

THE DEATH OF A FISH

Michael Bettencourt

347-564-9998 • michaelbettencourt@outlook.com • m-bettencourt.com

On the one hand, he was just a betta fish—*Betta splendens*, to be exact—something that caught the eye of the Marvelous María Beatriz as she was out buying food for the cats at Petsmart.

She came in with all the trappings—tank, pump, light, heater, bloodworms, and the fish (which she named Inigo Montoya)—and she set him up in the living room where he entertained us with his teal-colored flow through the water.

A few days in, he was attacked by a fungus that swaddled his body and sucked the life out of him. He lay on the bottom of the tank, the pulse of his gill flaps the only indication that he was alive. We tried various remedies, but nothing helped.

We decided to put him out of his misery—and this is where the story shifts to “on the other hand.”

The method we chose was one suggested as the most humane. We put him a container of water and placed that container in a bowl of crushed ice. His water would eventually get colder, dropping his body temperature until he passed away.

We kept vigil. It didn't take long. As the water chilled, the undulations of his gills became slower and slower until they just stopped.

We were both a little stunned by what we had witnessed. Not to say humbled and a touch frightened. We had just watched life pass out of a living creature. Whatever “life” is, it was now gone. It had ebbed away. As it would be for us at some unknown point in the future. As it would be for everything around us, right down to the decay of quarks. This made us very quiet inside.

But because living goes on, and we had to get to bed because we had work the next day, we put Inigo's body in a baggie and into the freezer so that we could dispose of it in a dignified way when we had time on the weekend (life gets so busy during the week!) and not just dump it into the trash. Even if it was for just a short time, we living

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creatures had been in commune with each other, and it feeds the health of our spirits to treat that time with respect and compassion and pay it due homage.

The pump is still burbling. We will get a new resident—on the weekend, when there is time—and make sure that the tank is clean clean clean and the water well-prepared and pH-balanced and a vial of anti-fungal medicine on hand just in case.

His gift to us, if it can be called that, was to get us to stop and pay attention—to him and his suffering, to the passing of time as it passes us by, to the need to stop bulling our way through life with scarcely a glance to the right or to the left.

For that, he deserves a proper farewell—which we will get to just as soon as time permits. But we will get to it.