

You had me at *miaow*!

Melodee Currier tells us about her soulmate Shibui, a cat as unique as his name.

They say you'll find your soulmate when you least expect it. That's just what happened to me when Shibui came into my life. I spent months trying to find a unique kitten with distinctive colouring and personality, but always came home empty handed. Then one day unexpectedly a friend called me to say her friend's cat had given birth to a litter of kittens and she thought one of them was just what I was looking for. I dropped everything and ran right over. The minute I saw him I knew he was the one for me. All I can say is – he had me at miaow!

At four weeks old, he was so tiny; all white with a little brown fur above his nose and front paws that resembled black piano keys. He needed to be weaned for at least another week, so I planned to pick him up the following week.

You're probably wondering about his name, which I chose months before I found him. While listening to a Wayne Dyer motivational tape with some friends, Wayne mentioned the word 'Shibui', which is a Japanese word meaning simple, subtle and unobtrusive beauty. It was perfect!

When the day came to pick up Shibui, he was waiting in front of the house for me. I couldn't wait to hold him again and take him to the vet for his first check-up before heading home. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to take care of him, but when Shibui fell asleep on my chest that night, my fears subsided.

Over the years, as his white fur transformed into a beautiful pattern of white, cream, beige, brown and black, I discovered Shibui was a Snowshoe Siamese. He was very intelligent and had definite boundaries. If you petted him for too long he would nip, he didn't want anyone to hold him and he wasn't especially friendly, but that



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made him even more endearing when he would comfort me, sleep next to me and occasionally lie on my stomach. He would even growl when someone was at the door and would fetch items like a dog too.

When my future husband, Doug, picked me up for our first date, he was fascinated by Shibui and spent a lot of time with him. Shibui was captivated by Doug too. That was an excellent sign – as good as getting your parents' approval!

Before Shibui's 18th birthday, I noticed a lump on his shoulder and asked the vet to take a look. He didn't seem concerned and told us to wait a few months and then have it checked again. A month later it had grown so we quickly took him back to the vet.

This time another vet saw him, said she thought it looked 'nasty' and took a biopsy. A day later we got the call we were dreading – Shibui had skin lymphoma. He also had intestinal

lymphoma and didn't have long to live. I spent the next month crying.

Doug and I decided that if Shibui didn't pass away on his own, we would know when the time was right. That time came. At midnight one July, Shibui wasn't acting like his usual self and couldn't control his bladder. We looked at each other and said: "Tonight's the night. We have to go now."

We drove in the darkness to the vets knowing vaguely what was to follow. This would be the last time

we would see our beloved Shibui alive. I felt we were betraying his trust by having him put to sleep, but what choice did we have? We didn't want him to suffer. We loved him too much.

We said our sad goodbyes and Shibui looked at us with glazed eyes. As soon as the needle entered his body, he was limp. Doug and I cried long and hard together. I wailed so loudly I surprised myself and I can still hear my cries to this day. There has never been a time – before or after – when I felt so much grief. I vowed there and then that I never wanted another cat because the pain of losing them is too great. I thought I couldn't and wouldn't go through that ever again.

Then two months later a funny thing happened. Our house didn't feel like home without the sound of little paws, so we started thinking about possibly getting another cat.

Soon after, while surfing the internet, I came across a photo of five adorable ten-week-old Siamese kittens that lived about ten miles from our home.

Before we knew it, we made an appointment to see them and chose not one, but two kittens to come home with us. That was five years ago and it was one of the best decisions we ever made.

The old saying 'It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all' really means something now! ■