

Happy National Hairball Awareness Day

by Con Chapman

A rainy Saturday. There's just me and two cats, Rocco and Okie, three sullen males grunting their way through the day—as usual—while the wife's running errands.



Rocco: "You insensitive clod!"

And yet something's—not quite right. Okie, the elder cat, seems—distract. Taciturn. Phlegmatic. And those are just leftover vocab words from my son's senior English class.

"Just leave me alone—okay?"

He sits on a windowsill, staring off into the middle distance, as if he's depressed. He's indifferent to my attentions, or perhaps I should say more indifferent that he—or any other cat—is normally. Rocco's outside rolling in the dirt, so I amble up to him for a sidebar.

"Great day, huh?"

"Yeah. I'm going to hassle those stupid long-haired chihuahuas next door."

"Okay, but get that out of your system early—I want to take a nap this afternoon. Hey—have you noticed anything funny about Okie?"

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"Yip, yip, yip!"

"Funny strange, or funny ha-ha?"

"Strange. He seems somewhat—distant today."

Rocco looks at me with a pitiless expression and shakes his head.

"You are so freaking clueless."

"What?"

He takes a second to scratch for a tick under his chin. "It's all about you— isn't it? You sit there at your computer all day in your own little world. Never thinking about anybody else."

"Hey—if I don't sit at my computer all day, you don't get any Iams Low Fat Weight Control Dry Cat Food."



"Oh, whoop-de-do! That stuff's so bad I'd rather eat the bag."

"You'll thank me in a couple of years when every other cat in the neighborhood has a gut that's dusting the floor. But seriously—is something the matter with him?"

"Don't you know what today is?"

St. Swithin: Peace out, dawg.

I search my memory. Not Arbor Day. Not my elder sister's birthday. St. Swithin's Day? Elizabeth Taylor's wedding anniversary? "I give up—what?"

Rocco closes his eyes, as if he can't believe how stupid I am. "It's National Hairball Awareness Day, you mook!"

I'm confused. "Okie's a short-hair. Why would he get emotional about hairballs?"

"You are such an insensitive clod," Rocco says, licking his white ruff. "Hairballs can strike any cat, at any time—long or short-hair."

"I didn't know. We get so many solicitations at work. United Fund. All kinds of diseases. You don't expect me to keep up with all of them, do you?"

National Hairball Awareness Poster Child

"Look—just because there's no washed-up comedian doing a telethon for Hairball Awareness doesn't mean you can completely ignore a cause that means so much to someone right in your own home!"

"Ack-ack-ack—it's the sound of a hairball attack!"

"But I don't . . ."

Rocco cuts me off. "Okie's mom *died* of a hairball."

Okay. 'Nuf said. I "get it." "Jeez—I didn't realize."

"You should go talk to him. Maybe buy a bracelet, or at least a ribbon."

I take out my wallet. I've got four ones and a twenty. Stupid cat won't know the difference.

"And don't try to stiff him like you do the mini-mites hockey kids who accost you at the stoplights with their coffee cans."

"You cheap bastard—giving a kid a cents-off coupon for a granola bar!"

"You're right. I'll go talk to him." I go back in the house and Okie's still sitting where he was when I left, his chin on his paws.

"Hey Oke," I say, "I'm . . . uh . . . sorry I forgot about Hairball Awareness Day."

He looks up at me without anger. "That's okay," he says. "Who was it that said the universe was indifferent to our suffering?"



Camus: 1951 Existentialist Rookie of the Year.

"I don't know. Either Albert Camus—or Yogi Berra."

He lets out a short little sigh. "I think of the poem by Auden . . ."

"Musée des Beaux Arts?"



Auden: "At least this post has a smoking section."

"Right. How suffering takes place while someone else is eating or opening a window . . ."

" . . . or just walking dully along?" I say, finishing the line for him. Nothing like the consolations of art—their purgative powers—to help one get over sadness.

"I tell you what," I say. "I've got \$24—I'm going to make a contribution in your mother's name to the National Hairball Foundation."

His eyes mist over—or at least I think they do. "Save your money," he says.

"But I want to."

"No—you're going to need it."

"Why?" I ask.



“For some Resolve Multi-Surface Fabric Cleaner. I upchucked a hairball on the dining room rug.”

Available in Kindle format on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) as part of the collection “Cats Say the Darndest Things.”

