

m.m. memos

Margaret Miller

## We'll miss you, Sam

I used the above headline in this space several years ago to note with sorrow the passing of humorist Sam Levenson, one of the best speakers to grace a Town Hall program in these parts for many a year.

And I was rather startled to come upon it when looking through some old papers a few weeks ago. I had by that time come to think of my feline pet as Sam instead of The Cat.

We had named her Sam (because she was spayed, and then we wanted to see how many of our friends caught the pun), but we rarely used the name until a second cat came to live with us. Then she became Sam, or Sam-cat.

And now I with sorrow repeat the headline, because Sam left us last weekend. A heart attack, I guess, after an evening of nocturnal strolling and then some playing with our daughter and son-in-law who were visiting for a few days.

WE HAD BEEN owned by Sam for nearly 11 years, and we all agree she was a special cat. She was half Siamese and inherited from that breed coon and voice and a little blue in her green eyes.

She was one of a kind in appearance, so we found it hard sometimes to resist the temptation to make up some exotic breed name when people asked what kind she was.

But for us, of course, she was one of a kind in other ways. Sam came to us as a teen-ager rather than a kitten, the

first of a long line of orphan cats taken in by some friends of ours.

We took her home because she seemed to be a "people cat" and she never failed us in that respect. She enjoyed being petted, jumped onto laps and never quite understood at meal-time that she wasn't human.

SAM WAS POSED with the bride when the photographer came to record the hours before our first wedding. Our bride later wondered about the wisdom of having that picture taken, because people thumbing through the wedding pictures later were heard to remark "What a pretty cat!"

Although in recent years she's been less vocal, she used to give us long dissertations on the world of catdom. She would have her catting expeditions, and once when we had just moved her to a new house she worried us a lot by disappearing for three days.

When at last she returned, I asked in relief where in the world she had been. She told me, for the next two hours, following me wherever I went in the house.

A couple of years ago we imported the second cat. I'm sure Sam was not thrilled, but she was tolerant, usually, and not up with quite a bit of nonsense from the upstairs.

Sam gives us a lot of pleasure, and we figure we gave her a pretty good life.

I'm glad she had a final playtime, and I guess she had the best means possible for departing from this world.

## review

## Poets tell hurtful truths

By Rebecca Roberts  
special writer

During two recent events, both centering on poetry, I heard the phrase "action and reflection."

If we are to effect change, bring back some order in our messy human affairs, we must embrace both action and reflection. Reflection without action is ineffective. And action without reflection is dangerous.

The first event was the Poetry Resource Center (PRC) Poetry Festival in Detroit. Carolyn Forché was the featured poet. Forché, who is from Farmington Hills, is the author of a book of poetry inspired primarily by her experiences in El Salvador, where she spent two years observing and recording.

THE BOOK, "The Country Between Us," Harper & Row, is essential. It awakens us to our dangerous delusions and it chronicles how only what is happening in El Salvador, but what is happening within us.

In her poem, "The Visitor," Forché says, "There is nothing one man will not do to another." A few days after the PRC festival, Denise Levertov was the featured poet for the Detroit Poets benefit for nuclear disarmament "Words Against Weapons." It was held at Birmingham Unitarian Church.

Levertov has been speaking out, both in her poetry and in her prose, against bad wars (are there good ones?) and

against the peculiar insanity which allows humans to entertain their own destruction through the use of nuclear weapons.

Her book, "Poet in the World," New Directions, is a collection of prose. Levertov, like Forché, tells us in clear terms what she has seen and heard. And she shows us in the course of that telling that there is a profound evil in the world that threatens to annihilate us. Within her words lies an irrepressible truth: If we do nothing to extinguish that evil, we nourish it.

LEVERTOV'S NEW book of poetry is called "Candles in Babylon." New Directions. It is a book of reflection, haunting and cogent.

Both Carolyn Forché and Denise Levertov have gone out into the world and observed unflinchingly what is there, and just as unflinchingly they have told us about it.

The writing in these books is beautiful in form. The rhythms are like our own pulse. But a lot of what they are telling us is not easy to hear, even harder to know. But know we must, because if we refuse to know, we will refuse to act. Their stories are about us, the human race.

Action and reflection. We need to understand. And then we need to stand up.

Rebecca Roberts is a poet living in North Oakland County and a member of the Detroit Poets

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