

Sunday Column – Unbreakable Bonds

For publication 6.4.17

When I first noticed “A Street Cat Named Bob” listed on Netflix it sounded like a movie meant for children. Not so. It’s actually a story about a heroin addict living “rough” on the streets of London, who finally decides it’s time to clean up his life.

While he works toward recovery from addiction he begins to question how he got to this point in life. He gets a flat and takes up “busking”, to make money. In other words he is a street performer living off the generosity of those who walk by and hear his music. It is the “job” he goes to every day.

This is a true story about James Bowen who authored a book of same title. It is the “who rescued who” story line that a lot of us are familiar with, though maybe not on quite such a dramatic scale.

One day, James walks out of his flat and meets, Bob, who has a gash in his rear leg. It looks like he has been attacked by another animal. James takes Bob to the local charity veterinarian who patches him up. James has no intention of taking on a pet. He thinks that will be that and sends Bob on his way.

As many of us know it is never this way with cats and Bob hangs on until James finally relents and allows him into the flat for keeps. It is the beginning of a transformation for James where he comes to terms with his innate selfishness. Clearly, a centerpoint of James’ awakening, he refers to this several times throughout the book.

The first miracle happens when Bob decides to follow James out the door one day and becomes his busking sidekick. While it was a shock to James, it isn’t hard for most of us to imagine the way the crowds reacted to this. Bob found his place on James’ shoulders or on the end of the leash and collar that he eventually purchased for Bob.

Bob was his own cat and James describes how he often led their way down the busy streets of London. Once they found their station for the day Bob would sit on James’ rucksack or in the guitar case and watch as the crowds stopped to listen and support them. Their income as a duo was often quadruple what James would bring in alone. The fans made scarves for Bob and gifted him with treats.

Unbeknownst to James, they were becoming internet famous with tourists from all over the world posting pictures and films online. Eventually, a publishing house encouraged James to write a book about his life with Bob.

Many of us have at least one story about a special animal who touched us. We began by “rescuing” them from whatever grief they appeared to be having. By the time we were finished we had a new friend for life.

Anytime we help anyone, animal or human, it makes us feel better. It is the act of giving without expecting anything in return that is so vital to our mental and emotional health. That is the special magic of animals. When we do something for them it seems natural not to expect anything in return, yet, without asking, we get a bond that is unbreakable.

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