

Cemetery cat Sponkey

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tions from across the community on the social media platform with people expressing their sadness and heartbreak over the loss. It also prompted story after story how Sponkey tended to their grieving hearts and even souls on their visits to the cemetery.

Taylor Simmons commented: "Are you serious?!?! I'm literally distraught right now. He brought so much comfort while I visited my mom and dad. RIP Graveyard Cat. (I called him that before I knew his name.)"

Simmons and many other addressed comments directly to Sponkey.

"I loved Sponkey and looked forward to seeing him when visiting my parents grave. He will be greatly missed by many! RIP you sweet kitty," Jody Hayes Cray wrote.

Lisa Cruise called Sponkey an angel from heaven. Lynn Zurnieden stated she kept cat treats in her car for the last seven years. Lauren Mundell Wipper said Sponkey was a treasure. "When I'd walk through the cemetery it always amazed me how he wouldn't walk toward me but would walk to where I was heading," she said. "Every cemetery needs a soul like Sponkey."

There is an effort afoot to create a memorial to Sponkey at Orono Cemetery. Two Rivers Monuments of Elk River has offered to donate a bench, and Sponkey's family is working with the cemetery to be able to install a memorial of some sort.

Jayne Barrett, who suggested a story be written about Sponkey, made sev-

"I have no doubt now that he was looking for people to help when he roamed the cemetery."

- Hunter Lord, an Elk River man whose cat, Spidermonkey or "Sponkey," became well known while keeping watch over Orono Cemetery.



Submitted photo

Hunter Lord created this portrait of him and his beloved Spidermonkey for the Star News. He learned after Sponkey's death his pet made quite an impact on visitors to Orono Cemetery. Many shared stories of being comforted by the feline on their trips to gravesites.

eral posts over a period of time. In one, she stated:

"One time (me and my mom) were visiting my (grandfather's) grave, (and) it was 90° out and Sponkey jumped in our car and sat on my mother's lap in the air conditioning for a few minutes. It was so precious. My mother, Molly, died about a month after that and I always called Sponkey her soul cat."

With each post, Hunter Lord and his family got a little better idea of the extraordinary impact Sponkey made.

"We knew Sponkey had a following, but didn't realize the extent of it until he passed away early in the morning of Sunday, March 6, due to an accident," Hunter's father, Chris Lord said. "With all of the admirers he had at Orono Cemetery, we were always surprised and grateful that no one decided to 'adopt' him. I guess everyone knew that Sponkey had a job to do and needed to be shared with others."

Hunter, 25, said it has been mind-blowing for him to learn of his cat's double life.

It was he who named him Spidermonkey 15 years ago as a child. The cat's name was later shortened to Sponkey for practical reasons.

One of his vivid memo-

ries of Spidermonkey was watching him slowly and methodically bite off the leaves of a ponytail palm tree he had in his bedroom growing up in Coon Rapids.

The black cat, with brown highlights that illuminated when he sat in the sunlight, became a huge support for Hunter as he navigated adolescence and even some mental health issues he faced back then.

"He was the small dose of consistency, and a ray of light on those very dark nights," Hunter Lord said. "He was a best friend who always seemed to know, before myself, when I would need him most."

Hunter said he has no doubt Sponkey was looking for people to help when he roamed the cemetery.

"He had a lot more to give," he said.

Spidermonkey came home to family in 2007

Chris Lord said when the family decided to get a cat, they consulted a relative who worked at a veterinarian's office.

"We knew we would get a pair of cats, so they could keep each other company when we were all at work and school," Chris Lord said. "Our niece told us to get brothers and to get what she called 'belly kitties' — those that allow

you to hold them indefinitely and in any orientation: upside down, sideways, wrapped around your neck like a scarf."

Upon meeting a litter of stray cats at a co-worker's home, Sponkey was the clear champion of the belly kitty test.

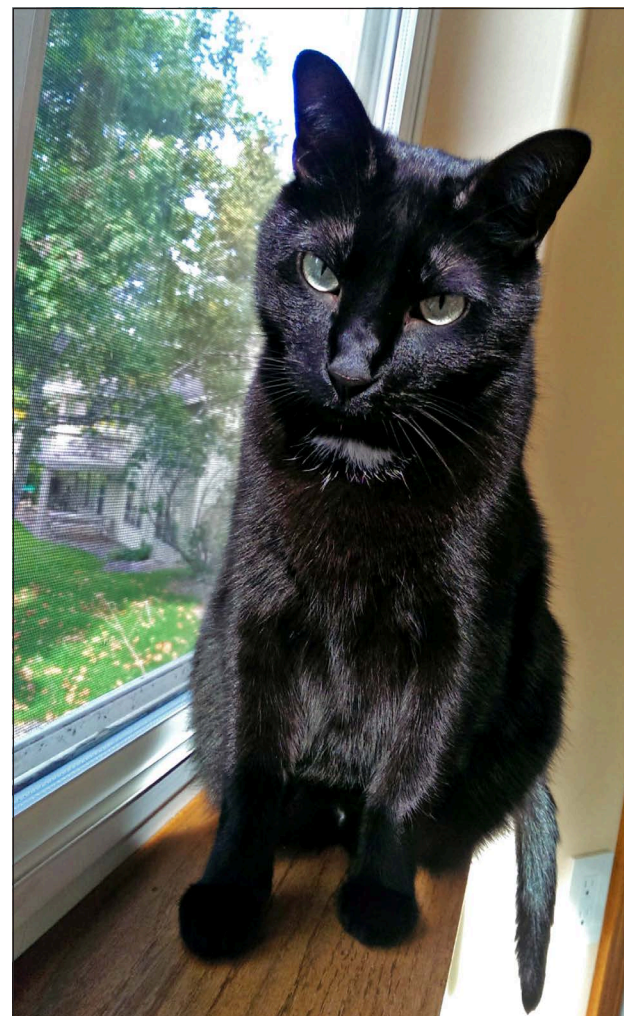
"His brother Skeeter was good, but a clear second," Chris Lord said. "In July of 2007 they came home with us as kittens."

The Lord family relocated to Elk River about 10 years ago. A couple years in, Sponkey discovered the Orono Cemetery just down the road from the family's house. By then Sponkey and Skeeter lived in the family's heated garage with a cat door that only their collars could unlock, providing them freedom to roam and a warm safe harbor with plenty of food and water when they needed it.

"When at home, Sponkey liked to relax in our laps on the deck or in the garage, for hours at a time if we were up for it," Chris Lord said.

Sponkey headed out to the cemetery early every morning and wouldn't return home until evening every season except in the wintertime.

Hunter Lord said he is grateful he was able to see him more than usual right before he died due to the time of year. "That time I had with him



Sponkey, as a younger cat, enjoyed basking in the sun in his Coon Rapids home.

meant a lot," Hunter Lord said.

Memorial to be created for Sponkey

"It strikes us now how Sponkey had two lives," Chris Lord said. "To our family, he was for the

most part an adorable, cuddly pet. To those at the cemetery, he was therapy, healing, comfort and a distraction.

"We feel deeply for their loss," Chris Lord said. "When going to the cem-

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