

## A Cat Named Jerry Saved My Dad By Debe Jolliff

My dad has never had a cat in his 81 years – until now. In December of 2016, I moved my parents to an Assisted Living Center near my home. They had just celebrated their 56<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Within a couple months after the move, my mom fell ill and passed away. She was a vibrant woman, perpetually active, a social butterfly, and the light of my Dad's world.

The impact of the move and the loss of his lifelong love in such a short time were devastating. The sheer silence of living alone after a long life of a buzzing household was unbearable, not only for him to live, but for me to watch. In the weeks following Mom's passing I could see him declining, both in spirit and physically. I felt helpless. I live far enough away that spending time with him daily wasn't feasible.

My Dad is a quiet man so developing new friendships is hard for him. I began thinking about ways to lift his spirits. My parents had dogs throughout their marriage. But at this stage, caring for a dog would be impossible. So what about a cat? Of course he declined and said that he had no interest. But I chose to ignore that! I contacted the Adoption Coordinator at my local Animal Welfare League. She was wonderful! I explained my Dad's situation and she knew just what to do. She said that they had two cats that she thought might work for him. She brought them to his apartment to see how each interacted with him.

Molly was timid and ran under the bed to hide, but Jerry took to him right away, jumping onto his lap, purring and nudging his hand begging to be petted. Perfect! Dad and Jerry played and played. It had been a very long time since I had seen him smile like that, and even longer since I'd heard him laugh. It warmed my heart! When it was time to go Dad chose to let Jerry "stay for a while."

To say that Jerry has had a positive influence on my Dad's quality of life is a colossal understatement. Dad literally lives to care for Jerry. They are best friends. Jerry loves to play almost as much as he loves to snuggle so they do a lot of both. Jerry loves to nap, just like Dad. When I visit I find Jerry right next to Dad, either napping on the bed or sitting together in the easy chair. And he talks to Jerry incessantly –



certainly more than he talks to me! But

I don't care. I honestly believe that Jerry has made the difference between Dad giving up on life and having something to live for. He wakes up every day greeting Jerry with a big smile and a scruff on the head. Who knew that a cat could possess so much power! That's how Jerry became the cat who saved my dad.

