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A Legacy of Love

An Interview by Donna Strong

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There are cycles and seasons in life that catch us unaware. In an instant, someone new enters and the world changes. A scroungy cat, doing its best to survive, touches our heart and we realize a Buddha being has entered our life, teaching lessons of fortitude, courage and compassion. This story begins with a nomad feline, a survivor, who entered the life of Santa Barbara resident Karen Lee Stevens.

Vision: Karen, what compelled you to go back the day after you saw the abandoned cat at the vacant warehouse?

Karen: While curled under the covers during a rainstorm, I suddenly thought of the cat. I had a feeling I would find him taking shelter, so I drove over, and there he was! I picked him up and put him on my lap. He was totally at ease during the ride home.

Vision: And although the feline, who later became known as Cassidy, was only going to stay the weekend, it quickly became clear that the cat was too special to let go?

Karen: Yes, although at first I didn't really recognize his extraordinary qualities. I saw a cat with rough fur, a boney body and gangly legs. My mother, Rhoda, looked at him and said, "This is one of the most beautiful cats I've ever seen. Have you looked at his eyes?" Looking at Cassidy I saw his big, sapphire eyes and felt his calm presence. Unnerved by his gaze, I could feel him looking into me and didn't know what to make of him.

Vision: Can you tell us how Cassidy became a catalyst for change in your life?

Karen: My life began to change dramatically when Cassidy 'adopted' me in 1994. We bonded quite deeply and my love for him led me to wonder why this amazing being was abandoned. The Internet was becoming popular, and I began doing searches on animals and was quite shocked by what I found. I would hug Cassidy and ask: Why are so many animals mistreated? His quiet presence propelled me to do something positive. I began a web site as a resource for animal lovers. The website, now in its eighth year, has become a very rewarding adoption service for animals.

Vision: You and Cassidy were together for six years when he fell ill. Tell us about Cassidy's illness and the transition you both had to endure.

Karen: Cassidy's kidneys began to fail, and I knew he had less than a year left. I had to give him daily fluid injections, which were hard for me to handle, yet

Cassidy would sit quietly and purr. The bond between us grew stronger as we spent time together.

At the time, I was producing my first book and beginning to realize my desire to become a writer. The manuscript was a compilation of stories and tips to be kinder to animals in everyday life.

When I finally knew that it was time, I arranged for our veterinarian to come to the house. Throughout the day, as I was finishing the manuscript, the printer kept indicating, 'low on ink.' Because this was our last day together, I didn't want to leave him, so I kept printing. As the last page printed out, both the ink and the manuscript were finished. Fifteen minutes later the vet was scheduled to arrive. With candles and music, Cassidy died in my arms at home, letting go quite gently. Although the transition experience was quite good, I lost it emotionally. I found it extremely difficult to be without the steady, blue-eyed gaze that Cassidy provided as a rudder in my life. The next day I had an appointment with a potential publisher for the manuscript. I couldn't speak without crying. The publisher handed me Kleenex and I handed him the manuscript and left. Three weeks later I received word that he would love to publish *All For Animals: Tips and Inspiration for Living a More Compassionate Life*.

Vision: Animals can be a powerful force in our lives. After the death of a beloved animal companion more than a decade ago, I made a vow: to continue the gift of love that I had been given so generously. I believe this is a gift that animal companions offer us. How would you describe Cassidy's legacy of love?

Karen: From the time he entered my life, he became a profound catalyst to act in favor of sentient animal beings and it led me to fulfill a dream to become a writer. Five years after his transition, Cassidy is still deeply inspiring and the gift of his presence continues.

Karen Lee Stevens, writer and animal advocate, may be reached at www.allforanimals.com. Donna Strong is a writer and an animal lover, working on a book about animals in transition and the gifts of love they bestow upon us. A healing practitioner who works with flower essences with all forms of sentient beings, she can be reached at www.floralspirit.com.