

**The
BLACK
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**Baby Darl and the Quality of Life
Under Capitalism in the U.S.A.
Represent Our Resistance
By Dr. Lenore J. Daniels, PhD
BC Editorial Board**

But I tell you, a cat needs a name that's particular,
A name that's peculiar, and more dignified,
Else how can he keep up his tail perpendicular,
Or spread out his whiskers, or cherish his pride?
Of names of this kind, I can give you a quorum,
Such as Munkustrap, Quaxo, or Coricopat,
Such as Bombalurina, or else Jellylorum-
Names that never belong to more than one cat.
But above and beyond there's still one name left over,
And that is the name that you never will guess;
The name that no human research can discover--
But THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess.
When you notice a cat in profound meditation,
The reason, I tell you, is always the same:
His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation
Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name:
His ineffable effable
Effanineffable
Deep and inscrutable singular Name.

- T.S. Eliot, "The Naming of Cats"

Meow!

Baby Darl

The name on the birth certificate is Buddha, but I named him Darl, a name William Faulkner gave to his alter ego and sensitive, artistic-minded protagonist in *As I Lay Dying*. I wrote my dissertation on William Faulkner and came to love the character Darl. *Darl* was different, and I liked the sound of the name: *Darl*. He was Darl the minute I saw him - this tabby who reach out his hand and spoke, "hi."

"This is the one," I said. Darl! A boy? A boy?

"Is it a boy?"

"It's a boy," the caregiver answered.

"Hi, Darl," I told Darl. "We are going home, baby!" He was so small, 4 months old.

Their *Buddha*, my *Darl*, was one of the five kittens delivered right there in the shelter after four boys set the mother on fire. They were born on July 1, 1997.

"You saw the mother downstairs." And I remembered seeing a cat with burned ears and was told that the shelter advertised in the papers for someone who would provide the special care necessary for this traumatized cat.

Darl was released to me a few days later, and we went home. We had been together for 15 years as of this past July 15, 2012. His "brother," Kofi, joined us just after September 2001. Kofi was left in a box in front of a pet store in Kenosha, Wisconsin, a couple of blocks from where I lived. The store owner kept Kofi in a cage in a back room of the store, among the mice, and the hamsters, and worms, and was desperate to pass him along to someone.

Darl was now 4 years old. I had called him Baby for so long that I had to make sure he knew his name was *Baby Darl*. I had been going to the pet store for Baby Darl and to the veterinarian across the street since I arrived in Wisconsin the year before. I never had but one cat at a time and had to consider travel arrangements with two cats. This kitten, with his white coat and randomly placed orange tabby spots, was beautiful to me, but I also knew that people would prefer the pedigree look, the solid color, or systematic strips.

Day after day as I watched on television the unfolding events after 911, I thought about the little kitten in that cage. I tried to interest a comfortable and spoiled Baby Darl in a brother, but I did not get an immediate response from him. But for me, there was this little cat in a cage...

When I returned to the pet store and that back room, this little boy was further back in the cage than he had been when I saw him the previous two times.

Open, the cage, I told the owner.

I picked him up in my arms and carried a suddenly animated little kitten to the vet across the street. As I sat in the chair waiting, the little kitten just looked at me. So grateful! A month and 500 dollars later, the little kitten came home to me and Baby Darl - without the fleas, worms, and anemic condition.

The little kitten became Kofi, "born on Friday," once I tracked back two and a half months and picked that last Friday in August, 2001. Kofi then became Kofi Bo because I could not come up with a meaningful middle name. *Kofi Bo, Kofi Bo. Bo stuck!*

The following year, my Boys and I would be vaccinated and receive our passports to spend a year in Ethiopia. Yes, each as passports and passport pictures! The fellowship to teach in Ethiopia would be an award for me. What would have happened to these guys and the relationship between me and them and between themselves?

In time, the frail Kofi Bo caught up to Baby Darl, and the latter had a companion, and the former, a big brother. Over many of their years together, both Boys have weighted 15 pounds - until this past January. As of the last few years, including late last year, both weighted 15 pounds.

In January, of this year however, Baby Darl started losing weight. Drastically losing weight! We had returned to Madison, not necessarily the plan, but close enough to Chicago, in November, 2011. Before I left, Baby Darl started showed signs of aging and problems with his bowels. He vomited more often than usual. I thought this development was the result of the preparation for a move from Philadelphia back to the Midwest. So I set an appointment to see his and Kofi Bo's vet.

I have learned to be weary of veterinarians. This is the United States of America. I try not to forget. But I did slip up when Kofi Bo developed an inflection in one eye in 2009.

I called what I thought was the closes veterinarian in the area where I lived in Philadelphia, Germantown to explain the situation and was told to bring him in. When I put Kofi Bo on the table, took him out of the case, I turned his head to face the veterinarian.

“What did you do to his eye?”

I think my mouth was open for a minute. The horror! It was as if the veterinarian and landed a blow to my stomach, and I stepped back, even took my hands off Kofi Bo,, the whole while looking at The Look. The United States of America where ignorance is knowledge! Pick Kofi Bo up and go!

“Examine my boy’s eye!”

As the veterinarian proceeded to examine Kofi Bo’s eye, I remembered the conversations of the past about white veterinarians and white cat and dog lovers who thought Blacks negligent, if not inferior pet owners - or parents (I prefer “parent” or “parents”) - and this was years before anyone heard of Michael Vick. Some Black parents of cats and dogs, and there are Blacks who would rather commit suicide than to have cats or dogs tear up their furniture. Some Blacks have learned from this capitalist society to love money and things more than any living being. But then plenty of whites, even caring and loving parents of cats and dogs, have no problems with this nation setting dogs on human beings, or watching or hearing about bombs or drones exploding over little children, or eating the meat of the deer they shoot. Some Blacks believe in the Biblical hierarchy of humans over animals, but so does Western Civilization as a whole.

Kofi Bo had an eye infection, and I was given medication to clear up the problem. Needless to say, I never returned to this veterinarian again. In fact, I was soon given the name of a veterinarian with a clinic actually closer to my home. This veterinarian cared for Baby Darl before we left Philadelphia to return to Wisconsin in November of last year. In October of last year, when I told him that I was leaving the state, he told me to stay in touch. He has “patients” across the country. His “little buddies” would be just a little distance away.

If I could have flown to Philadelphia in January when Baby Darl started losing weight I would have done so! I called veterinarians here in Madison. I said my boy is old and sick. I heard - money! Money, Money, Money!

No money, no care! No money, we can’t help you! No money - maybe you should never have had him in the first place!

Oh, but they love so much! But, alas, no money, no love!

I called the veterinarian in Philadelphia since he was the only veterinarian who expressed compassion and love for my Boys. I have been calling him ever since, two, sometimes three times a week. We tried! We tried!

I tried to describe the changes in Baby Darl. I changed my work habits to spend more time with him. My long days became longer as the

healthy boy in October pictures with a hanging stomach grew weaker, displaying a shrunken stomach. His sprint became a slow walk in which he would stop on the way to the kitchen or bathroom and it would seem he paused in meditation .

I never thought he was dying. Old but not necessarily dying! Baby Darl was ageing and how could I put to sleep this precious boy because he is ageing? When his quality of life goes, when he gives up... But until then, the battle is on. Help him with his bowels. Change his diet. Purify the water. Make this apartment comfortable for him to moving around, relax, and sleep.

Make more calls to veterinarians and receive the same response!

Cats in general are brave; they conceal pain. Baby Darl, in particular, initially up for the battle, showed indication of pain. He did not become lethargic until the middle week of August, and even then, he was still able to walk but not sit. Climbing to his favorite lounge in the refrigerator had come to an end by mid-July, just after his birthday.

In the early months of this year, I was able to stabilize the weight loss and he still had an appetite. He was more finicky than ever and went through a series of more expensive foods from a local pet store once I discovered that even the 7 and 8 dollar brands (never dollar store brands) of well-known pet food had grain and other additives that could result in serious problems. I even changed the littler to one that was corn-based as opposed to the well-know, general store brand. . .

Of course, Baby Darl, the alpha cat, the in-your-face cat, received even more attention. I rarely left my apartment and then mostly when it was necessary to shop for Baby Darl and Kofi! But mommy no longer has the income she had in previous years as when Louis needed dental work, Kofi eye inflection medication, Baby Darl several times needing minor medical attention. But their mommy had become too much of a threat in the corporate college classroom and found herself without, yet again, classes to teach and more stressed than ever before.

My healthy Baby Darl would tilt his head to look at objects closely, dip his hands in your glass and sometimes in his own bowl of water and sucked the water from his hands, purr louder than a locomotive, and he talked! He talked ever so softly but audibly about Kofi Bo and "his ways" or "misdoings" or about a particular package of "candy treats" that did not seem to be available on the kitchen counter - and why not? We talked about the "bad" people at work or the utility company's representative. And, of course, we talked about the weather: a tornado in Tuscaloosa, an earthquake and hurricane in Philadelphia, terrible lightening storms in Tuscaloosa and Platteville, WI, and

beautiful weather in Ethiopia. Baby Darl lived for "pretty light." He would roll around in the sunlight on the living room carpets of various homes and apartments, enjoying his "beach."

But he also taught me to speak without being audible. Baby Darl or I would look at each other and either one, usually him, would open and close his mouth quickly and then I would imitate him, and then we talked. "Fine?" And he, "Yeah!"

"Candy food?"

"Yeah!"

"Are we tired?"

"Yeah!"

What Kofi Bo must have thought of this strange goings on, I do not know! Perhaps he thought we were talking about him!

Baby Darl greeted everyone at the door, with a set of criteria for permission to enter his domain. But he was friendly - in his way, meaning the visitor had to notice him and speaking *with him*. It was his house, as he often reminded Kofi Bo when he encircled his younger brother, and I would say - "No! No fighting!" But Kofi Bo would get the message.

Most important, Baby Darl loved unconditionally and reminded me of this whenever I was embroiled in my own battles with corporatized and racist and sexist, get-along to personal advantage administrators and co-faculty members at colleges and universities that love the bottom line more than they do truth and justice.

They don't love you - but I do! Don't forget me and Kofi Bo!

How could I forget them!

I put up with ignorance for years for them! I sold whatever possible to make sure they never missed a meal even if I did!

Owners of property - tunnels and loungers and stuffed animals and a small suitcase of various balls and string "birdies," and "mice," they made claims on the only chairs and tables in the house as well as claims on the bed, of course, and the bookcases on which they sat as well as the books which often served as pillows, particularly when they were left on the floor or kitchen table. They reserved the right to claim the top of any or all refrigerators in which at least one lounger must be placed, along with their pillow...

I can honestly say I miss the fighting! I missed the fighting on last Thursday, August 16th, when I woke up (at Baby Darl's time) 6 a.m.,

and opened up a can of chicken rice soap and a can of chicken, put small amounts down in two bowls. Feed him what he wants, his veterinarian in Philadelphia said. Feed him what he wants. He wants "McDonalds" and not the healthy food. Feed him McDonald's.

For more than a month, I bought baby food, chicken, cans of chicken and turkey and occasionally cans of tuna. I bought Kitty Chow. In the mornings, after breakfast, I gave him and Kofi Bo a teaspoon each of a vitamin gel supplement. All day I changed bowls and took out contains of various meats and soups, heated everything up, and Baby Darl ate and ate. He ate! But he increasingly and frequently passed the food not more than 15 or 20 minutes later. By late June, his "accidents" were also far more frequent until last month when he was literally dripping from behind as he stood in front of his bowls and ate.

I would clean up with apple cider vinegar several times a day, all the while telling Baby Darl that it was okay. But by August, he limited himself to a little space on the carpet near my computer in the living. No Baby Darl at the foot of the bed or even in the corner under the chair or in his lounge at night or day no matter how hard I tried to tell him that Kofi Bo and I missed him in the room and that Kofi Bo and I are scared at night.

Baby Darl was tired. I was tired. Sometime last month, I would catch him with his head down. I would come and, sitting right in front of him, I would struggle with him to raise his head.

"Who are you? Baby Darl! Raise your head! You are Baby Darl mommy loves." I had said these lines to both boys through the years. "Who are you? Kofi Bo!"

For months, weeks, days, the leakage of his bowels continued. But he ate and ate. He drank water. He talked with me, eyes alert, but by May could no longer play or fight with Kofi Bo. The later had to wait until mommy dealt with Baby Darl and, as for play - an imaginary friend stopped by usually just before dinner so Kofi Bo became Air Jordan - for a time.

Now this Thursday morning Baby Darl could eat no more. Not one bowl of anything. He looks up at me, and I sit on the kitchen floor near the bowls, raising one bowl at a time. Finally he licks the juice from one bowl with chicken chunks that I have chopped up. And then it comes.

I clean up the mess behind him while he continues to lick the chicken.

"That's okay," I said. "It's okay."

And it is not okay. It hasn't been okay. And he knows it. He knew it then and the months and days before.

It is not okay.

It is frustration and anger. I cannot give my Boy the treatment he needs. It is not okay that children and people in this nation, under this system of capitalism, must suffer instead of receiving proper health care. It is not okay that people died for lack of health care or inadequate. That loved pets must suffer for lack of health care...

...or for some to profit because it is about profits and not compassion and certainly not about love. If I could have flown to my boy's veterinarian...

But my Boys and I live under corporate rule in the United States of America, and in a town of liberal and progressive minded folks for whom capitalism's hierarchy serves to protect them from the "have nots" - have not the proper skin color, the proper gender, the proper class with the proper qualifying papers with the dead presidents or those almighty premium gold cards. High-priced pet stores and pet clinic are for the "haves." But they do love here - just not all people or all pets belonging to certain people. The quality of life for anyone living in the United States of American is determined by capitalism.

The evening before, I mentioned to a new neighbor in my building that my Baby Darl was sick and she supplied me with a list of clinics and offered to talk me to one of them. Well, the next day, this Thursday morning, Baby Darl is not eating and I call these clinics. No payment arrangements and, as I moved through the list, the initial payment rose. Finally, I found a clinic! Twenty dollars for an examination, but it was located in Sun Prairie, just north of Madison. The neighbor could take me. Get directions! The appointment was for 4 p.m. When I meet the neighbor in her car, she handed me a referral card for a corporate chain of pet clinics. This particular branch was closer - closer than Sun Prairie. I understood. In this car, I am a "have not!" I have no options! *You can decide*. But not really: two friends just happened to be out of state that Thursday. So I had no choice.

What chance did Baby Darl have at a corporate clinic were money is the bottom line!

The veterinarian examined Baby Darl and began rattling off possibilities: kidney disease, hyperthyroid disease and GI...

What?

Gastrointestinal cancer.

Could it be cancer, I say, crying and trying to keep Baby Darl calm.

She cannot say.

The neighbor returns to the room and speaks to the veterinarian: Tell her this cat is dying. He needs to be put to sleep. Sent on to cat heaven!

Cat heaven!

This is my Boy. He goes home. I turn to the veterinarian. What can I do? I have a certain amount with me.

She leaves and she and another woman come back and forth with plans that will exceed the amount I have with me.

What can I do now with far less?

Thirty minutes later, Baby Darl is given a steroid shot and I am handed a bottle of medicine.

I know that Baby Darl is now dying. He is now, I know, in pain. But this is so sudden even if it has taken months to arrive. And the neighbor continues to talk about putting him to sleep rather than allowing him to live for me: Let him go! And I do not know this woman and she does not know me or my Baby Darl. She does not know us! But she assumes she does!

Later that day when I returned home from the corporate veterinarian clinic, I realized the quality of life for my Baby Darl had deteriorated at least four months before. He tried. We could not beat the system.

By Baby Darl was dying. He was brave, but he was dying. From that evening until mid-day Saturday when we walked back into that clinic, he no longer held his head down. He looked at me. He closed his eyes but barely.

We celebrated Kofi Bo's birthday that Friday, the 17th, rather than the 31st - without Baby Darl. I camped out on the living room floor next to him and slept there that night and Friday night. We talked and talked. Kofi Bo was always near by and the three of us remembered the good times when he and Kofi Bo ran up "steps" in our previous homes in unison or when he came to grocery stores with to pick out the "candy treats" or when we three flew on "airplanes," quickly, quickly."

I surrounded him with his special toys and feed him chicken broth. I said over and over again: "You are Baby Darl. Mommies Big Boy Man! Mommy loves a whole bunch." I made Kofi Bo kiss him several times. We watched their favorite film, *Shakespeare in Love*. Baby Darl purred, barely. I thanked him.

Baby Darl and I are going back to that doctor and Baby Darl will get medicine, and Baby Darl will be all "fixed." And we come back home.

When his bowels continued to run, it was "okay" because "You will be fixed" and all better when we go back."

But he knew. He knew. He walked to the front door on Saturday morning as if asking me to "open the door." When I said it was not time to go and get "fixed," he laid down right there on the rug in front of the door. I called my sister in Chicago. I said, he is ready!

"Kofi Bo, it is not Baby Darl. It's his stomach. Baby Darl is very good!"

We kissed each other before Baby Darl and I left the house.

Baby Darl is a world traveler. He is my confident, by boy. Treat him with respect and love. He is more human than some human, I told the veterinarian. Baby Darl, alone with his brother, Kofi Bo, is intelligent, familiar with books, particularly literature and knows the dialogue in *Shakespeare in Love*.

Today, Tuesday, August 21st, I spoke with the charter owner and veterinarian where Baby Darl was put to sleep. We spoke for some 40 minutes and I heard a compassionate human being who understood "Big Brother's" world. We have to list options, the possible causes of the problem. (But then there is the question of money). Yes, there is the question of money. Who can and cannot afford treatment. So Baby Darl could have had kidney problems or hyperthyroid and, as my veterinarian said, suffering from old age? Yes...

Most important, the veterinarian told me that the veterinarian who administered the shot cried in the back room. She cried for my Baby Darl! She heard me, he said. And she cried.

Baby Darl could do that! But I am not crying anymore. My brave boy is at rest!

Play, Baby Darl! Play a way! You are free!

Now I lay me down to sleep,
The king-size bed is soft and deep...
I sleep right in the center groove
My human can hardly move!
I've trapped her legs, she's tucked in tight
And here is where I pass the night
No one disturbs me or dares intrude
Till morning comes and "I want food!"

I sneak up slowly to begin
My nibbles on my human's chin.
She wakes up quickly, I have sharp teeth -
And my claws I will unsheath

For the morning's here and it's time to play
I always seem to get my way.
So thank you Lord for giving me
This human person that I see.

The one who hugs me and holds me tight
And sacrifices her bed at night.

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The king-size bed is soft and deep...
I sleep right in the center groove
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- Author Unknown, A Cat's Prayer

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