**Harry’s most important work**

News of my death reached Australia and Canada. The final picture of me soaking up some late summer sunshine in the tranquil gardens at St Angela’s hospice was liked by over 13,000 people on Twitter and shared by over 225,000 fans on Facebook. I didn’t manage to record the exact Instagram numbers but I am told that Marketing claimed them as “impressive”. In the month of my passing Jan from Fundraising was relieved to be able to report that “due to unexpected donations via the JustGiving page the income generation team had exceeded September’s target”. I was nearly commemorated on a mug, but Kirsten from Marketing couldn’t quite work out how to Photoshop my tucked tabby tail so that it could appear to be curling around the mug’s handle. Yes, I have a tail as I am a cat. But, to be clear from the outset, not some lazy, fat LOL cat, whose fame and photographer's fortune was acquired simply by circulating as digital entertainment alleviating bored office workers on a wet November Tuesday. No! Nor was I a campus cat who unwittingly became part of a university’s campaign to soften the harsh realities of life for all humans on a brutalist campus. Unlike Larry the Cat at Number 10 (Downing Street), I had a proper job, although Larry and I did share the same ability to out stay many of the humans we kept an eye on. My name is Harry, and, despite beginning life with Cyril as “the tabby at no. 6”, my most important work, and my legacy, was achieved in the last two years of my life at St Angela’s Hospice through being Harry The Hospice Cat.

St Angela’s is much like the other 200 hospices which Alan, St Angela’s CEO, had asked Kirsten to plot, using a complicated number of different colours, on a big map of the United Kingdom he bought especially to have in his office. St Angela’s is a place where humans go to begin dying and sometimes where they do actually die. You see, unlike cats, humans do the end of their lives in many different ways. Most people die in hospital or at home and, sadly, do not usually die in a place like St Angela’s. As Cyril’s daughter said when she first looked at St Angela’s website and wrote in an email to her dad’s GP, “St Angela’s looks like a very nice place for dad to be”. You see in the UK most people die on a hospital ward where the humans don’t always have time, there aren’t gardens and you certainly don’t find cats.

Cyril and me, in my cat basket, together with his respirator, but not his daughter, arrived at St Angela’s late one summer’s day in an ambulance, which left making a very loud and startling bleeping noise. I stayed on after Cyril had died, and his daughter had sent her final donation and thank you letter from Glasgow. Cyril’s daughter did come “all the way” to visit us both once. We all sat on the bench, the one in the picture on the website, the bench which Steve’s family donated “in thanks for the warm and loving care”. It was the same bench that David, St Angela’s Finance Director, sat on with Alan after he had worked out how much the NHS pay award would add to the hospice’s staffing costs. It is often the place at St Angela’s people choose for quiet, difficult chats. Steve’s bench became a “good place to break the news” which never seemed to me to be ‘good news’ for those who came and sat on Steve’s bench in the gardens at St Angela’s.

Becoming Harry the Hospice Cat was not without its sacrifices. Being a hospice cat meant giving up the luxury of cream and prawns from number 10, as well as my nightly adventures hunting on the common with the Siamese at number 16; however, I was very content at St Angela’s. When I arrived with Cyril and we were admitted “for just a few days to get the pain under control”, much like Cyril, I quickly realised that I never wanted to leave St Angela’s and return to the world outside or for Cyril to have the pain returned. I’d never been inside a hospice before and certainly never experienced human dying. But not to dwell on that too much, because as a human I know that you won’t like to talk or read about death and dying, this makes life very difficult but anyway shall we just say the lying down or sitting still humans instead?

What I remembered first about St Angela’s was its comfortable sofas and big pillows. Then there were the sun spots of warmth in the hospice gardens, as well as the abundance of butterflies for me to chase and those slightly vulnerable mice I could toy with who arrived, a bit disorientated, after passing though the new housing estate next door, having got lost on their way to what was left of The Old Heath. As well as befuddled mice, I shared my garden with the “friends and families” who came and sat alongside the lying down or sitting still humans. Like Cyril, many people seemed to only be able to get around if they were helped into chairs with big wheels. Back inside St Angela’s moving in and out of all the rooms and comfortable warm places were another group of humans who wore squeaky shoes and usually carried some things which they called “medication charts and care plans”. Then there were the humans at St Angela’s who didn’t have plans but often talked about “rotas” and had quite noisy machines on wheels called “Henry”. A Henry was a kind of mechanical cat because he seemed to like eating dust but oddly didn’t make fur balls. In fact, it was a Henry’s human who first noticed I was still in Cyril’s room. You see, in St Angela’s and all hospices, it is customary that the room is left empty for 24 hours after someone has died; it’s something they do in hospices but can’t do in hospitals. Cyril had died and his room but the new lying down or sitting still human called Penny hadn’t yet arrived, so I was curled up and just napping when I was woken, not so much by a Henry and his human but by the commotion going on in my garden.

Carefully venturing outside to see what all the fuss was about I came across “Kirsten from Marketing”. Kirsten was very clever as that Friday she was both in the garden and, at the same time, in what she called “the 4th quarter of the year”. Kirsten was with someone called a photographer who wasn’t very interested in the 4th quarter but was keen to discuss the “scheduled photo session” with someone in the garden who apparently “knew we were coming”. However, the trouble was not with the photographer or the someone, but the humans in squeaky shoes and Kirsten, whose shoes didn’t squeak but click-clacked. This group seemed to be quite agitated because of another person Kirsten kept mentioning called the CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group). I, like many others in the garden that afternoon, had no idea who CCG was, although I had come across a troublesome stray cat on the common known as Charlie who was a Cornish Rex, perhaps that was who they meant? He certainly was not the kind of cat who would fit in here, behave or who was suited to living at St Angela’s.

The fuss in my garden was on account of Kirsten having been working “all week” on a document for Alan, and she needed “just one picture” of one of the lying down or sitting still humans, someone who Kirsten called “an inpatient”. Well, even though Charlie the Cornish Rex wasn’t present he seemed to wield great power as just his name seemed to worry the people gathered in the garden. The squeaky-shoed person called Sue got quite upset with Kirsten, and I heard Sue say in a quiet but very firm voice to Kirsten that today they “just didn’t have anyone who could sit and smile for the camera”. Kirsten took Sue to sit on Steve’s bench, and Sue explained it “was a difficult day” because “Penny had died last night before she could be admitted”. Sue said Penny’s children were very upset so “no one was feeling like being a good patient and being photographed or filmed today”. This conversation about being good whilst at the hospice confirmed to me that it would really be much better for everyone at St Angela’s if Charlie the Cornish Rex stayed away; I knew that he was a difficult and quite grumpy cat, certainly not the kind of cat who would enhance St Angela’s reputation.

The photographer had almost packed up her car and was getting ready to leave when Sue and Kirsten ended up by doing that thing humans do called “hugging”. Next, after the photographer had spent a lot of time with something she called “the blasted light meter”, a device which seemed very out of place in the garden, an “inpatient” called Mary and her big-wheeled chair were arranged underneath my favourite Magnolia tree. We had another awkward moment when the photographer said it was “a shame that we couldn’t take the photo next week with the tree in blossom”, but eventually, after a nice cup of tea with a human who normally had a Henry with her, Mary said she was ready. Sensing, as only us cats can, that something about Mary that day did seem extra sad, just after the photographer said “ready”, I jumped on to Mary’s lap. This was clearly a good decision by me as it seemed to make Mary and everyone really happy. They stayed being happy, tickling me under my chin, even after photographer said that I had “helped cover Mary’s wrinkly hands making her look much younger”. This comment seemed to make Sue and Kirsten exchange that funny kind of look which only humans can and would be so much easier for us cats to understand if a tail was involved.

After the garden and Mary incident, I noticed that Kirsten seemed to come to the inpatient unit quite often for “chats” and “catch-ups” with Sue on Steve’s bench. Becoming slightly worried about when exactly Charlie the Cornish Rex might decide to show up and challenge me for my sun spots, the next time Kirsten came to see Sue to “drop off some new bereavement support leaflets” and say “a big thank you” to Sue, but not to Mary who wasn’t here any more, I followed her back across the car park. Even though I had been living at the St Angela’s for several months, Kirsten was taking me to a new part of the hospice. Once inside, and carefully following silently behind Kirsten, I was surprised to find how different this place was to the rest of St Angela’s. My whiskers were twitching because the smell was also different, so was the bright lighting, and the floor felt cold and slippery on my paws. All the windows here were shut tight, and rather than long curtains drawn aside to get lots of light in these windows were covered keeping the light out. Busy taking in my new surroundings I realised I had lost Kirsten. It took me quite a long time to find her as all the rooms here had doors which were shut, and when I did manage to get into a room humans were facing things that looked like a TV but didn’t play pictures. In this part of St Angela’s the humans all sat on chairs with small wheels which could, like a Henry, be quite startling. I had to wait for the chair and human on it to spin round to see if that human was in fact Kirsten. At the end of one corridor, there was a big chilly white meeting room which had bright coloured pictures on the walls. One day much later I heard Kirsten say to Alan how this office was “a bit like Google’s offices”.I didn’t think much of this Google as Google obviously didn’t understand that cats always needed a place to hang out which was nice and warm as well as soft for curling up and sleeping. Also, I did notice that rather than the lovely still water colours donated by Karen, whose gran had died at St Angela’s, in this part of St Angela’s walls were covered in bits of paper, numbers, dates, charts and plans which flapped and sometimes fell down. Oddly, unlike Karen and her gran, no one wanted to claim these particular decorations as their own because they hadn’t put their name alongside anything on the walls here.

Having eventually located Kirsten in her closed-door room, and after some careful checking out and much whisker twitching, I decided to settle on her warm window sill. Kirsten had two other click-clacking shoed humans with her as well as something invisible called KISS FM and Spotify in the room. KISS FM and Spotify could be very noisy especially on Friday afternoons. Although Kirsten went back across the car park to see Sue, KISS FM, Spotify and the others rarely left the Marketing room and didn’t seem to know humans like Sue, David or, for that matter, a Henry. When they did leave their desks and chairs with small wheels these humans went to see someone called Tesco who was especially good at knowing what cats liked to eat. Over time I got used to KISS FM and the other noisy parts of Marketing, and, learning to set aside the tranquillity and calm of Cyril’s room and my garden, Marketing seemed like quite a good place to make my new home. Charlie the Cornish Rex was apparently busy and still ruling the common, which suited me fine as I just wanted to have this place to myself, not be moved much any more and to enjoy being looked after by Kirsten and made a fuss of by the other humans, and of course Tesco.

Once I had got settled I behaved much like the other two humans in Marketing in that I really only went next door to somewhere called Fundraising. Actually, it would have suited us all much better if Marketing and Fundraising had been in the same room because they spent so much time chatting away to each other. If Marketing and Fundraising had been together with KISS FM, Spotify, also the kettle, printer, a sofa, and even a place for people like Sue and Mary on her big-wheeled chair, I think things might have been so much easier for Kirsten. You see, although I was only ‘Harry the Hospice Cat’, it was clear to me that all these humans needed to be together and, more importantly, to talk to each other much more. Firstly they all needed to stand still and listen, like Sue and the other squeaky-shoed people always did when talking with the lying down or sitting still humans. Secondly they needed to agree which language they would talk because everyone a St Angela’s seemed to me to be speaking in a different language.

The first language of St Angela’s was the one spoken in the inpatient unit and in my garden and was made up of words like “syringe driver” and “morphine”; these were words that humans didn’t seem to like as much as words like “feeling” and “warm”, which were often asked in questions. Some words made the lying down or sitting still humans smile, like when the squeaky-shoed humans asked if these humans “needed anything”, and if they “were OK”. The first language of St Angela’s was undoubtedly what the squeaky-shoed humans spoke, standing still in the same place until people like Cyril and Mary gave their answers. But across the other side of the car park people in Marketing spoke another language delivered at a fast pace, and Kirsten and the other humans on the surprising small-wheeled chairs talked very quickly to each other, often whilst looking at the big screens which weren’t TVs. Kirsten and the others used a different language containing words like “websites” and “mobile”. Sometimes they seemed in such a hurry that they could not even use words and used letters like CX the CJ instead. Their language was brief and short. Sue and the other squeaky-shoed people never used this language. Once, when Kirsten was away on Steve’s bench chatting and catching up with Sue, the humans in Fundraising and Marketing talked a lot about a someone called Susan Sheridan and how amazing she had been in “The C word”. Observing the humans talking about the C word didn’t seem like the other times when Marketing had to miss things out, or avoided naming things, and I sensed Marketing and Fundraising were too scared to use this full word. I wondered what Sue, who didn’t seem afraid to say any words, would have made of this discussion between Marketing and Fundraising?

Amongst all the different languages being spoken at St Angela’s the same words cropped up, although I came to understand that their meanings could be quite different. For instance, “planning” was something I had heard the squeaky-shoed humans talk about, and I also knew all about “charts” from being in Cyril’s room. I had overheard “friends and families” talking quite a lot about “plans and planning”, and they said it was “better not to plan”. So I did wonder why Kirsten and the humans on small-wheeled chairs were so keen on “plans” and spent so much time “planning” if it was so futile at St Angela’s? Because everyone at St Angela’s spoke a different language some of the humans had got quite good at translating. For instance, one day Paula, a squeaky-shoed person who, like the mice in the garden, must have got disorientated, arrived in a meeting but told everyone that she didn’t seem to “know why she was here”. In this particular meeting Paula needed a lot of help with understanding the marketing language so had to ask Kirsten to “translate” because “as a clinical nurse specialist” she “just didn’t understand”. Kirsten did explain but maybe she needed some more practice because, from my spot under the table, I heard Paula whisper to Sue that she still didn’t “get it”. In reply Sue said something about not worrying because “ROI wasn’t their problem”. Hearing this I felt sorry for Kirsten as she was normally very good at trying to translate her language for Sue when they were sitting chatting on Steve’s bench. Also, unlike the other click-clacking shoed humans, Kirsten worked very hard to understand Sue’s language asking Sue to explain things like “Advanced Care Planning”. In fact when Kirsten was eating what Tesco’s sent humans for lunch she often put words from Sue’s language into Google. Here Google seemed very helpful and was clearly better with words and explaining things than at understanding that cats wouldn’t ever be truly content in a white, chilly meeting room.

Another language with words which no one, not even Kirsten, seemed to understand was spoken by Harvey, or as Kirsten and Jan from Fundraising called him “Harvey the Hipster”. Harvey brought yet another language into St Angela’s, which seemed to confuse everyone, with words like “responsive” and “engagement”, especially when talking about something called a “Chat Bot”. Chat Bot was yet another invisible thing at St Angela’s which seemed to be “increasingly important” although mainly to Alan, Kirsten and those two other humans in Marketing. Chat Bot seemed to need a lot of explaining. When doing this explaining Harvey did get close to Kirsten’s Marketing language even using letters like “AI” instead of words like in Marketing’s language, although AI, a bit like “the C word”, seemed to worry everyone, especially Fundraising.

Chat Bot, like Charlie the Cornish Rex, was another thing which didn’t materialise whilst I was at St Angela’s. Perhaps this was because David from finance said that Chat Bot needed “a line on the 1st quarter of next year’s budget” and, despite David, Alan, Kirsten, Jan and even Sue spending a lot of time in the chilly, white meeting room, no one seemed to be able to create this line for Chat Bot. Personally, I felt Chat Bot could have been a bit more reasonable and considered asking for something which St Angela’s could give him, like a mouse. After all everyone seemed to have a mouse in the closed-door offices, and I knew that there were plenty in my garden over the other side of the car park. After one meeting in the chilly meeting room when the humans had been trying to help Chat Bot, and when both Kirsten and Harvey were having to do a lot of translating, Harvey and Kirsten ended getting so “frustrated” with Chat Bot that after the meeting they had to take a walk over to Steve’s bench. Following Kirsten I thought maybe this is where they would have to break the bad news to Chat Bot, but in fact this time the bad news was for Kirsten because Harvey told Kirsten he “thought St Angela’s probably weren’t quite ready for Chat Bot”. So, once again another chat on Steve’s bench which didn’t end well.

Despite Kirsten working on Chat Bot’s demands and Fundraising speaking to “corporates and several high net worth individuals” in the end it seemed that Harvey the Hipster had been right and St Angela’s weren’t ready for Chat Bot. However, Harvey the Hipster’s company did “do a redesign” of St Angela’s website, which included, I’m pleased to say, my picture with Mary. Oddly, Harvey the Hipster managed to do all this work for St Angela’s without ever coming back to sit on Steve’s bench to chat to Kirsten or talk to the others in the chilly meeting room. You know, now I come to think about it, I don’t think he ever did meet a lying down human or sitting still human like Cyril in his time at St Angela’s.

During my time at St Angela’s Kirsten ended up being my most favourite human, a special friend who I didn’t mean to make so sad. After I had died Kirsten said to Jan in Fundraising that she wished all cats could have the final sleep I had at St Angela’s. She was right. My final sleep was everything a cat’s last sleep should be. My tummy was full after a delicious meal thanks to Tesco and a ”little celebration” after the new website “had finally gone live”. Everyone had left and I was in my cat basket, donated I’d like to think by Mary’s family, peaceful and content and I just slipped away, just the way you humans prefer to think about death and dying. But now that I have died and there is no Harry the Hospice Cat I am worried about who’ll do my work now I am gone? You see during my time at St Angela’s I had been into every room and cupboard (even Henry’s), attended all the meetings, including those in the chilly rooms, followed Kirsten whenever she did manage to leave her room and observed quietly as Sue talked in her language to Cyril, Mary and many other lying down or sitting still humans. I had been there “at the end” for the “families and friends” and understood things which even Kirsten and the other click-clacking humans couldn’t, not to mention Harvey. I had observed and understood that plans and charts might always mean something very different to Sue and Kirsten. I had come to know more than anyone about St Angela’s, certainly I was the only one who knew just how ‘difficult’ Marketing at St Angela’s could be. So, despite being lucky enough to be in a hospice, dying well so having the really good death you humans all seem to want, I didn’t quite manage to sort everything out before I left St Angela’s. But maybe Chat Bot will do this.

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