

Winston the Cat

Steve's long fingers teach me how to form the shape of Winstone's furry body, his ears pricked up and his long tail wrapped around his feet as he sits on his haunches. He shows me how to scratch on his features and whiskers with a pin before he goes into the kiln.

"But he's the wrong colour" I protest, looking at the muddy lump of clay. "He was ginger with darker stripes."

"I'll colour him before I glaze him" Steve tells me.

And sure enough, there he sits on my mantelpiece, between the Japanese lady and the Greek maiden, holding court. His head is raised, a serious quizzical expression on his face. They're in the same place now, Steve and Winstone; not on my mantelpiece; they are both in Heaven. Each brings memories of the other.

Winston was born in Lancaster, chosen from a litter around the corner from our house, his predecessor who climbed the curtains mercifully having escaped. He didn't fit in. But from the first moment Winston belonged. Our sofa in the living room was exactly the same bright orange as his fur, Perfect camouflage. His job spec was clear. He was to be a companion for 12 year old Lucy. Lucy was sad and solitary, with good reason, in need of a friend and confidant. Before Winston, Lucy cried in the morning when she woke, and again every time she had to do something she didn't want to do, which was often. But now she blossomed. Winston submitted to endless indignities, being bathed, dressed in dolls' clothes. He slept with her at night; he knew no other life. Lucy was woken each morning by the touch of his gentle paw on her face, tentatively reminding her it was breakfast time. She was understood at last.

But Winston lived for 18 years. Lucy left home at 18, when he was six.

He lives on, on my mantelpiece.

© Wendy Barkess

July 2025