It wasn't more than five minutes before Princess opened her eyes, stood up, stretched and, once again, slowly dropped from the couch and behind the coffee table. All of my senses were engaged—I was completely mesmerized by the whole scene—my hair was beginning to stand on end. I waited for no more than a few seconds for her to retrace her steps, and then when she didn't I leapt from my chair and rushed over to where she had come off the couch half-expecting that she would be waiting there, licking a paw or something worse. Nothing. She wasn't there! "What the f_____?" I yelled.

Hilary called from the kitchen "What's going on?"

"Is Princess in there with you?"

"No, what's wrong?"

"I'm pretty sure Princess is portal jumping."

Then I explained to Hilary what had been going on the last ten minutes.

"I mean it's happened twice now. The first time I wasn't really sure, but this last time, I was completely zoned in on what she was doing. One second she's there on the couch, and then she drops off and is gone. I mean 'gone,' like she is not in this dimension—completely disappears. She's found some seam or crease or something in the cosmos. I don't know what exactly."

Hilary looked at me strangely as if she wanted to ask 'Are you alright?' I had shoulder surgery a few weeks earlier and was still in quite a bit of pain, but I only take the pain meds before I go to sleep. "I'm fine. I know this sounds insane, but you tell me: Where is Princess? Do you see her anywhere?" Hilary went off to conduct her own search and came back a few minutes later empty handed. "Do you think this is really possible?"

Thirty minutes later Princess came back into the family room looking quite pleased with herself. I thought she gave me this conceited look, "I know something you don't." She climbed back up on the couch and remained there on her spot for the remainder of the evening until Hilary scooped her up and carried downstairs into the garage.

I haven't witnessed any more portal jumping by Princess, although I have seen her several times sitting in the middle of the family room and staring very intently at something—I don't see anything—and she seems to be completely transfixed by whatever it is, or isn't. It kind of freaks me out, to tell you the truth.

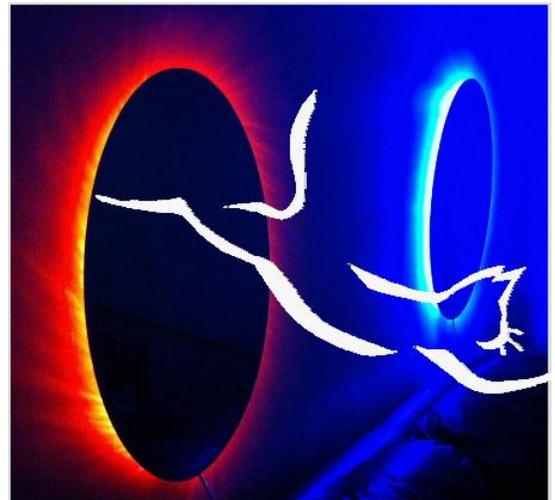
The other night I was once again in my recliner and Hilary was seated on the couch. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Princess walking behind by chair and then continue on the other side of the couch which backs onto the west wall of our family room facing the ocean. A few moments later, I watched as she peeled around from the back of the other end of the couch where Hilary was seated. Wait a minute. Is that what happened? When she dropped off the couch, did she slip around the back of the couch and exit the family room behind my recliner? My view of that corner of the couch from my recliner chair is blocked by the coffee table. Is that why I couldn't see her? She never does that—I mean exit the family room that way— but let's assume she did that night. Where did she go? Why couldn't Hilary or I find this old gal— especially the second time when we were all over it? She doesn't move very fast anymore, ok?

Perhaps it will remain a mystery, but I'm going to stick with my portal jumping theory for now.

Maybe that explains what happened those couple times she disappeared for weeks at a time. Maybe she went through and couldn't find her way back.

She continues to sit in the middle of the family room and stare intently at or into something. What is it? Where does it go? Maybe now it's too hard for her to jump in and get back. Princess is over 147 years old, you know.

Oh, that's right, I already mentioned that.



"I'm pretty sure Princess is portal jumping."

Princess died the morning of January 6, 2012, a month after this story was written. An hour before she passed over—that is when the birds started to swarm the windows around our house. I'm pretty sure I know why, as I explain in our next story: "[Princess Gantt – For The Birds.](#)"