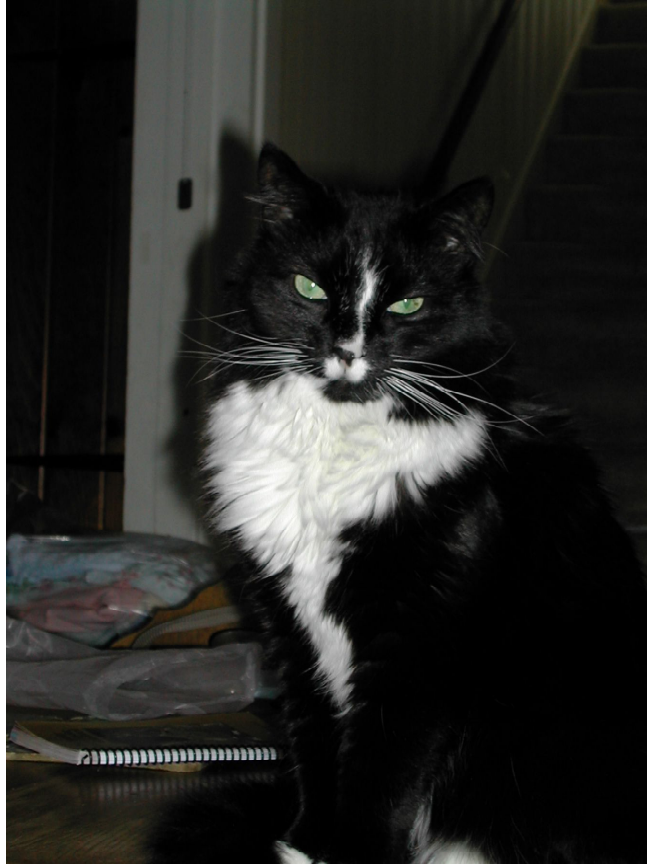


Gremlin's Saga



A Cat's Tail
As Told To
Benjamin Lentz
October, 2020

Lectio Homo Cave
(Reader Beware)

Most stories do not begin with a caveat, but then I'm not really a writer, unless you count the several books I've started but never quite got around to finishing. I do, however, like to tell stories, frequently based in reality, or at least, how I remember the reality. It seems I can remember things well, even if they didn't happen.

I understand that in this day and age, we all know about fact checking and of whom I speak. I don't wish to go there at this moment, but I will say that it is never my intention to tell a lie. Others might just remember the story differently and they are welcomed to their opinion.

No critiquing my writing style, and definitely no fact checking please. If you like the story, feel free to say so. If you don't like it, keep it to yourself because I'm writing this tail for Theo (the cat's Boy), Andrea (the cat's surrogate mom), and especially for me (the old curmudgeon, who said, "Why'd you get a cat?").

Before The Tail Begins

Gremlin—although he never told us his real name, graciously acquiesced to our insistence on calling him Gremlin—was born on the last day of October, 1997. We all know the holiday as Halloween, despite the fact he once described it to me as the day the little two legged creatures would dress in funny clothes and wear masks to hide their faces.

He was born in a barn, but he knew that he was destined for bigger and better things. His tuxedo, which he wore proudly, was evidence of this belief.

Perhaps he also knew of his Maine Coon genes which would allow him to become a true alpha in a household of humans. But don't let me get ahead of ourselves, I was starting to tell the tail of his out maneuvering his siblings into our home and hearts.

Shortly after his birth, he was brought into the kitchen with his brothers and sisters to be shown to a woman and the Boy. His siblings kept playing amongst themselves, but he later told me he knew there was plenty of time later

to romp around; bigger things were at play here.

The Tail Begins

When the Boy sat on the floor, I knew it was time to make my move. While the others played, I moved over to the Boy, snuggled onto his lap, and took possession of him. I had claimed my Boy and everyone knew it!

After a few weeks and I had learned the methods of cleanliness from my birth-mother, the woman brought my Boy back to bring me to my new home. Bigger and better things were in the making: new challenges and adventures.

Not soon after we entered the house, I met my first big challenge: the old guy napping in his recliner—soon to be our recliner. After some grumbling about not needing any pets, especially a cat, he put his feet back up. He said that he wasn't going to take care of it, they had to.

“It!” The challenge was on!

Soon his eyes closed again and I made my retaliatory strike for the affront of “it”.

No, not what you think. I’m much smarter than that. I quietly crawled up the side of the chair, and snuggled down on his soft belly. I closed my eyes too, but I didn’t really sleep.

When I sensed he had opened his eyes, I purred and snuggled deeper on to his flannel shirt. His hand came up to me, but I didn’t tense even though he might dump me on the floor. I just snuggled deeper. Then he gently stroked my back.

**“IT!” SCORECARD
ME: 1 - OLD GUY: 0**

He said that I was a house cat and there would be none of this “in” and “out” of the house. I was told I could look out the windows, but I could not leave the house unattended.

Leave the house? Why would I want to go outside? Food and drink, warm places to contemplate the world, lots of laps, and lots of places to explore—no one would leave paradise.

Playing with my Boy

Most mornings began rather hectically, as my Boy was a slow starter in the morning. I'd usually be waiting in the kitchen for him to come down the stairs. I'd get a greeting from him along with some 'scratches' under my chin.

Sometimes I would join him at the breakfast table, sitting on his lap if there wasn't an empty chair for me. Sometimes we'd go to the room they called living where my toys were kept.

He'd let me ride, draped across the back of his neck, parts dangling over him, like a cherished mantle of sorts. Other times I might just dangle upside-down from his arms. Either way was fine by me because he had his hands on me.

Our play was usually interrupted by mom hurrying him to get ready for school. She had to get to work as well and she'd say she wouldn't be late.

When everyone was gone off to their tasks for the day, I'd find a comfortable place to snooze until they came home. My two favorite spots were under the quilt on the bed upstairs or on an afghan in the old guy's recliner.

My hearing is exceptionally good, although they didn't always think so. They struggled to accept the fact that I could always hear them with the fact that I didn't always listen. But my good hearing allowed me to recognize the difference between the two cars pulling into the garage—more importantly, knowing which one my Boy was usually in.

After a quick snack for my Boy, we'd be off to other matters. Sometimes it was to lay on the living floor and watch him do homework, always nearby in case I realized he needed time to play.

Sometimes I'd lay in the cardboard house he and the old guy made for me and I'd listen to him practice the piano. Always, however, near enough by that if I could distract him, we could play.

At night, before he went off to bed, while he

lay on the floor watching TV, I'd lay with him, snuggled up against him.

I had chosen him to be my Boy, and I'd always try to let him know he was special.

***Culinary Adventures:
Roast Pork Drippings***

The old guy, mom and my Boy had set the table in the dining, so I knew this must be a special meal. I was still too small to sit on a dining chair and have a good view of the table top or of my Boy on the opposite side of the table. However, whenever I put my feet on the table to get a better look, mom or the old guy pushed my feet off.

Better smells from the kitchen, anyway. I took up my supervisory place on a kitchen chair. The old guy had roasted a big piece of pork, lots of fat drippings for gravy.

Everything was ready and it was all brought out to the dining table. Again, no feet on the table—at least when mom or the old guy were watching. Apparently the rule didn't apply

when my Boy was in charge.

It's boring sitting at a dinner and not being able to eat or even see the food. Into the kitchen and the endless kibble dish, and perhaps a browse of the counter.

Eureka! The mother lode of delectable pork drippings left just for me. Chair, table, counter top and a leisurely stroll around it all the way to the treat. A new experience, pork drippings—greasy and delightful.

When the old guy finally came into the kitchen, it was too late. I'd pretty much had my fill, probably 2/3 of the treat.

Mom yelled, "how much was in there?" The old guy looked, about a cup full. Mom: "Call the Vet." Then off for a ride.

The man in the white jacket looked me over and said that if I hadn't died yet, I'd probably be all right. Then he commented, "Interesting odor from him and his coat will be very shiny for awhile. Just keep an eye on him for a couple of days."

The drawback was that it wasn't as easy to hide. All they had to do was follow the "pork" smell. On the up-side, I must say, my coat never gleamed brighter.

"IT!" SCORECARD
ME: 2 - OLD GUY: 0

Kitchen Counter Training

I always had very strong hind legs and exceptional balance and grace—even when I missed my target. I was always proud of these talents and proved myself to the old guy time and time again.

For instance, there was the kitchen testing ground.

One day, the old guy was sitting at the kitchen table, mom's chair was pulled slightly out, so I accepted the invitation of the empty chair. I stared across the table at him, watching him eat. When I decided I needed a better view, I took my place on the table.

He picked me up and put me on the floor. After a few rounds of chair, table, floor, he

pulled mom's chair in so I couldn't get on it.

Time to show off my strong legs, balance and grace. Floor to table top in one bound, I didn't even need a running start. Then back to the floor along with some empty threats from him.

When I entered the kitchen later by myself, I found that a new test was being proffered. Upon inspecting the table top, I found doubled-sided sticky tape on the table.

How devious he was. He knew it was difficult for me to stop after every step and to lick clean the paw that stepped on tape. Game on, old guy!

When he came into the kitchen later and found me sitting on the counter he immediately put me onto the floor. I just as quickly demonstrated that although the counter was higher than the table, I had strong legs and balance and grace.

However, the third test was presented to me when next I tried a leap to the counter. The old guy had put tape all along the top edge of the counter. My first leap up, I landed on the

awful stuff and had to clean all my paws.

I got down and sat on the floor and waited. When he entered the kitchen I saw the smirk on his face. “Beat you!” he crowed.

Demonstration number two: from floor to counter, long enough leap to clear the tape on the edge.

He put me on the floor and while I watched, covered the counter top with sticky. He picked me up to show me there was no free counter space for me to land or walk on.

I wondered how he’d prepare dinner or serve it. But that was his problem, not mine.

Undaunted, I later showed him the balance and grace part of my skills. He must have heard from the other room the rattling of a canister lid and came to investigate.

I had waited for him to come and then completed the demonstration of slinking over the tops of the canisters lining the counter. I even showed him I could squeeze between the top of the mixer and the bottom of the cabinets.

A long stretch from the last canister to the window shelf so I could sit majestically among the flowers on the shelf and look out the window.

I was surprised to find out at that moment that priests do know how to swear.

Later that day I found that all the sticky stuff was gone. Game, match, set!

“IT!” SCORECARD
ME: 3, 4, 5, 6 - OLD GUY: 0

High Adventures:
The Pantry

One thing I had learned very early on is that higher ground is always better. The higher up you can get, the better it is to survey your kingdom. That’s why kings of old always built their castles on a hill with watch towers. They knew: better to defend your territory, better to keep an eye on the peasants!

I had heard it said that my home was an old

farm house. It had very high ceilings with cupboards so high the old guy had to get a step ladder to reach the very top of them.

Who needs step ladders? Challenge on!

I tried to show him that it was easy to leap onto the hamper setting across from the washing machine. I showed him that it was an easy leap onto the washing machine, teaching him to make sure the lid on the washer should always be kept closed.

From the washer to the dryer to the top of the refrigerator—easy-peasy. Opening the cupboard shutters was easy, too. Then onward and upward from shelf to shelf until there was no place else higher. When I was bigger, I could no longer sit upright because my head hit the ceiling.

When the old guy would go to get the step ladder, I'd climb down and sit on the hamper to show him he really didn't need the ladder. Alas! He was never able to learn what I was trying to teach him: hamper, washer, fridge, shelves.

**“IT!” SCORECARD
ME: 7 - OLD GUY: 0**

***High Adventures:
The Living Room***

The room they called “living” was an interesting place to wile away the hours when no one was home. The table top, backs of chairs, desk, book shelves and even the top of the mantle over the big hearth-like fireplace were minor challenges for a skilled mountaineer.

However, the challenge that needed to be negotiated was the rafters that crossed from wall to wall, just beneath the cathedral ceiling.

I know they were laughing at me when I’d sit and stare up at the ceiling fan and the rafters. But cats know how to bide their time, in fact, most cat real names include some variation of the word ‘patience’.

The day finally came when they brought a big, green, pointy tree in from outside. They put it in a corner and decorated it with lots of cat

toys they called ornaments.

I knew it didn't look very sturdy with the little base it had, but the old guy liked big trees—reaching as high as the rafters. Sturdy or not, perhaps I could eventually get the old guy to remedy that issue.

The first attempt resulted in a slow climb up and a quick timber down.

After much grousing and empty threats of sending me back to the barn, the old guy got out his step ladder. He stood the tree back up and put the ladder next to it and went to get some wire.

I climbed the ladder but still wasn't quite high enough—although. A leap from the top of the ladder, rebound off and up from the tree might just work. While I was working out the physics required, the old guy found me on the ladder and just before I leapt, he grabbed me.

Another scolding and more empty threats, all while he climbed the ladder and fastened the tree to the rafter.

Mission accomplished! While out of the room putting the ladder back, which was now kept in a closet because he was getting tired of having to go to the garage to get it, I once again showed him it was not a necessary item.

He was out of the room for only a minute, but up the tree and onto the rafter. It was easy to leap across the four feet between rafters.

This became an annual event. He liked big trees; I liked height.

**“IT!” SCORECARD
ME: 8 - OLD GUY: 0**

***High Adventures:
The Antique Mirror Shelf***

In a room upstairs, where they kept my big bed, which I graciously shared with the mom and the old guy, I found an intriguing thing. It hung on the wall, near the ceiling: a mirrored shelf lined with glass cat toys, which they called figurines.

I pondered the logistics for quite some time. It was too high and too far from the bed to make the leap. It was definitely too high off the floor for most cats.

One day the old guy came into the bedroom and found one of the glass toys on the floor. He grumbled about the old house and how the walls vibrated when the outside door was slammed too hard. He put it back up.

The next day he found another glass toy on the floor and grouched to mom that she didn't need to slam the door so hard.

While they argued about slamming the door, I showed them that their assumptions were wrong.

Grace and balance! A casual leap from the bed onto the top of the old guy's highboy dresser on the opposite wall from the glass toys. From there a little leap to the window valance on an adjacent wall.

Right two feet on the valance and left two feet on the top molding of the window, then a leap from this one to the next window valance on

the same wall. Across this window and a graceful jump to the top of mom's dresser mirror. From here I showed them it was all down-hill: a little stretch to top of the third window, across the valance and a final jump to the top shelf of the target and toys.

Voila! Challenge met! Challenge defeated!

Before they could take me down, I leapt down to the big, soft bed.

They took the glass cat toys and put them in a drawer.

**“IT!” SCORECARD
ME: 9 - OLD GUY: 0**

Invasion: Tango

Do not think that all challenges came from within. Mom and my Boy once brought home a challenge, another male kitten. I always knew that it wasn't a good thing that they would travel to “cat shows”, but it was all confirmed when “Nermal” appeared, although they called him Tango.

Because he was a “shelter” kitten I was slightly sympathetic—but he smelled and was uncouth.

He was kept in the downstairs bathroom because it had a tiled floor. He knew what a sand box was for, but his birth-mother hadn’t really taught him how to position himself. He had terrible aim.

A door gate was put into place to keep him in, while keeping me out—like I wanted in. We could visit through the gate if necessary.

I began the “bopping” training early. Even while still behind the gate, when he would reach through, I’d “bop” his paw and give him what the old guy called, the evil eye.

Eventually he was freed from the confines of the bathroom and allowed onto the carpeting. I intensified his training.

If he tried to chase me: “bop, bop”. If he tried to play with my tail: “bop, bop, bop”. When he would try to get on a lap I was enjoying, the evil eye was usually sufficient warning not to

infringe on my territory.

When I was sure that he understood exactly whose house this was, who was in charge, then I began to let him snuggle against me and even share a lap—if he wasn't too forward. Bop!

Over the next several years he needed refresher courses in “bopping” from time to time. Even when he grew larger than me, the evil eye was usually all that was necessary.

Invasion: Bossy Princess, Lap Hog

I remember it as if it was yesterday. The dreaded day that mom brought home Princess. Me, the old guy, and Tango were not thrilled.

Mom said that someone was moving and they couldn't take Princess with them. A likely story! Mom had offered to take her for a trial period to see if her boys, Me and Tango, would bother her or not.

In reality, we didn't want to get near her.

She was a declawed Himalayan. She was a biter.

Me and Tango soon renamed her: Bossy Lap Hog.

She would want to be on the lap that we were on and she wouldn't share. She'd bite. She didn't even really want us in the same room.

Me and Tango took to high ground and learned to maneuver throughout the house without touching the floor. Despite the fact that she was a Himalayan, without front claws, she wasn't much of a climber.

We'd take turns distracting her so that the other could use a sandbox. Although they were on her level, there were several strategically placed around the house.

The old guy liked to lay on the couch and read. I would snuggle on his legs to keep him company. Tango liked to squeezed between his body and the back of the couch.

Bossy Lap Hog would come into the room, the cue for Me and Tango to take to higher

ground. She insisted on wanting to lay on the old guy's chest, as close to his face as possible. He was not thrilled because reading is impossible with a cat between your face and the book.

After about a week, the old guy said the trial period was over. Princess, Bossy Lap Hog went to live with someone else. Need I add? Good riddance!

The Great Tuxedoed Hunter, not!

Act I

I was never a hunter. I never saw the need. There was an endless kibble dish in the kitchen. Personally, live and let live was my motto, provided you remembered who was the boss.

There was the one time Me and Tango were sitting watching the world go by from the screened in back porch. I was perched higher so I could keep an eye on the outside world and on Tango.

Tango would chase flies and he was fast

enough to catch them. But then he'd eat them. He could be disgusting at times.

He'd chase spiders or other crawly things that might come in from outside under the bottom of the screen that went all the way to the ground. Then one day he managed to paw something long, skinny, and wriggling from underneath the screen base.

It was a garter snake, about 18" long. I quickly realized that he had a prize demanding further inspection, and not on the porch where it might get away.

We each took an end. Into the kitchen and when we saw that mom was upstairs, we decided to share with her our find. Yes, Tango actually found it, but I always retained the finder's rights as the alpha.

She was coming down the stairs as we started up. We had only gotten a few steps up when she realized what we were bringing her.

The tail gets a bit confusing at this point. Obviously with greatest joy, she screeched in a voice we'd never heard before. Startled, we

dropped our treasure and dumbfoundly, watched it hastily slither down the steps and out the back door.

I guess Tango hadn't killed it good enough. The incident also strengthen my resolve that I didn't need to be a hunter. That clearly would be Tango's job.

Act II

There are two entrances into the room they call living, one from the foyer and one from the room they call dining. There is no door to the kitchen from dining; no door to the upstairs; and one door to pantry—this always stood open because the pantry had a sandbox in it.

We were all sitting in the living, Tango on mom's lap. I was on the old guy's lap in our recliner.

It must have come down the fireplace chimney: a furry gray critter with a fluffy tail.

As it scurried across the living floor, Tango sprang into action and the chase was on.

Mom and the old guy sprang into action too. Personally, I didn't think they could move that fast.

The critter had the lead, then Tango, followed by the rest of the pursuit team. I decided to station myself at the living/dining door as I could see most of the action from there.

If you wonder how I know its tail was fluffy, I felt it brush my chest as it ran across my paws while I was watching the bedlam.

Here, as before, it turns into a blur. The critter bounded from kitchen table to counters, to stove all while Tango created havoc in his trail. At one point the old guy opened the door to the porch and they took up places to keep it from going anywhere but out the door.

I took up a sentinel post directly in the door to the porch. I felt its fluffy tail again as it nearly got past me and onto the porch. The old guy yelled at me to get out of the way as it scampered past me again, back into the pantry.

I figured if he would dare to yell at me, I

wouldn't help anymore. I went to the endless kibble dish for a snack.

The critter went out the back door and the old guy slammed it shut before Tango got out.

Live and let live.

**“IT!” SCORECARD
ME: 10 - OLD GUY: 0**

Invasion: Hoover

One day while sitting in the kitchen door, looking out over the porch to the screened-out backyard, a mostly white “rag muffin” brother appeared at the screen door. He meowed; I stared back.

Not that interested in talking, I moved out of the door and further into the house. The next day, he was back, this time on the front porch as I looked out the window.

Mom became interested. Oh, oh! We've been down this path before.

It seemed that no matter what door you would open, he'd be sitting on the outside, looking lost and pathetic and hungry. What a con!

Mom and the old guy talked about letting him onto the back porch where they could give him something to eat. They then talked about taking him to the Vet to get him checked out before bringing him all the way into my house.

After being given a clean bill of health by the Vet, he was introduced to the family. He was more interested in being introduced to the endless kibble dish. While me and Tango sat watching him gobble down the kibble, mom said, "What shall we call him?"

She offered several cutesy names. The old guy said that since he sucked the dish clean so quickly, let's call him Hoover, like the vacuum.

Soon the endless kibble dish was no more. If it was filled in the morning, Hoover would empty it. Thus the beginning of set dinner times.

Tango greeted him, carefully nose to nose. Hoover didn't seem to mind—actually, he didn't care. We'd have staring contests. He with an air of indifference; Me with the “go away look”.

He wasn't pushy. At dinner time he would defer to letting me eat first, then Tango. He knew the pecking order.

If I was on the old guy's lap, he was contented to lie next to him on the arm of the chair. If Tango was crammed between his lap and the arm of the chair, Hoover would climb to the back of the chair.

In reality, like Tango, he wasn't half bad and in time I got use to him.

All that said, Hoover was okay.

Invasion: Gandalf

After the second invasion, the Lap Hog, then the Hoover, Me and Tango steeled ourselves for anything. But we never thought it would come from the old guy.

There was a young, gray and white feral cat who was trying to wrangle his way into our house. He was a persistent little pest.

He learned to climb a nearby tree that overhung the shed roof. From there he could get anywhere.

He'd walk along the porch roof, hang off the side so he could look in the kitchen window. He'd cross the garage roof looking in house windows, stalking the old guy as he went from room to room upstairs.

No matter which window I'd choose to sit in and look out, he'd magically appear, staring back.

I must give him credit. He had strong legs—not much balance and grace. He could jump from the lower edge of the garage roof, up about two feet and over the ground for about five feet, so that he could continue his stalking across the upper deck, looking in bedroom windows or the door to the bedroom.

He'd sleep on a deck chair or the step just

outside the bedroom door. This way he'd know when they had gotten up.

One day, as I watched out the door to the upper deck where the old guy was reading in a recliner, I heard a thump and saw him stalking across the deck toward the old guy. I moved to a better vantage point in a window.

I was amazed. The newcomer had the nerve to insinuate himself onto the lap of the old guy, reading in the recliner. Then, I swear, I could hear him softly purr. The sneaky little intruder was appropriating my opening technique!

Although the old guy didn't bring him in from the deck, after he spoke with mom, the magician took the Hoover route in. First the back porch for feeding, then the Vet check up, then in.

They named him Gandalf, I suppose because like a magician, he would just appear, always watching.

Gandalf readily got along with Tango. Tango would get along with anybody, excepting Lap

Hog. Hoover was his usual indifferent self to change. I had the evil eye.

Soon after Gandalf had found his way into my home, I realized that he was all right. It happened when Tango started to fail quite quickly. His health hadn't been good for quite awhile.

He soon couldn't walk well and definitely not very far. He'd get off of a lap and then just lie on the floor. When he started this, Me and Gandalf would take turns lying against him on the floor to keep him company. Gandalf was a true brother.

***Time Passes:
All Too Quickly***

I was never a very mouthy cat. My stare communicated my wants and needs, and they usually understood.

However, as I grew much older, I took to roaming the house "meowing" loudly. Sooner or later someone would come. I would give them the look of "Oh, there you are. I thought

you were lost.” Then quietly stroll off.

Upon reflection, this behavior change probably worried them. Still, even an old alpha cat needs to remind everyone who is the alpha.

**“IT!” SCORECARD
ME: ? - OLD GUY: 0**

I finally stopped counting. The old guy just couldn't keep up.

Many other things happened in my life, some of which the old guy has forgotten, some of which he never knew happened.

But a cat's tail can only be so long.

***Halloween to Feast of St. Francis
31 October 1997 to 4 October 2020***

It was a Sunday, the Feast of St. Francis, the day mom or my Boy would sometimes bring me to church. This year was different though, so the old guy just had slips of paper with the names of everyone's pet on them.

He told mom when he came home that all the slips of paper were placed on the altar and that he mentioned us all by name. He told me that as priest, he exercised his prerogative and named me first in the blessing.

I let them know it was time to let me cross the Rainbow Bridge.

They called my Boy at his new home and a friend drove him back to me. After he and I visited for a bit, we all went to the kind lady in the white coat.

She gently laid me on the table on my favorite red blanket, and with my Boy's hand gently resting on me, she sweetly opened the gate to the Bridge. Francis was there to walk across the Bridge with me, leading me to God.

God, seated on the glorious throne greeted me by the name my birth-mother had given me. I politely corrected Him, "I prefer to be called Gremlin, the name my Boy gave me."

I added, "Does your throne recline?"

The tail's end.



Requiescat In Pace.