

Living Longer Than Your Cat

Faithful readers (hi, mom!) may recall that last month I was obsessed with my own mortality. Specifically, the fact that some life expectancy tables indicate I have around 18 years left to live – about the same anticipated lifespan of our new cats.

Many animal adoption services attempt to match potential owners' remaining years with that of a new pet, particularly if that person is getting along in years. That's fine, but I find it irritating that this is now something I have to take into consideration.

Fortunately, my friend Dale recently pointed out to me that the mortality chart I have been using is for newborns – not males of my advanced age who have already lived through their butt-dumb teens and twenties.

So I searched the Internet for a lifespan calculator that takes such things into account. I was confident I'd find one because it seems like all human knowledge is available somewhere in cyberspace.

Remember when the Internet first became available to us non-geeks in the early 1990's? Everyone was hyperventilating about how you couldn't trust anything you find there because any yahoo (so to speak) post any bogus information that he wanted to.

Fast forward to today, when search engines pretty much screen out the junk and you can have some confidence that what you end up with is current and accurate. It's still possible to find erroneous info occasionally, but it's usually corrected quickly or shouted down by vigilant cybernerds.

The practical impact of having instant information is that a lot of perfectly good arguments about what is or isn't true about any random subject are short-circuited. At least one of the participants will have a device clipped onto his belt that he can whip out and say, "Well, let's just find out!" I say "he," because for some reason I've never seen a woman do this.

So instead of endless conversations about whether Bill Buckner's fielding error cost the Red Sox the 1986 (or was it 1987?) World Series title, we now find ourselves arguing about issues that are strictly a matter of opinion. Like whether Jennifer Aniston might still be mad at Brad Pitt for dumping her in favor of Angelina Jolie, although usually reliable Internet sources say they may be divorcing soon themselves. Not that I care.

When I was growing up in the '50's and '60's, such fact-checking would require a trip to the public library (too much trouble) or a phone call to a librarian (always female) who would set down the phone, look it up and give you the answer five minutes later. Yes, I'm old.

By the way, if you are one of those people who automatically pass along supposedly factual emails without vetting them first, I'm going to reach through the Internet and give you a virtual slap upside the head. I'm pretty much removed from the contact list of everyone who does this, because I check out each suspicious "fact" anyone sends to me at snopes.com. If it's bogus I'll Reply All to the email, include the Snopes link and publicly shame the sender.

When I first started doing this, my reply subject lines would be something like "Interesting But Not Entirely True." But as I get older and my patience wears thin, my subject line has morphed into, "You Are An Idiot."

Where was I? Oh yes, the life expectancy calculator. As it turns out, a white male with my lifestyle and habits who already has earned the age of 57 can expect to live to be 88! That gives me a little more breathing room, literally.

With regard to adopting pets, that range puts me well past cat mortality and somewhere in the neighborhood of a bison, lion or grizzly bear. But I suspect they are much more difficult to train to use a litter box.

Dave Parsons, LuAnn and their cats are aging at exactly the same pace at their home in Iowa City.

