*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic)*Inter-County Leader

**Knowing when it’s time to say goodbye**

“Time To Say Goodbye” is one of the most beautiful Italian love songs that has touched my heart. Sung by Andrea Bocelli and the beautiful Sarah Brightman, I can listen to it over and over all day.

It was years ago that I first heard Andrea when he sang in a concert, and I was most impressed by his powerful voice, filled with emotion and passion, though I do not speak Italian. (Correction: I can speak Italian, but no one would understand a word of what I’m saying.) However, I found it odd that he never engaged with the audience; he just sang with his eyes closed all the time. Then I found out later that he is blind. Needless to say, I felt terrible. Just learned another priceless lesson — never make any judgment until you know the truth.

Well, my wife loves animals, and she had three cats which had been with her long before she met me. One was a black cat named Wakely, as he was found on Wakely Street; the other two were brother and sister. She named the brother Conan O’Brien, her favorite talk show host who also happened to have orange hair. The other was named Maxine, a shy but mischievous female.

Wakely was supposed to be an outdoor cat, as every time when the door was ajar, he would run out and roam the neighborhood. Conan was a good mouser, but he also liked to use our expensive furniture as scratching posts. I would get a scolding if I ever complained. “Oh, honey, cats will be cats. Besides, he is so cute and adorable.” Not wanting to spend my nights sleeping outdoors, (I do sleep better in my own bed), I learned to enjoy having the specially designed cat posts and to put up with their barfs and poops which they would deposit anywhere that they found convenient. No point in complaining. What to do? What to do?

We lost Wakely a few years ago, but the siblings still hang on. After their 20th birthday, something happened to Conan. Somehow, it was time to say goodbye. For a few months, he was starting to show his age. He had problems walking up and down the steps and would take long naps every day. Still, whenever Colleen sat down in front of the TV to watch a show, both cats would cling to her like glue. It is kind of strange, that every time my wife and I visit friends who have pets, they would jump on my lap once I am seated; but not with our cats, though I don’t mind a bit.

Then one morning, something strange happened. Conan was looking out the screen door at the lake, and kept meowing. When Colleen opened the screen door, he slowly walked outside. He never liked outdoors, so I sensed that he was up to something, but what? I was getting curious.

After walking around the porch a few times, he decided to walk down the steps and to investigate the lake, which was a distance away. He paused on top of the slope and looked around; then kept walking slowly toward the dock. There he sat quietly and just looking around. Colleen was afraid that he might fall into the lake, and carried him all the way back to the house.

After he rested a little bit, he was at the screen door again, meowing continuously. Naturally, knowing that he wanted out again, Colleen abided, but this time followed him closely, just in case. This time, when on the dock, he was splashing the water playfully. That puzzled both of us, as he didn’t like water at all. I remember one time when Colleen tried to give him a bath after he encountered something sticky and smelly; he put up such a fight that I thought the neighbors were going to call the police.

Fearing that he might fall in accidentally, Colleen gently picked him up and brought him to the house. Once again, Conan wanted to get out to the lake; and this time, he actually jumped into the lake. Thank goodness for the lake weeds, he didn’t sink to the bottom, but was resting on the floating foliage instead. Having been a hospice chaplain, Colleen realized that Conan knew that it was time to say goodbye, and he was enjoying every last moment.

At that time, Conan was soaking wet, but he couldn’t care less. Colleen wrapped him up in a blanket and brought him back to the house, laid him down in his bed, then covered him with another blanket. He laid there peacefully, catching his last breath. Then just like that, he was gone the next morning.

It surprised me that even though I knew Colleen was sad, she didn’t shed a tear. She knew that it was time to say goodbye, for both of them. They enjoyed each other’s company while they could, and now he was on a journey to a better place. She dug a grave where he rested last — on top of the slope overlooking the lake and the prairie around. After she placed a couple of plants on top of the grave, she collected some large pieces of rock and carefully placed them around. I have to admit, it was a good resting place indeed.

I’m waiting patiently to sing “Time To Say Goodbye” to Maxine, but somehow, she refuses to sing along. So, I’ve to put away the plan of replacing the carpet even though I’m immune to the reek by now. I know that the time will come one day soon, but I’m not pushing it. As long as Colleen is happy, what the heck. Come to think of it, of all the money that we’ll be saving on cat food and cat litter, we definitely can afford a vacation. Where to go and what to do?

Hmmm, maybe a trip to Italy where I can practice my Italian?