LIFE

Cats

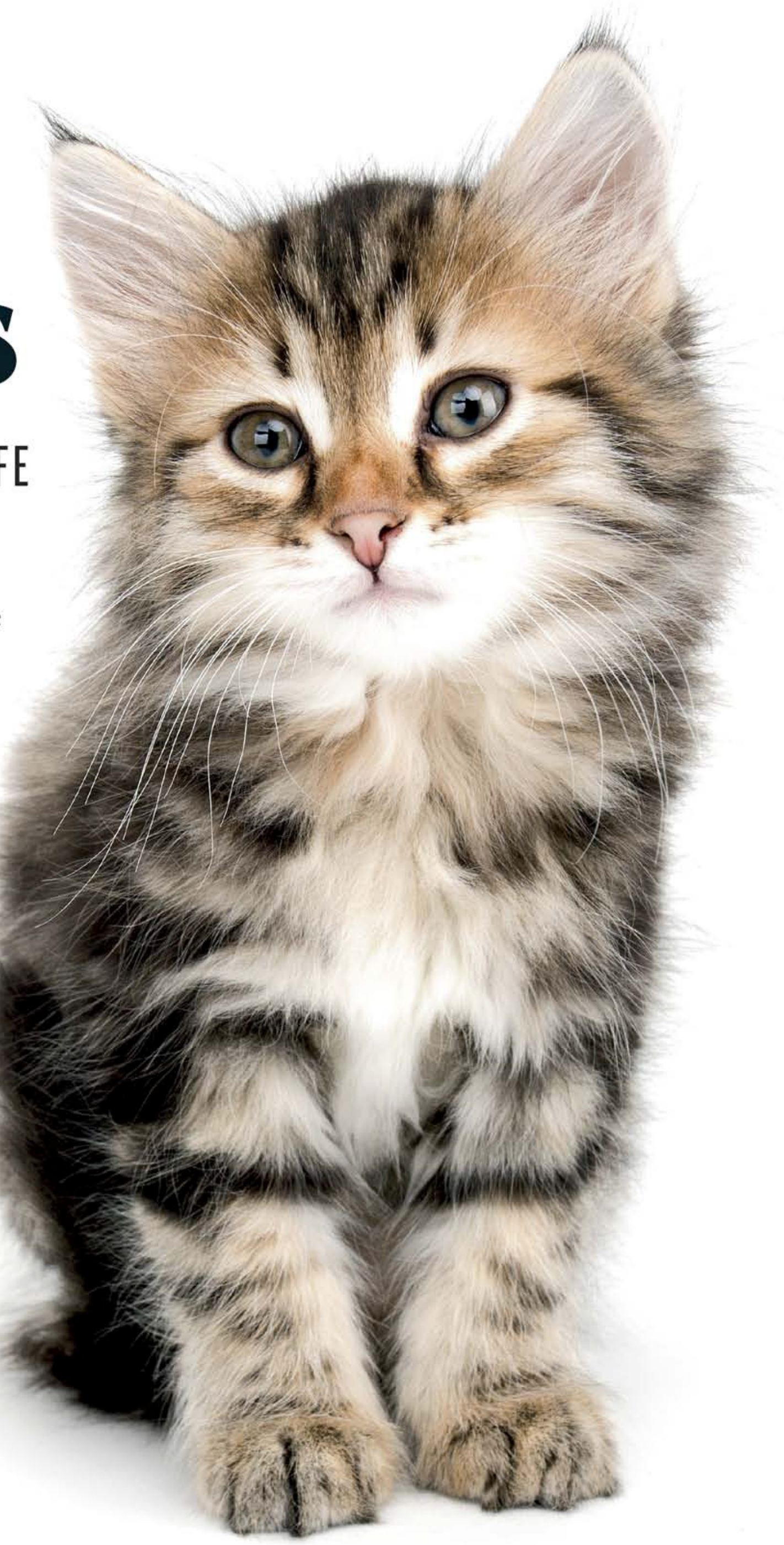
COMPANIONS IN LIFE

Feline Behavior

Rulers of the House

The Truth About Kittens

PLUS:
CATS
vs.
DOGS




LIFE
CATS

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Introduction

How Often Do We Celebrate the Life of a Cat?

By Kostya Kennedy

One morning, some years ago when I was living in New York City, I gathered Kaya into an old blue shawl and carried him eight blocks to the animal clinic to be put to sleep. He had been my cat since I was in the ninth grade. I named him after the Bob Marley album. "Nineteen years is a long time for a domestic short hair," the vet said, stroking him.

Kaya still had a little life in him at the end. On the walk over to the clinic he batted at my chin from inside his wrap. I talked to him matter-of-factly, telling him about a recent CNN/*New York Times* poll that had voted him one of the seven best cats in the Northeast. I often told him things like this over the years: my version of coochy-coochy-coo.

Kaya always tolerated the stuff about the polls, though he must have known he wasn't all that. Not compared to his brother Korduroy, anyway. Korduroy did things you'd tell people about. He would stand in the road near the STOP sign, for example, and when a car pulled up, he'd jump on the hood and peer into the windshield. Kaya would watch this impassively, and he also looked on when Korduroy played elaborate play-fighting games with the neighbor's German shepherd. Next to Korduroy, a skilled small-game hunter who knocked on our front door by putting a paw into the mail-slot, Kaya seemed a simpleton.

He was docile and deliberate and he purred a lot. He didn't much go for killing things but he got into sudden, spirited battles with ballpoint pens and dangling extension cords. He had white mittens on his front paws, white knee-length stockings on his hind legs, and soft snowy fur around his muzzle, neck, and breast. Otherwise he was cloaked in a hodgepodge of blacks and browns. He had wide, yellow-green eyes. He lay down a lot.

Among me and my immediate family we've had maybe a dozen cats over the years—not including the eight kittens that once roamed my parents' house after Palaleela had her litter—and there is no question that in matters of decency and kindness Kaya was the best of the lot. He let Korduroy eat first. He put up with two-year-olds who tugged his tail. He kept you company. Many cats are keen to human suffering but none was keener than Kaya. When someone was sad, Kaya always came around. "Mow," he'd say, and look up at you.

Kaya appreciated good, simple things: being brushed with a fine comb, warm chicken scraps, a scratch behind the ears, weekends on the Cape, a place to sleep at the foot of the bed. How often do we celebrate the life of a cat?

Maybe it was because he didn't know any tricks that in the last few years of his life, Kaya began to talk. He mewed incessantly. His most common issuance was a loud, plaintive wail that sounded more like a human baby than any animal I've heard. "Dude, you've got a kid over there?" friends would say during phone conversations. My professional acquaintances knew him too. I'd be interviewing someone, and when Kaya's voice filled the phone lines I'd sense the person on the other end ignoring it

uncomfortably. “I know,” I’d say to Kaya afterward, “it can be hard to be a cat.”

Kaya delivered other sounds besides that trademark yowl. He had a two-beat high-pitched me-ow for when he was playing happily or anticipating food. He gave a short, chirplike mew as a greeting when he walked into a room. His long trilling mew meant he wanted to go out. A low, guttural “reowwl” said he was encountering another cat. An airy half-mew, half-yawn meant he was waking up, and Kaya’s odd, unnerving series of yips told you he sensed a thunderstorm on its way. Whatever Kaya’s agenda, the only sure way to quiet him was to take him onto your lap.

The mewing became a backdrop to my life that did not fade until the very end. When I made the appointment at the clinic, Kaya had been sick for several weeks. Thyroid condition. He slept nearly all the time and he couldn’t keep his medicine down. He stopped jumping up onto the bed at night. He kept to a corner of the apartment, venturing out every few hours to stare into his water dish and take a few half-hearted laps. When his mewing died down, a strange silence settled upon the apartment. Around that time he stopped eating.

It got to me, of course. I tried to tempt him with his favorite foods. Friends came over to tell Kaya good-bye. The night before we went to the clinic I was sitting on the couch—quiet, glum, and staring off. I guess Kaya could tell I was in a rotten way. I looked down when I felt him rubbing weakly against my shins. He peered up at me. “Mow,” he said, and then he slumped back over to the corner to rest.

The next morning I carried him in the crook of my arm. I talked to him as if nothing were wrong. At the clinic I set him on a table in a small greenish room and stroked him until I could feel a faint purr in his breast. The vet was there too, and Kaya, with what seemed like great effort, gave a final, soft meow.

His life was gentle, I tell people, and you could have learned from him.

Even when batting a toy mouse, Kaya rarely extended his claws.

One, two, three: Awwww! Curious, lovable, mischievous baby cats spend the first two months of their lives completely dependent on their mothers, who teach them everything they need to survive as adults—like how to hunt and what to think of humans. Being adorable, on the other hand, comes naturally

IT ALL STARTS WITH KITTENS

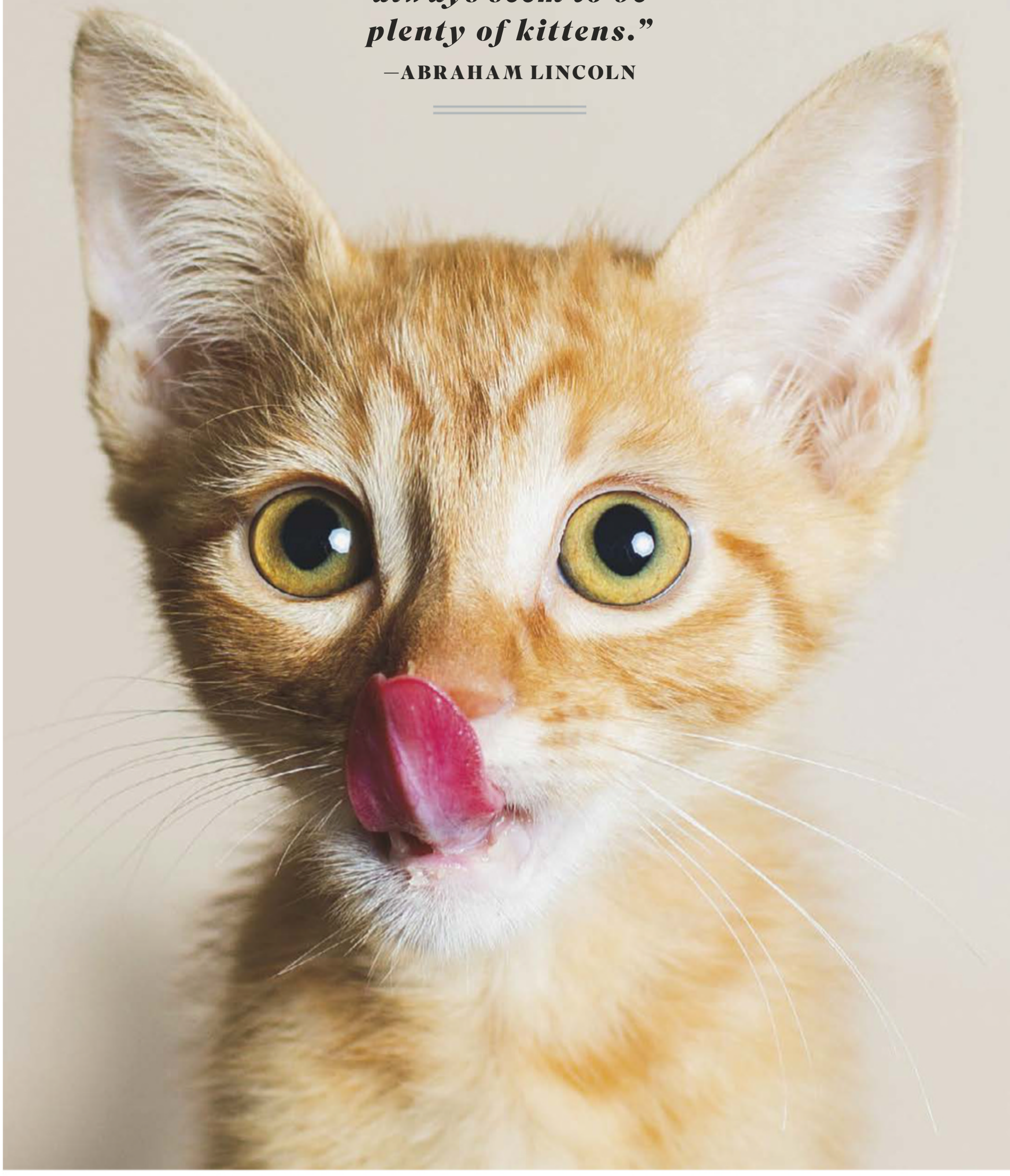
Kittens don't begin playing with each other until they're about three weeks old, the age of these two rascals.

PLAY ON!

Cats' personalities start to emerge at around five weeks, which is also when they begin to be weaned and start nibbling on dry food, though their mothers basically have to kick them out of the nest first.

“No matter how much the cats fight, there always seem to be plenty of kittens.”

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN



LOOK OUT!

Kittens played on the windowsill of a German farmhouse. The little guy at the left seemed momentarily entranced by the purple flowers, but cats generally don't distinguish between colors—instead, they're attracted to small, quickly moving objects.

"A kitten is the most irresistible comedian in the world."

—AGNES REPPLIER

WE ARE SIAMESE

+

One of the oldest cat breeds, "Meezers" are known to play fetch and are particularly smart, curious, energetic, and vocal—except when they're sleeping kittens, of course.

“A kitten gets himself into every kind of trouble.”

—CHAMPFLEURY

CATNAPS

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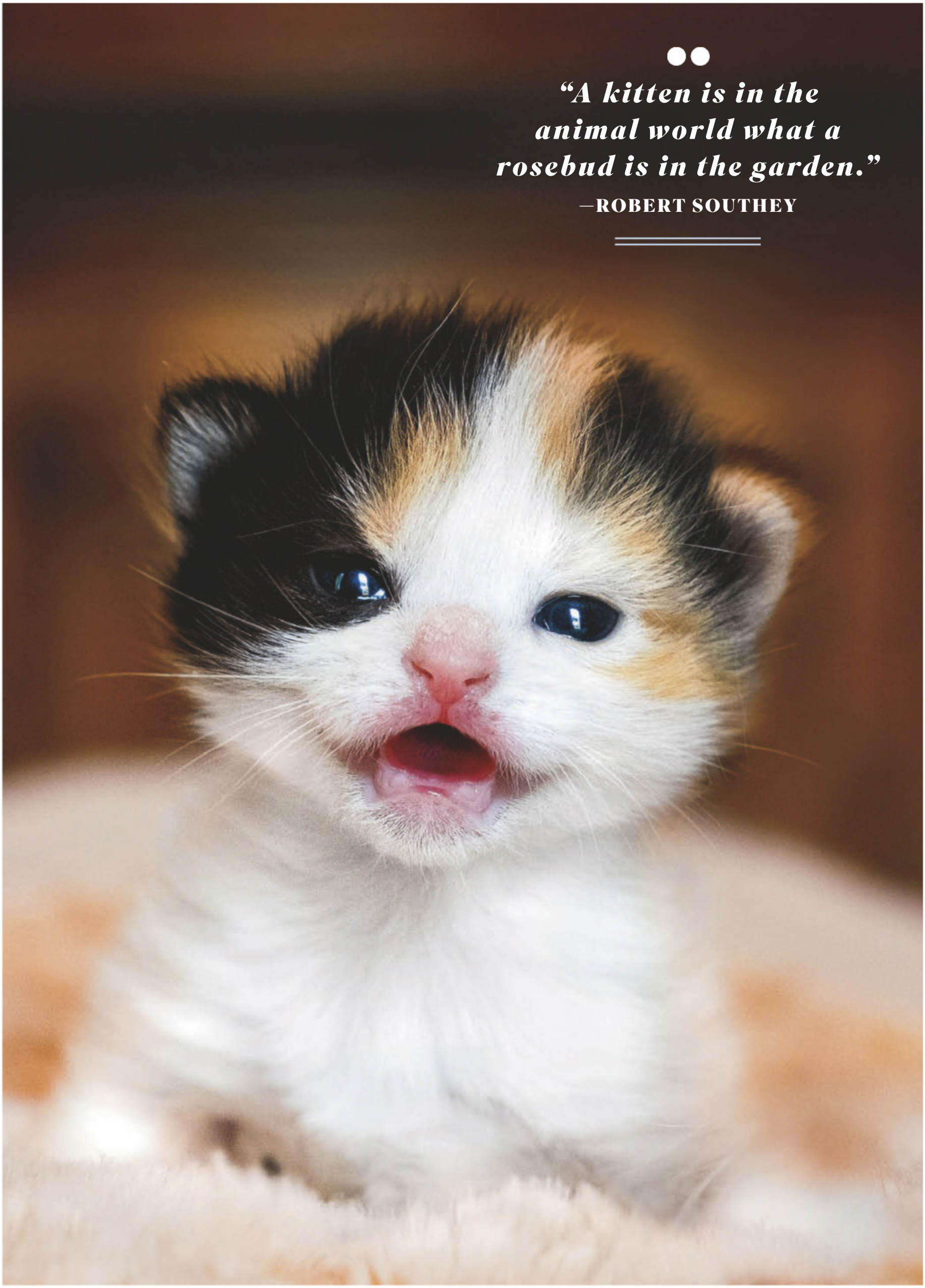
Cats sleep more than they do anything else—especially as kittens, when they doze about 20 hours a day. When they're not napping, they're often eating—or at least begging for food.


“A kitten is in the animal world what a rosebud is in the garden.”
—ROBERT SOUTHEY

FRISKY KITTIES

+

Ginger kittens—their kind are known as orange tabbies—are almost always males.

“Kittens believe that all nature is occupied with their diversion.”

—F.A. PARADIS DE MONCRIF

Until about 70 years ago, most domestic cats lived outdoors. Cat food and litter boxes are relatively recent inventions.

1

Chapter One

THE HISTORY OF THE HOUSE CAT

Long, long ago, your friendly domestic feline was a wild Middle Eastern cat who scavenged for scraps around human homes—and was eventually invited inside. Here, his astonishing journey from ancient loner to the world's most popular pet

The Gods and Their Makers, **an 1878 oil painting by Edwin Longsden Long, showed a 19th-century European take on ancient Egypt, iconic cats included.**

Once upon a time—about 100,000 years ago, that is—the ancestor of your finicky, affectionate, inscrutable domestic feline was a wild creature who prowled the deserts of the ancient Middle East. At first, the animals that scientists would call *Felis sylvestris lybica* pretty much ignored the primates they shared the planet with. These primates were mammals who walked on two legs accompanied by domesticated wolves, the ancestors of today's dogs. Cats began to pay serious attention to humans only when the Neolithic Revolution began in the Fertile Crescent.

The rising temperatures that

First valued as rodent killers, cats in ancient Egypt eventually became treasured domestic pets and—finally—gods.

Ancient Egyptians honored cats by preserving them as mummies (this page) and memorializing them in art, such as the brass head from the 6th century BCE shown opposite.

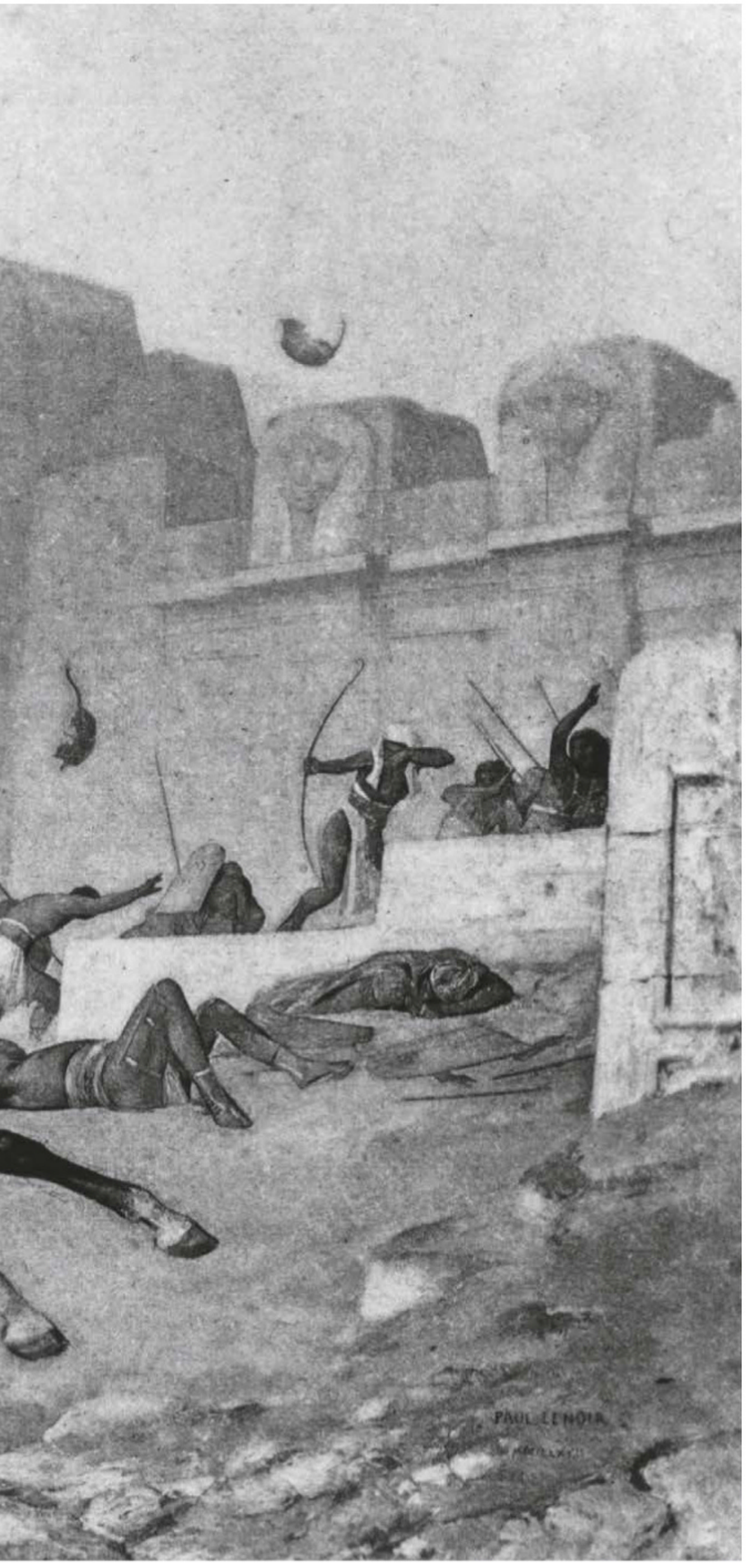
marked the end of the Ice Age around 9,000 to 10,000 years ago allowed humans to begin cultivating grain. As a result, we morphed from hunter-gatherers into farmers, putting down roots in settlements that marked the beginning of human civilization in parts of what is now the Middle East.

In 1989, one such settlement was excavated in Hallan Çemi, a small site in Turkey's Anatolia region that dates from the beginning of the Neolithic period. Located near a forest along the Sason River, the place was home to a handful of New Stone Age families who lived in wattle-and-daub huts and crafted tools from flint and obsidian. They ate everything from wild lentils to the animals that prowled their settlements in search of scraps—wild cats among them. During the excavation of Hallan Çemi, archaeologists found the bones of 58 cats that had clearly once been dinner.

But humans eventually discovered that cats could serve as more than mere food. For one thing, the wild grain that people were now storing attracted a creature known as *Mus musculus domesticus*—a.k.a. the common house mouse. Originating on the Indian subcontinent, the mouse couldn't compete with its fiercer indigenous cousins, so it moved indoors. Thus, cats—carnivorous hunters who preyed on vermin—became useful to humans. "Both sides profited from each other," according to Eva-Maria Geigl, an evolutionary geneticist at the Institut Jacques Monod and Université Paris Diderot. "Humans were happy there were less rodents, and the cats had food."

Over time, natural selection favored the cats that exhibited two key characteristics: boldness, which brought them into our encampments, and calmness, which kept them there. The mix of these seemingly contradictory

In this painting by Paul Lemair, Cambyses II, the king of Persia, and his army throw cats at the Egyptians in their conquest of Pelusium in 525 BCE.



qualities distinguished *Felis sylvestris lybica* from the four other subspecies of wildcats, which were native to Europe, China, central Asia, and southern Africa, respectively. The European and Chinese wildcats probably weren't tolerant of people, according to a 2007 study, and though central Asian and southern African wildcats might have been domesticated under the right circumstances, only *Felis sylvestris lybica* lived where human settlements first evolved. In fact, every domestic cat—known as *Felis catus*—is a descendant of its ancient Middle Eastern ancestors and none other.

But "domestic" is something of a misnomer where cats are concerned. In fact, it's a mistake to suggest that cats were domesticated by humans. Why? For starters, we have traditionally domesticated animals such as dogs, horses, and sheep by assuming the role of the alpha males that control their respec-

When a beloved cat died in ancient Egypt, its owners would shave their eyebrows as a sign of mourning.

tive packs. Cats, though, have no social hierarchy. They operate alone. Indeed, even as they became part of our settlements, cats remained fiercely independent. Neolithic homes had open doors and windows, which allowed "pet" cats to wander freely and breed with their wild counterparts. As a result, domestic felines stayed more or less feral—a quality they retain, in some measure, to this day.

So why did we keep them around? Well, in addition to their hunting skills, we were *attracted* to them—possibly because they remind us of human infants. Relative to their faces, their eyes are appealingly large (just like our babies') and aren't located on the side of their heads—unlike those of other domesticated animals. In addition, the average full-grown cat weighs about eight pounds—just like most human newborns. These and

other characteristics trigger the nurturing impulses we're hard-wired to feel for our own children—especially among women of child-bearing age. According to evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould, we are "fooled by an evolved response to our own babies and we transfer our reaction to the same set of features in other animals."

In the end, humans did not domesticate *Felis sylvestris lybica.* Rather, the canny cats did something wholly unprecedented: They domesticated themselves.

In 2004, the first archaeological evidence of a unique connection between humans and cats was found on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus. There, the archaeologist Alain le Brun discovered the remains of a human adult who was buried about 9,500 years ago—not far from the grave of an eight-month-old cat. Since cats aren't native to Cyprus, humans would have had to bring them to the island on boats—probably from Anatolia or the Levant. Just to handle the voyage, these cats would had to have reached some level of comfort with people (a "spitting, scratching, panic-stricken wild feline would have been the last kind of boat companion they would have wanted," as Desmond Morris wrote in 1997's *Catworld*). The burial of a cat near a human on Cyprus likely reflects some kind of emotional bond. "The association of a cat and a human in death is strong evidence of association in life," according to Jean-Denis Vigne, an archaeologist at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris.

Nevertheless, the discovery doesn't conclusively prove that cats were domesticated on Cyprus—only that a single human was probably close to his cat. The first clear evidence of cat domestication comes from around 3,700 years ago—an ivory cat statue found in Israel dating from that time indicates that cats were then common in human society. About 100 years later, artists in Egypt, where cat domestication first occurred on a large scale, started painting cats eating from bowls and sitting under chairs.

Not surprisingly, cats were first valued in Egypt for their hunting skills. In addition to Nile rats, they killed poisonous snakes—including deadly cobras. But, as they had elsewhere, cats eventually became treasured

The early Christian church accepted and even cherished cats, as shown in this depiction of St. Jerome in a 15th-century Swiss altarpiece.

pets in Egypt. In 2008, Wim Van Neer of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences in Brussels and his team found six cat skeletons buried in a southern Egyptian cemetery dating from the fourth millennium BCE. The fact that the animals were buried in an elite burial ground was unusual in itself, but the scientists also discovered that the animals had been born outside the normal breeding cycles, meaning that they had been bred by humans. (Wildcats breed only once a year, whereas domestic cats can breed multiple times.)

Indeed, ancient cat domestication reached its peak in Egypt. "The Egyptians were the first people to have the resources to do everything bigger and better," says Carlos Driscoll, the World Wildlife Fund chair in conservation genetics at the Wildlife Institute of India in Dehradun. It's even possible that Egyptians took already domesticated cats and, in effect,

Though the Roman emperor Theodosius I had banned paganism in 391 CE, its practices weren't explicitly associated with cats until 1233.

domesticated them twice—a process that may have helped turn the wildcats into today's cuddly avatars of cuteness, according to Van Neer's study. In short, the ancient Egyptian cat metamorphosed "from being a slaughterer of mice to a couch potato," said Geigl.

But the cat would climb to even greater heights in Egypt. In fact, it became revered. When a beloved cat died, for instance, its owners would shave their eyebrows as a sign of mourning, which ended when the eyebrows grew back. Killing cats became punishable by death, and Egyptians were known to risk their lives to save them from burning houses, according to the Greek historian Herodotus. Egyptian royals were particularly devoted to their cats, giving them gold jewelry and letting

them eat off their plates. One pharaoh had his female cat embalmed and placed in a custom-made sarcophagus.

About 3,500 years ago, Egyptian cats began to be associated with divinities—particularly the leopard goddess Mafdet, who offered protection from scorpions and snakes just as mortal cats did. As the avatar of justice, Mafdet supposedly ripped the hearts out of criminals and gave them to the pharaohs. (Anyone who's ever been awakened in the middle of the night by a cat with a mouse in its mouth will understand.) About 2,800 years ago, the Egyptian lion goddess Bastet became associated with domestic cats. "Originally a simple goddess who protected humankind against misfortune, she later became associated with playfulness, fertility, motherhood, and female sexuality—all characteristics of domestic cats," John Bradshaw wrote in 2013's *Cat Sense*.

The Egyptians' obsession with cats may even have contributed to their civilization's decline. In 525 BCE, Cambyses II of Persia set out to conquer Egypt by attacking Pelusium, a city on the Nile River. Knowing of the Egyptians' reverence for cats, the Persians rounded up the animals and forced them to run ahead of their marauding horses, according to the Macedonian historian Polyaenus. The invaders may even have painted cats on their shields and held the animals in their arms. Horrified, the Egyptians surrendered Pelusium. During his victory march through the city, Cambyses II threw cats at the natives. Many years later, the historian Herodotus wrote that he could still see cat skeletons lying in the sand.

After the Battle of Pelusium, Egypt was annexed to the Persian empire—until around 334 BCE, when Alexander the Great conquered Persia and Egypt, placing them under Macedonian control. During this period, cat worship reached its height in Egypt. Celebrations in the city of Bubastis ("House of Bastet"), located just southeast of modern Zagazig, attracted up to 700,000 worshippers. "The men played on pipes of lotus: the women on cymbals and tambourines," Herodotus

Cats in the work of the 16th-century Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch (above) and in a 19th-century treatise on feline breeds by a Thai Buddhist abbot (opposite).

Chinese Cat Merchants, a 19th-century engraving, shows cats being sold for food. "The cats . . . maintain an incessant squalling, and seem never to despair of escaping," according to a commentary on the work.

wrote. "When they reached Bubastsis, then held they a wondrously solemn feast: and more wine of the grape was drunk in those days than in all the rest of the year."

There was a dark side to this revelry, however. From about 332 to 30 BCE, Egyptian cats were systematically bred to be killed and mummified as sacrifices to Bastet and other gods. "Kittens, aged 2 to 4 months old, were sacrificed in huge numbers, because they were more suitable for mummification," according to a study published in the April 2012 issue of the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*. Barbaric? Yes. Yet the fact that cats were raised in cramped Egyptian catteries may be why they can now tolerate living in our homes.

Though the Egyptians banned the exportation of cats for hundreds of years—probably for religious reasons—nature doesn't care about human laws. Which is why domestic

According to an ancient Chinese story, the gods asked cats to run the world, but the animals declined: They had better things to do.

cats spread to Greece and Italy around 2,400 years ago, probably thanks to Phoenician traders, who then ruled the seas from what is now Lebanon, Israel, and Syria. Since the Greeks and Romans were already using domesticated weasels to control rodent populations, cats took on a more symbolic significance in those cultures. In Rome, they represented freedom and came to be associated with Diana, the goddess of wild animals and hunting, while the Greeks linked them to Hecate, the goddess of sorcery and witchcraft. These associations would later bedevil the cat—literally—as it made its way through Western Europe.

In 332 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered the port city of Tyre, leading to the fall of Phoenicia. After annexing what remained of

the civilization in 64 BCE, the Romans took over the country's trade routes. They eventually took cats to India, where the animals became prominent in the country's literature. The national epics the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* featured Sastht (a cat goddess not unlike Bastet), while an Indian folk tale from the 5th century BCE inspired the Western children's story "Puss in Boots."

Not long after cats arrived on the subcontinent, Romans brought the animals along the Silk Road to China, where they were valued in part because they protected silkmoth cocoons and rare manuscripts from rodents. Eventually they became associated with Li Shou, the goddess of fertility and (what else?) pest control. According to an ancient Chinese story, the gods asked cats to run the world at the beginning of time, but cats had better things to do (namely, playing

In Japan, cats became the model for the* maneki neko, *the figure of a beckoning feline that represents good luck.

and sleeping). For better or worse, humans got the job.

About 100 years after cats arrived in China, they showed up in Japan, where they became the model for the *maneki neko,* the figure of a beckoning cat that represents good luck and is seen to this day in Japanese restaurants throughout the world.

The discovery in Tofting, Germany, of cat bones dating from about 2,000 years ago—along with the increasing appearance of cats in art and literature—proves that domestic cats were common in Europe at the time. The Phoenicians were probably responsible for introducing cats to Britain, where their remains were discovered in Iron Age settlements dating from the 3rd century BCE, but the first evidence of cats as pets in the British Isles dates from the Roman era. In

Children's Games: Third Month, **an 1894 woodcut showing children playing in the company of their pet cat.**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XII

1997, archaeologists unearthed the remains of a villa from the 2nd to the 4th centuries CE in Dalton-on-Tees, North Yorkshire, England—along with the well-preserved bones from about 28 animal species.

Among these was the skeleton of a small domestic cat whose bones had been broken in a devastating accident, though the presence of new growth proved that the cat had survived. How? "It appears that a friendly human may have, if not nursed the stricken feline back to health, at least tended it with food and water while its bones knitted back together—a level of care above and beyond what you might expect to be accorded to 'pest control' or an opportunistic cohabiter," according to a 2016 article in *Current Archaeology*. "If this stiff-legged, limping cat, which would certainly not have been able to earn its keep as a working mouser, had been allowed to continue living at the villa rather than being euthanised and replaced, might this suggest that its owner had felt a deeper emotional connection with the animal? If so, this could be our earliest evidence yet in Britain for a cat that was not just a household tool, but a cherished pet."

From the 5th to the 13th centuries, cats spread throughout Europe in an accelerating process that tells "the story of human mobility—war paths, trading paths, and mostly seafaring paths," according to Geigl. "This must have been a cat that was at the time very attractive to people, because it spread very efficiently."

During this time, cats had it pretty good in Britain and Europe. England's Henry I even created laws to protect the creatures, fining anyone who killed a cat 60 bushels of corn. As the animals proliferated, so did the lore associated with them (including the worship of the Egyptian goddess Bastet and the Roman goddess Diana). Though the Roman emperor Theodosius I had banned paganism in 391 CE, its practices weren't explicitly associated with cats—until 1233, when Pope Gregory IX issued *Vox in Rama,* a papal bull condemning the heresy of Luciferianism, whose adherents believed that Satan had been unjustly expelled from heaven and would eventually conquer the Christian god. To quash the apostasy, the Catholic Church appointed Konrad von Marburg—"a sadistic fanatic," in the words of one contemporary—to oversee an inquisition in Mainz, Germany. Luciferianism was real enough, but the story behind the cult that Marburg unearthed by torturing innocent people was suspect, to say the least. It went something like this:

After kissing a toad, a duck, or a goose, Luciferian initiates were introduced to a pale, cold man who kissed them on the lips, causing them to instantly forget their Catholic faith. The newly indoctrinated members would then share a meal before the statue of a black cat, which would come to life and walk backward with its tail erect. After the initiates kissed the cat on the buttocks, wild orgies ensued.

Thanks to *Vox in Rama,* the cat became indelibly associated with witches and black magic in Europe, according to Morris. "Its teeth were said to be venomous, its flesh poisonous, its hair lethal (causing suffocation if a few were accidentally swallowed), and its breath infectious, destroying human lungs and causing consumption." (A myth that derived from cat allergies, perhaps?)

As a result, millions of cats were slaughtered—and millions more were horribly mistreated. In France, they were burned alive as a form of public entertainment: Spectators "shrieked with laughter as the animals, howling with pain, were singed, roasted, and finally carbonized," according to Norman Davies's *Europe: A History* (1996). In Belgium, cats were thrown from a tower as part of a celebration known as Kattenstoet. In 1549, a celebration honoring the Spanish king Philip II in Brussels featured a "cat organ," which was composed not of pipes but of cats whose tails were tied to strings. When the strings were pulled (by a bear, no less), the cats' cries became "music" that trained monkeys danced to. Popular for at least a century, the "cat organ" was eventually "improved" by using spikes instead of strings.

In Europe during the 15th to 17th centuries cats were also affected by the persecution of suspected witches—often older women who lived alone with the animals. The cruelty and prejudice were severe. "Any elderly crone who happened to be ugly or misshapen enough to have repelled all potential husbands . . . was desperately in need of companionship," Morris theorized in 2007's *Fantastic Cats.* "Maltreated cats, finding themselves in a similar plight, might have approached such women, who befriended them as substitutes for human companionship and love . . . Anyone teasing or hurting their beloved felines might

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***The Love Potion*, a 1903 oil painting by Evelyn De Morgan, reflected the widely held belief of a connection between witches and cats—especially black ones.**

have been cursed and threatened. All that was required then was for one of these tormentors to fall ill or suffer a sudden accident, and the old 'witch' was to blame."

As cats were slaughtered throughout Europe, the rodent population spread, which some believed precipitated the Great Plague that decimated London's population from 1665 to 1666. Yet no one blamed the contagion on the flea-riddled rats—rather, they blamed the cats. "In the beginning of the infection, an order was published by the Lord Mayor . . . that all the dogs and cats should be immediately killed, and an officer was appointed for the execution," Daniel Defoe wrote in 1722's *Journal of the Plague Year.* "It is incredible . . . what a prodigious number of those creatures were destroyed. I think they talked of forty thousand dogs, and five times as many cats."

Siamese cats were considered so important in the Far East that they were reserved for royals, while other breeds were revered as temple guardians.

Black cats were particularly demonized, though their color was simply one of many genetic mutations that the animals were starting to develop. In the beginning, domestic cats were all brown tabbies with "mackerel" stripes, but color changes were first noted in 600 CE, and the characteristic blotchy coat of today's domestic tabbies first appeared in 14th-century London before spreading throughout the world. "It could have provided some natural advantage such as camouflage, or some other effect of the same mutation that has nothing to do with coat color," Bradshaw tells LIFE. "Alternatively, the look could have been favored by owners who were more inclined to take care of the kittens because they were 'different.'"

Meanwhile, the cats who had traveled to the Far East were undergoing their own distinct evolution. Since these animals could only interbreed with *Felis silvestris,* a subspecies that does not occur naturally in Asia, they developed unique characteristics in a process known as genetic drift. Over time, this resulted in the Siamese, among other distinctive breeds. The Siamese were considered so important that they were reserved for royals, while other cats were revered as guardians of Buddhist temples. "There was a strong belief that certain types of cats could bring good luck, prosperity, or health to the owner," according to the Southeast Asian Library Group, "whereas other types of cats were regarded as unlucky animals to be avoided."

Yes, the changes in Asian cats are striking, but—like other cat mutations—they are evolutionarily insignificant. Even to this day, domestic cats have changed very little from their wild progenitors. Over time, cats became somewhat smaller, and their brains shrank to minimize their fear responses, which helped them deal with crazy humans, but they never developed the floppy ears, curly tails, and smaller teeth that mark all other domesticated animals. "The only thing [cats] had to do was to get better at living with people," Driscoll said.

Sure enough, some of the most significant changes that occurred in cats were not genetic but rather were behaviors adopted by the animals specifically to influence humans. Why? Like our infants, domestic cats are "completely dependent on us for their survival," according to C.A. Tony Buffington, a professor emeritus of veterinary medicine at Ohio State University. "Any time an animal is in that situation, they are going to be scrutinizing their caregivers for any response to any signal they are sending out. Whatever works, they're going to do it—whether that's changing a purr, or doing figure eights between their owner's feet." So the cat incorporated the tonal frequencies found in human infant cries into its meows and purrs, triggering our desire to help them.

In truth, the cat desperately needed that help, since it continued to face persecution from humans. As late as 1658, the natural historian Edward Topsel claimed in *The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents* that "the familiars of Witches do most ordinarily appear in the shape of Cats, which is an argument that this beast is dangerous to soul and

A Himalayan/colorpoint Persian, a pedigree cat related to the Siamese, was first bred in the United States in 1957.

body." Indeed, the Western animus toward cats didn't change until the 19th century—thanks largely to an influential British queen.

In August 1838, an impoverished old woman in Lincolnshire, England, decided to mark the coronation of Queen Victoria by sending the newly minted monarch a kitten. She put the tiny creature into a hamper (along with a supply of bread and butter) and labeled it with a note: "To the Queen, in Lunnun [London] or elsewhere: to be taken great care of." Then she put the basket in a coach bound for Buckingham Palace. On August 21, the queen told her prime minister, Lord Melbourne, that she had received a basket "which I thought was full of flowers," she wrote, "and when my maid opened it, we found a pretty little kitten . . . which some poor people sent me as a present."

Back in Lincolnshire, the old woman and her husband were ridiculed by the locals—imagine sending a kitten to the queen!—until an envelope arrived from London. It contained two five-pound notes . . . and a thank-you note from Queen Victoria.

At the time, cats were widely considered a "necessary household appendage," according to *Windsor Magazine*. But the animal-loving

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***The Cat's Lunch,* a circa-1800 painting by Marguerite Gerard (above), and a 19th-century illustration of six domestic cat breeds from *La Science Illustrée,* a popular French publication.**


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Bungartz

Cats were judged at the Royal Botanic Gardens show in London, circa 1900 (this page). Opposite: A Persian cat posed with his ribbons and trophy at the 1945 Atlantic City Cat Show.

monarch felt that the animals "were so generally misunderstood and grossly ill-treated." Her attitude helped change things—at least among the British upper classes. "The well-to-do sought out cats that were distinct from those favored by 'commoners,' for whom cats were still primarily mousers," Bradshaw tells LIFE. But even aristocratic cats were mere variations on the alley cat—until Victorians invented cat breeding. "The breeding of pedigree dogs was already established, so it was but a short step for the cat fanciers to emulate their methods, albeit from a much smaller genetic base," Bradshaw says.

The most important figure in this development was the noted illustrator, journalist, and author Harrison Weir, who considered cats "possibly the most perfect, and certainly the most domestic" of all creatures. In 1889, he published the first pedigree cat book, *Our Cats and All About Them.* "Long ages of neglect, ill-treatment, and absolute cruelty, with little or no gentleness, kindness, or training, have made the Cat self-reliant," he wrote, "and from this emanates the marvellous powers of observation, the concentration of which has produced a state analogous to reasoning, not unmixed with timidity, caution, wildness, and a retaliative nature."

But Weir envisioned a better feline future. To help achieve his goal, he organized the first major cat show by establishing a series of standards with which to judge a cat's relative

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WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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merits. In doing so, he deliberately courted the members of the British upper class—particularly the women. They owned most of the cats that were exhibited at the Championship Cat Show, which opened on July 13, 1871, in London's Crystal Palace.

As he rode the train to the event, Weir worried. "What would it be like?" he later wrote. "Would there be many cats? How many? How would the animals comport themselves in their cages? Would they sulk or cry for liberty, refuse all food? or settle down and take the situation quietly and resignedly, or give way to terror?"

At that moment, a friend stepped into the first-class compartment and asked how Weir was doing.

"Tolerably well," he said. "I am on my way to the Cat Show."

"A show of cats!" the friend replied. "Why, I hate the things; I drive them off my premises when I see them."

"I am sorry, very sorry, that you do not like cats," Weir said. "For my part, I think them

> ***"The cat does not offer services. The cat offers itself."***
>
> **—WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS**

extremely beautiful, also very graceful in all their actions, and they are quite as domestic in their habits as the dog, if not more so. They are very useful in catching rats and mice; they are not deficient in sense; they will jump up at doors to push up latches with their paws. I have known them [to] knock at a door by the knocker when wanting admittance. They know Sunday from the week-day, and do not go out to wait for the meat barrow on that day; they—"

"Stop," the friend said. "I see you do like cats, and I do not, so let the matter drop."

"No," Weir replied. "Now come with me, my dear old friend, and see the first Cat Show."

Dutifully, the friend accompanied Weir to the Crystal Palace, where cats were displayed in 170 exhibits. Instead of struggling to escape or crying, as Weir had feared, the animals were lying in their cages on crimson cushions and purring as they lapped from bowls of milk. "Yes, there they were, big cats, very big cats, middling-sized cats, and small cats, cats of all colours and markings, and beautiful pure white Persian cats," Weir wrote.

The black Persian in cage 50 was "the object of much remark," according to one observer, while the grey Persian in cage 63 had been "brought into this country on the shoulders of an Arab." A cat with 26 claws exhibited by one Mr. S. Carleigh ("well known in the Music Hall world") "excited not a little curiosity," one report read. Even Weir's friend was impressed. "What a beauty this is!" he said of one cat. "And here's another!"

His enthusiasm was typical of the more than 20,000 people who attended the show, which proved so popular that trains had to be added to transport the crowds. In fact, 1871 became known as the Year of the Cat in Britain. Clearly Weir had struck a nerve.

A few months later, Weir paid a visit to his skeptical friend . . . and found him eating lunch with two cats sitting contentedly on a chair beside him: "pets, I should say, from their appearance," Weir wrote.

Largely thanks to Weir's efforts, the domestic cat went from being a necessary nuisance to a cherished companion in less than three decades. In 1900, *Lady's Realm* magazine wrote that Weir had "done wonders for the amelioration of pussy." In 1903's *Book of the Cat,* Frances Simpson wrote that the cat "is gradually creeping into the affections of mankind, even in this busy work-a-day world."

Capitalizing on his success, Weir established the National Cat Club in 1887, but he came to regret it after the wealthy matrons he'd courted turned his animal welfare initiative into a quest for status. "I found the principal idea of many of its members consisted not so much in promoting the welfare of the Cat as of winning prizes, and more particularly their own Cat Club medals," he wrote in 1892.

The mania for cat breeds accelerated in North America, where cats probably arrived around five hundred years ago. In the United States, as in England, the animals were valued for their mousing skills, persecuted for their perceived connection to witchcraft, treasured as pets, and eventually coveted as status symbols. In 1878, the first U.S. cat show, held at the

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Cat videos may be all the rage among humans, but cats prefer the avian versions.

Boston Music Hall, featured "Short-Haired Cats of Any or No Sex and Any Color." Over time, the standards became far more stringent, though to this day cat breeding remains far more scattershot than the breeding of dogs, which were domesticated thousands of years before cats. No matter how significant the differences between domestic breeds may seem, they are ultimately superficial—largely because cats have always been bred for appearance, not utility.

Today's purebred cats can cost thousands of dollars ($5,000 for a Toyger kitten), though the same animals can often be found in shelters, along with alley cats—more than 850,000 of which are killed every year when they are not adopted into loving homes. In addition, breeding cats to create a specific look often emphasizes genetic traits that harm rather than benefit the animals. For instance, the Persian is bred for its distinctively flat face, which often leads to breathing difficulties, dental problems, and malformed tear ducts—not to mention joint problems and kidney diseases. Sure, Munchkin cats are adorable, but they're bred to create distinctively

Bred to look like toy tigers, Toyger kittens are created by crossing Bengal cats with striped domestic shorthairs. These kittens are about six weeks old.

stubby legs that make it hard for them to jump, keeping them from exercising a deeply ingrained feline instinct. The inbreeding of sphynx and rex cats has left them susceptible to heart disease and digestive issues. “Please, for the love of all things cute and furry, stop the madness!” wrote Jane A. Kelley on Catster.com. “I don’t want the cat fancy to become a haven for the kind of sick and mutilated wrecks of once-functional breeds we see at dog shows.”

Today, 10,000 years after *Felis sylvestris lybica* first crept into small Middle Eastern encampments, domestic cats have colonized every continent except Antarctica. Numbering around 600 million worldwide, the house cat is the only one of 37 cat species that isn’t currently endangered. Indeed, it is the most popular pet in the United States,

Today’s purebred cats can cost thousands of dollars, though the same animals can often be found in shelters.

with about 38 percent of homes having at least one cat. There are about 90 million U.S. house cats, divided among an estimated 60 varieties. Not content with ruling the physical world, cats have conquered the Internet with memes and videos featuring the likes of Maru, the rotund Japanese cat who seems to think he should be able to climb into any box—no matter how small.

Still, “It’s a bit of a mystery for me why people are so fond of cats,” Eva-Maria Geigl said. She has a point—especially since contemporary house cats rarely kill rodents, which is what made them valuable to humans in the first place. To be honest, our cats don’t do much of anything, which paradoxically (even perversely) may be one of the reasons we love them. “The cat does not offer services,” the author William S. Burroughs once wrote. “The cat offers itself.”

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Chapter Two

Does your cat really love you? What is he trying to say when he purrs? Why does he present you with dead mice, grow tired of his toys, and go crazy for catnip (or not)? What is it that makes a cat tick?

SECRETS OF CAT BEHAVIOR

A red tabby surveyed his territory from the safety of his tree perch. Cats love to be up high, but more than one worried owner has called the fire department to bring a pet back down to earth.

There is something deeply mysterious and even downright spooky about cats, which may be why they were enshrined as gods in ancient Egypt—and demonized as witches' familiars in medieval Europe. Though they've shared their lives with humans for thousands of years, cats remain particularly difficult to categorize and study (they are nothing if not stubborn subjects, after all). Yet recent research has shed light on some enduring questions about their behavior, even if it hasn't solved the fundamental mystery of cats themselves.

What is your cat trying to tell you?

Of course, you know what your cat is saying when she meows near her empty food dish—it's the universal feline phrase for "feed me." But sometimes cats communicate in ways that aren't quite as clear and may even be deliberately obscure. Why? In a word: *survival.* "Apart from animals that spend their entire lives in permanent social groups, evolution selects against total transparency," John Bradshaw writes in his 2013 book, *Cat Sense.* "If every other member of its species is potentially a rival, it is not in an animal's best interest to shout with joy every time it finds something tasty to eat, a safe place to sleep, or an ideal mate." Which is why cats (unlike dogs) tend to avoid wearing their hearts on their sleeves—and why it might help to translate some of their messages into human terms.

Along with meows, one of the most common cat sounds is the trill or chirrup, which mother cats make when returning to their kittens. Similarly, some adult cats trill as a friendly greeting to their humans. (Try trilling at your cat in return, and you may find yourself engaging in kitty small talk.)

That chittering, chattering sound that a cat makes when it's staring at birds outside the window may be related to the "killing bite" that a cat uses to snap the neck bones of its prey with its teeth. An animal that makes this chittering sound may be expecting a kill—just as we might salivate in anticipation of a great meal.

Purring, on the other hand, is generally a sign of contentment—and something that kittens first do instinctively while nursing. It may also be the tiny animals' attempt to convince their mothers to keep giving them milk instead of the solid food she eventually weans them on. In that sense, a house cat's purr could be a subtler version of the meow: "Cats apparently learn to do this to get people to feed them sooner," according to veterinarian Benjamin L. Hart.

Purring may also be your cat's way of keeping you around. In other words, it might not mean "I'm happy" so much as "Stay here and keep doing what you're doing." Oddly, purring sometimes also reflects distress or pain, which makes it an all-purpose act—sort of like the human smile. "People will smile when they're nervous, when they want something, and when they're happy, so perhaps the purr can also be an appeasing gesture," suggests Kelly Morgan, DVM, clinical instructor at the Chicago Center for Veterinary Medicine of the University of Illinois in Chicago.

For the most part, adult cats vocalize only with humans and not with other adult cats. Adult felines who live together mostly communicate silently through gestures—as do cats in the wild—but domestic cats learned long ago that humans respond best to sounds. However, just because a loud "meow" grabs your attention doesn't mean that your cat isn't also communicating in nonverbal ways.

A Bengal cat named Tobysden Pyrrha posed after participating in the GCCF Supreme Cat Show at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, England, in 2017.

A girl walked her cat on a leash at Endcliffe Park in Sheffield, England.

Not surprisingly, many meaningful cat gestures involve the use of their tails. Some of the most common are the raised tail (good intentions), the raised tail with a curved upward flick (affection), the tail twined around your body (more affection), the tail between the legs (anxiety), the tail moving back and forth horizontally (curiosity), and the bristly tail (fear). Ears and eyes are also important. When your cat's ears are flattened, she is fearful. When she slowly and repeatedly winks, she's showing affection and trust (a cat with closed eyes is vulnerable). Trust is also shown when a cat flips onto its back, which usually does not mean "rub my belly," as many well-meaning pet owners have the scratches to prove.

One of the most overlooked nonverbal cat messages is the "lip lick" or "tongue flick," according to Mieshelle Nagelschneider, cat

"Much of the cat's social repertoire seems to have evolved from mother-kitten communication."

behaviorist and author of *The Cat Whisperer*. "This is one of the first behavior signs that shows a cat is fearful," she tells LIFE. "The cat's pink tongue will flick out—it's a quick action and you'll miss it if you're not watching closely."

Is your cat really into you?

Many cat lovers would answer "yes" and then list all their cats' expressions of "love"—headbutts and sinuous body-rubbing among them. But that behavior is a sign of ownership, not love—at least not love as humans define it. Often called "bunting," it involves depositing a distinctive scent from glands on the cat's cheeks and head. Just consider that cats do the same thing to furniture, walls—and anything else they want to claim as their own. They are, after all, fiercely territorial—whether they're prowling forests, alleys, or your Barcalounger.

"Scent is your cat's calling card," according to cat behaviorist Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like a Cat.*

Sometimes the emotions we think we see in cats are really just gestures designed to provoke certain reactions in humans. Because adult cats depend on people for their survival—in the same way that kittens depend on their mothers—they are extraordinarily sensitive to our behavior. When we respond positively to any given action, the cat will repeat it later in the hopes of obtaining the same result. Sometimes a cat will use expressions or gestures that mimic human emotions simply because he's learned that we respond well when he does, but he isn't actually *feeling* anything—except the desire to get what he wants.

"Cats are very affectionate and can seem like they love us, but they love how we make

Because adult cats depend on people for their survival, they are extraordinarily sensitive to our behavior.

them feel, and they especially love that we feed them," says Nagelschneider, citing a study showing that when cats were free-fed they were less affectionate with their owners than when they were fed on a schedule. "This may prove what many of us behaviorists knew all along—that we are an important part of a cat's survival, and showing us affection, which creates bonding and affiliation, helps ensure that they are going to be fed."

Why are some cats lap cats and others don't want to come near you?

It all depends on what happens in the first two months of a cat's life. During that time, he learns to raise his tail, mark, knead, hunt, and purr from his mother, who also teaches him what to think about human beings. A feral mother who's frightened of people will pass this fear onto her kittens.

Naturally, a fearful kitten taken into a human home will be far less likely to end up in your lap, but even a well-socialized cat will sometimes resist human contact. Why? "Perhaps you have done something negative to the cat, if only inadvertently, that makes them want to steer clear of you," says Nagelschneider. "Or sometimes a stressful environment will prevent a cat from relaxing enough to show this lap-cat behavior." Sometimes cats find too much attention (specifically direct eye contact) stressful, which may be why some of them avoid the people who seem most interested in them—and gravitate instead to those who ignore them.

It's possible to create a lap cat out of a non–lap cat, if the genetics are right, Nagelschneider says. "With calm genetic temperaments and the right kind of human interaction and environment, even feral cats can become the best lap cats ever," she says. "Ask anyone who's owned a feral."

What can you do to help ensure you have a lap cat? "Kittens—especially under seven weeks—must be handled gently several times a day by a human, and preferably different humans," she says. "They should be picked up, carried, and have lap time—even if for only five minutes a day, as it can have a profoundly positive impact on their socialization. If, however, the human handler forces handling, meaning they hold a kitten against its will, this can create a fear of being held."

Why do cats lose interest in their toys so quickly?

Because the toys don't break. You know the drill: You've spent a bunch of money on the latest gizmos that are supposedly guaranteed to entertain your cat for hours, but after playing with them excitedly at first, she gets bored and slinks away—perhaps never to return. Why? Unlike the rodents and birds that are a cat's natural prey, the fancy toys you bought don't fall apart when your cat attacks them, so her illusion of predation is destroyed. In short, she wants to believe she's really killing something—not batting around an expensive feather on a plastic stick.

Are a cat's coat color and patterns indications of its personality?

Probably not. Despite their unhappy association with bad luck, black cats may be friendlier than other felines—a theory that developed because there's no other reason for

+ Why do cats groom themselves after they eat? It's a deeply rooted instinct that stems from the fact that their ancestors slaughtered creatures that left blood on their fur.

the all-black gene to proliferate naturally—and yet black cats are everywhere. Perhaps (so the theory goes) the genetic mutation that creates solid-black cats also leads to a generally sweet nature that encourages humans to take care of them, thereby circumventing the natural selection process.

Many other theories suggest connections between cat appearance and temperament, but most of them are anecdotal. A 2016 study at the University of California, Davis, for instance, suggested that calico and tortoiseshell cats may be feistier than others, but it was based on the opinions of cat owners—not hard science. "To date there is little evidence that these perceived differences between differently colored cats actually exist, but there are serious repercussions for cats if people believe that some cat colors are friendlier than others," said Mikel Delgado, a doctoral student in psychology at U.C. Berkeley.

In other words, it's a mistake to adopt (or reject) a cat solely because of its color. In 2002, a study at the U.C. Davis found that dark cats were more likely to be killed in shelters and that people believed tortoiseshell cats have too much "attitude." None of this is fair to the individual cats, who—like humans—all have their own personalities, quite apart from their coat colors.

Why do cats torture their prey?

A cat is evolutionarily wired to hunt, which may be why it seems to want to prolong a mouse's or a bird's agony rather than swiftly finish off its victim. The evolutionary aspect is just one possible explanation for what (like much cat behavior) remains something of a mystery. The sometimes brutal cat-and-mouse game may be a holdover from kittenhood: Mother cats teach their babies to hunt by bringing home prey for them to play with. It may also just be your cat's way of blowing off steam.

Why does your cat bring you dead mice?

He may be offering you "food" because he thinks that you're his kitten, according to cat expert Desmond Morris. "Although [cats] usually look at humans as pseudo parents, on these occasions they view them as their family," he wrote. John Bradshaw thinks there's a simpler explanation: Though domestic cats no longer need to hunt mice to survive, they still do it because it's in their nature. But after

A house cat trapped a small bird on a farm in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho. Though domestic cats are often portrayed as predators of wild birds, they're generally not efficient hunters.

bringing their kill to a place they know is free of rival predators (e.g., your bed, which they may see as their "den"), cats realize that kibble is tastier and easier to digest, so they leave the dead rodent with their owners. This action, Bradshaw suggests, is expedient—not generous. (It's also a pain for humans at three in the morning, especially if the mouse in question isn't quite dead.)

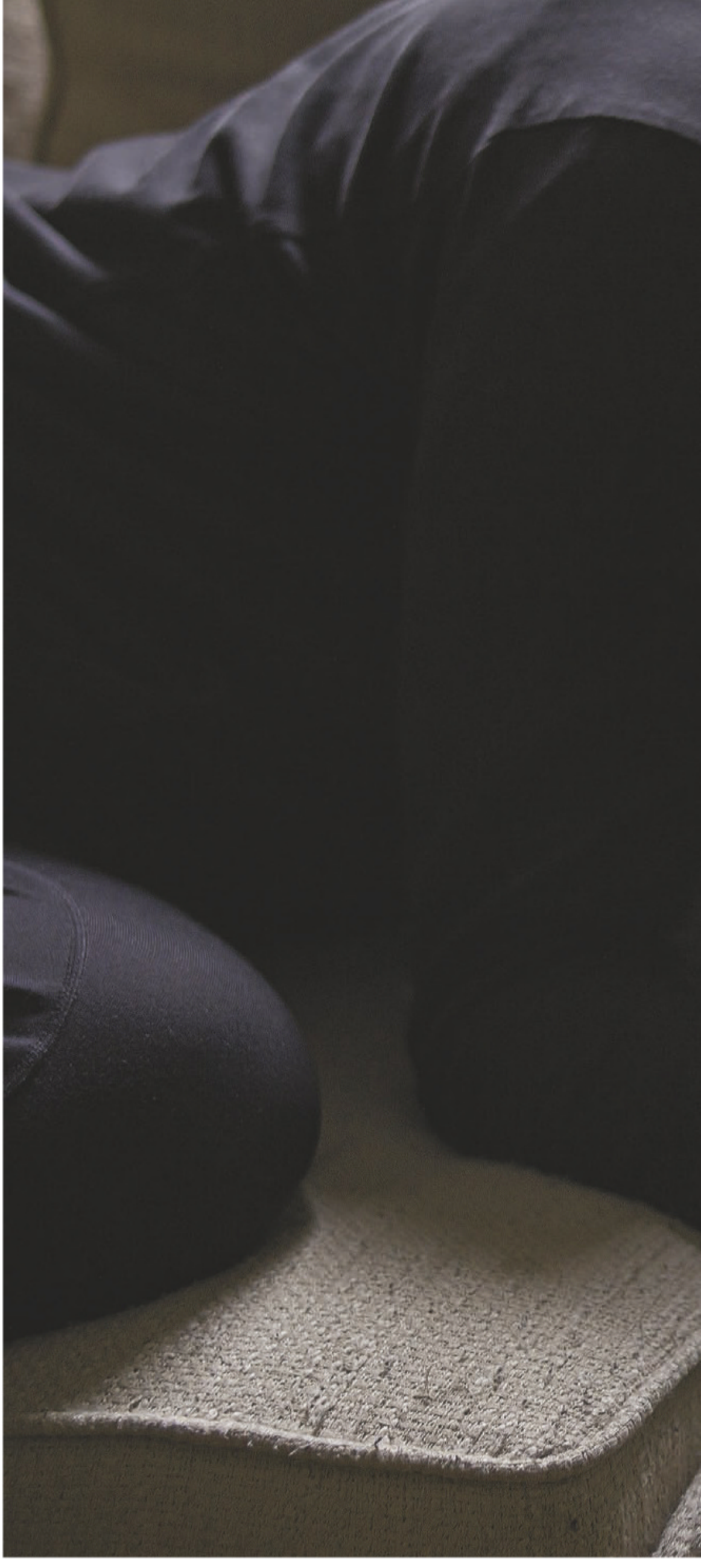
Bradshaw doesn't agree with Morris's assertion that cats see humans as their kittens—partly because of the difference in our respective sizes. Indeed, cats are more likely to view humans as substitute mothers than as surrogate offspring, Bradshaw says. "Much of the cat's social repertoire seems to have evolved from mother-kitten communication," he wrote. (This includes kneading, the characteristic paw-pressing that a cat does

Sometimes the emotions we think we see in cats are really just gestures designed to provoke certain reactions in humans.

on a warm blanket or your belly, which is how it got milk from its mother while nursing.) Because we're so much larger than cats, "we trigger in them behavior that they would under different circumstances direct toward a bigger or more senior member of their feline family."

Why do cats love catnip?

First of all, not all cats do. They're either genetically wired to respond to the herb, or they aren't. Since most species in the cat family react to the substance the way domestic cats do, the single gene that drives this behavior probably evolved millions of years ago, but no one knows why it persists. Cats don't derive any lasting benefit from catnip, and the behavior it engenders makes them vulnerable to predators. As with so much else about cat behavior—indeed, like cats themselves—it remains a mystery.



Recovering from surgery, a woman cuddled with her cat in Derby, Connecticut.

Over the years, LIFE magazine has chronicled World War II, the assassination of JFK, the Apollo moon landing—and, well, cats. Here, some of the most memorable feline images

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A CAT'S LIFE

DUTCH TREAT

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Two-year-old Dutch billiards prodigy Renske Quax fed cream to his cat in Haarlem, Netherlands, in 1953.

TOP DOG?

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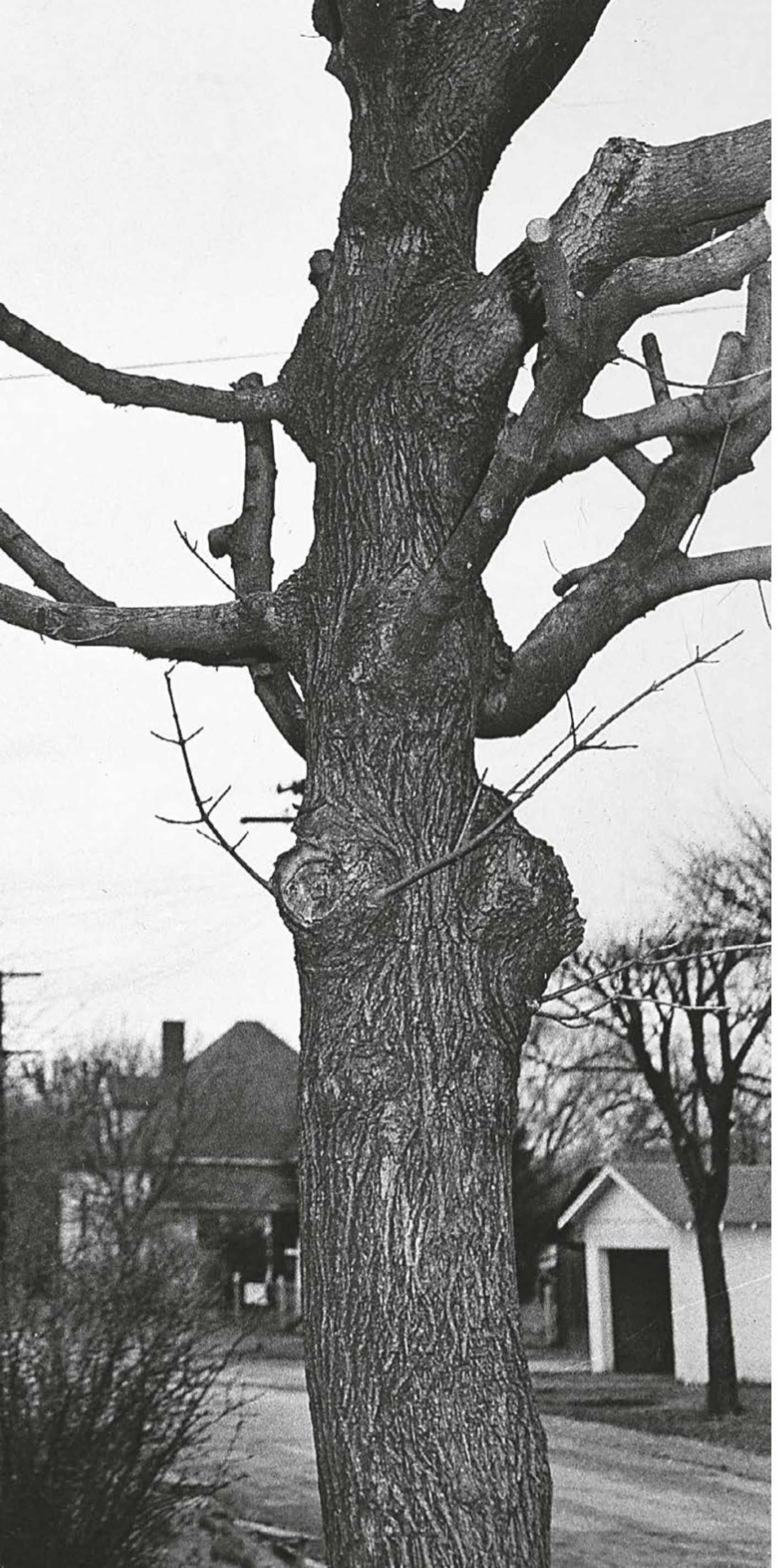
Trudy the cat and Rudy the dachshund played hide-and-seek before engaging in an interspecies wrestling match.

LOOKING THE PART

Owners waited in line with their black cats to audition for the horror movie *Tales of Terror* in 1961.

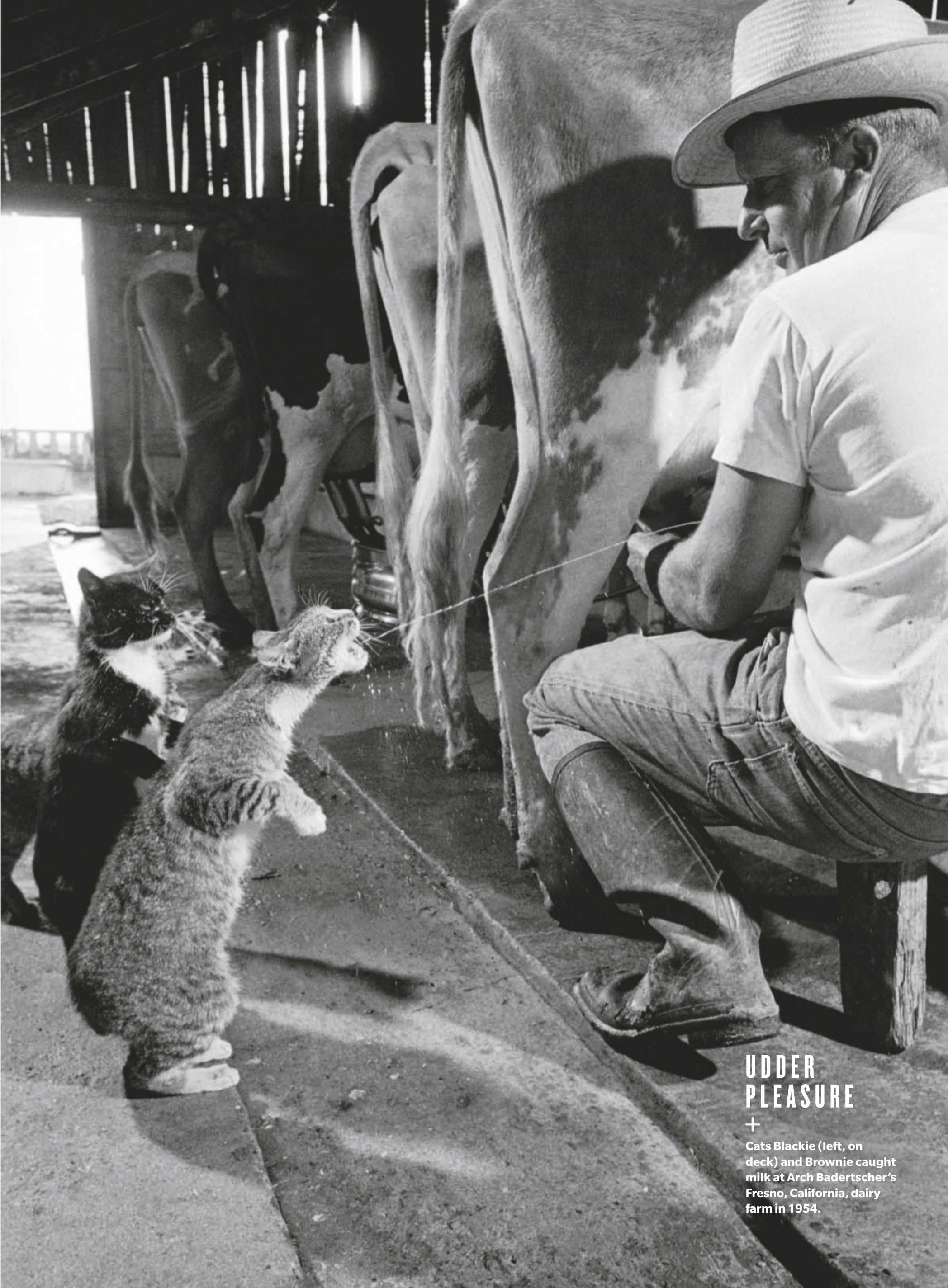


BABY ON BOARD

Puddy the cat gave birth to a litter of four on the porch roof near the home of her owner, patrolman Bill Major of Knoxville, Tennessee, but later realized that it was hardly a good place to raise her brood. Here, she held one of her 21-day-old kittens in her mouth as she leaped to a tree to bring it safely to earth.

DO WE DARE?

Mitten the cat and Tosen the dog considered their options vis-à-vis the mouse. All three were family pets in Denmark in the early 1950s.



UDDER PLEASURE

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Cats Blackie (left, on deck) and Brownie caught milk at Arch Badertscher's Fresno, California, dairy farm in 1954.

SERENITY NOW

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Aspiring ballerina Edwina Seaver relaxed with Ting Ling in New York City, circa 1940.

“Princess is the best combination of playful and affectionate.”

—MICHELLE THERIAULT

Though domestic cats inspire fierce devotion on the part of their owners (or should we say "slaves"?), tens of thousands of the creatures never find loving homes–and often are euthanized. Others win the feline lottery, like the lucky creatures featured here

SHELTER-CAT SUCCESS STORIES

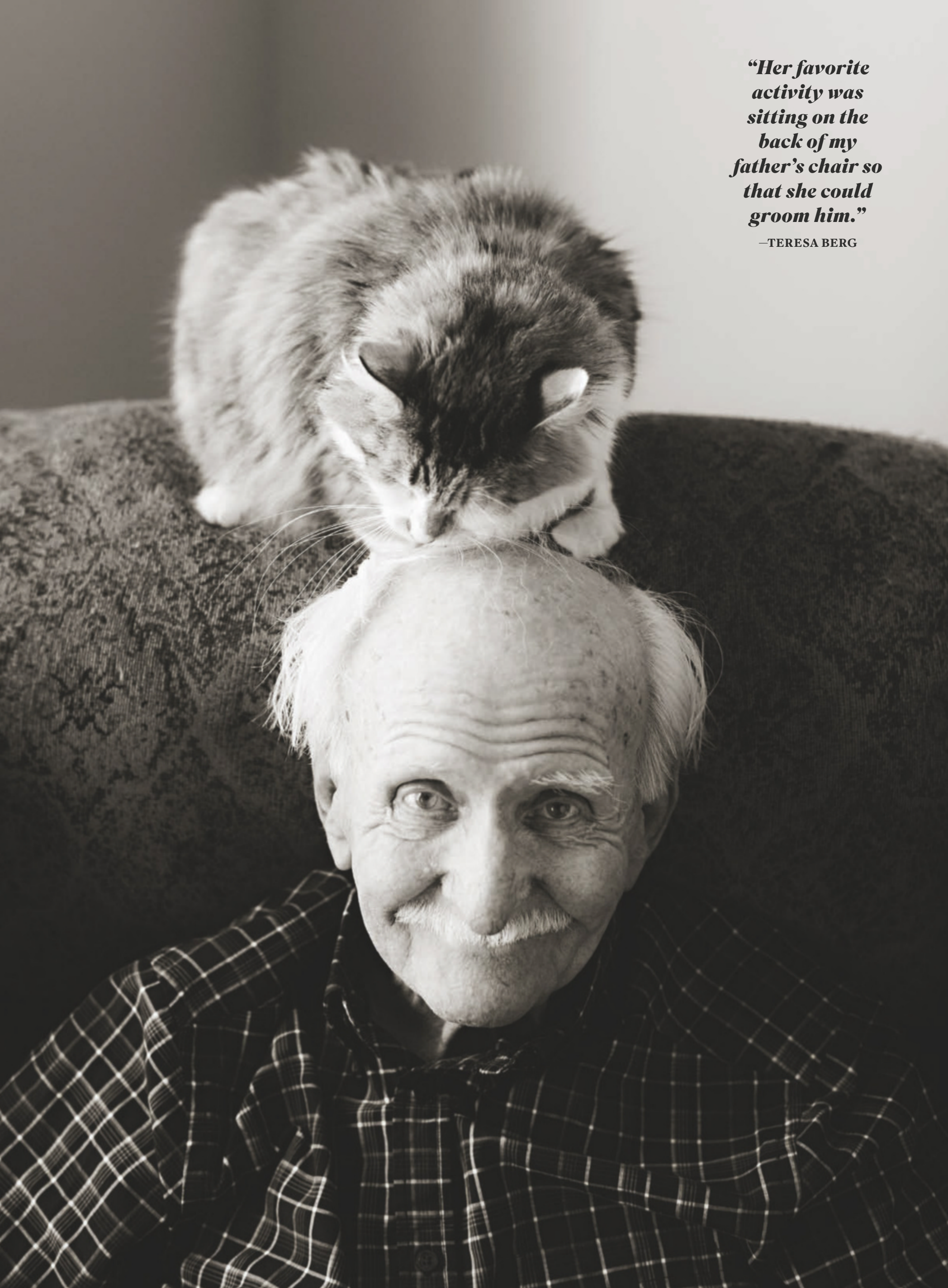
Every year, about 860,000 cats are euthanized in America, and thousands more remain hungry and homeless—a fact worth keeping in mind if you're considering purchasing an expensive breed, especially since "mutts" tend to be healthier than purebreds. Meet seven cats who, despite illness and injury, somehow beat the odds—thanks to a network of compassionate humans.

Princess

Princess (previous pages) was brought into the high-kill San Bernadino County Shelter in southern California with her eight newborn kittens in February 2017. That same month, the Los Angeles–based Friends for Life Rescue Network saved them, but since they were all very sick they were confined to an oxygen chamber for days. In June 2017, San Fernando Valley resident Michelle Theriault adopted Princess. "She is the most perfect cat," she tells LIFE. "She loves to play hide-and-seek with us!"

Sugar

Sugar, above and opposite, was brought into Operation Kindness, a shelter in north Texas, as a 10-month-old in the fall of 2013. Soon she was adopted by Milo Berg (opposite), who was moving into a senior citizens' home and wanted a companion. "They would sit together on his balcony, eat together, and play with her toys," Milo's daughter, photographer Teresa Berg, tells LIFE. "If he didn't feel well and refused to eat, she would refuse to eat as well." When Milo died in March 2017, Sugar went to live with Teresa. "She's a great comfort



"Her favorite activity was sitting on the back of my father's chair so that she could groom him."

—TERESA BERG

"How could I possibly resist her?"

—ANNE VEGA

to me, as I feel I'm able to keep a little piece of my dad close to my heart," she says.

Gracie

Gracie (above) was saved from the South Los Angeles animal shelter by Stray Cat Alliance in December 2016. Emaciated, dehydrated, blind, and suffering from seizures, she was rushed to the emergency vet. (In the photo, she is wearing bells so the doctors could hear if she was having another episode.) Though she miraculously regained her vision, her current foster mom, commercial producer and longtime L.A. shelter volunteer Anne Vega, has to administer three different medications three times a day to control her seizures and to treat a congenital liver problem. Once funds are raised to pay for the surgery, Vega will formally adopt her.

Ariel

Ariel (right) was a kitten who was brought to Fairfax County Animal Shelter in Virginia after being found along an interstate in September 2017. Her right leg had been badly damaged and had to be amputated. "She was timid but so sweet," Candace Shea, a shelter volunteer and law enforcement officer who coordinates emergency response for the

"She has grown into a beautiful, strong, and fast cat!"

—CANDACE SHEA

"Clive and Simon love to ride in the car with me"

–JOSEPH NELSON

Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C., tells LIFE. Shea fell so hard for the kitten that she begged her husband "just to meet her." Initially insisting that he wouldn't adopt her, he changed his mind after Shea handed him the cat wrapped in a baby blanket. "He just stared at her and pet her forehead," she adds. "About two minutes later, he handed her back to me and said, 'Please bring her home.'"

Clive and Simon

Clive and Simon (above) are brothers who were adopted in May 2018 from Fairfax County Animal Shelter in Fairfax, Virginia, by Joseph Nelson. Now about nine months old, they are "getting to be big boys" and are very close, Nelson, a 21-year Navy veteran who now works for the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, tells LIFE. This sociability is rare among cats—except with litter mates like these two. "I love watching them play together, and they keep me company."

Chickadee

Chickadee (opposite) and her sister were taken to the West Los Angeles animal shelter in December 2017. "When I met her, she was very scared and in a cage by herself, hiding," Casey Christopher, who photographs shelter cats, tells LIFE. "She only had a little hand towel to lay on, so I made her a little nest and wrapped her up in a fuzzy blanket and named her Chickadee." Both cats were adopted a few months later.

"I made her a little nest and wrapped her up in a fuzzy blanket."

—CASEY CHRISTOPHER

3

Chapter Three

CATS VS. DOGS

The animosity between the two species is rivaled perhaps only by the competition between cat people and dog people: Is one really better than the other? (No.) Are cats smarter? (Not necessarily.) Are dogs more loyal? (Well, yes.) And why can't we all just get along?

Cats tend to greet fellow animals face-to-face. Dogs, on the other hand, usually start at the opposite end.

Those Siamese cats tormenting Lady in *Lady and the Tramp* . . . Garfield and Odie . . . the expression "fighting like cats and dogs": The long-running animosity between our two favorite pets is legendary. But where did it come from? After all, dogs and cats are descended from the same creature—a tree-dwelling genus called the *Miacis* that prowled the forests of Eurasia and North America a few million years after dinosaurs became extinct. During their 25-million-year existence, *Miacis* morphed into carnivorans, an order of 280 species from which present-day bears, skunks, badgers, seals, walruses, and many others are descended. Dogs and cats are part of that crew, too. As varied as these creatures have turned out to be, they all have claws and teeth that make them particularly good at chewing meat—hence, carnivorans.

No one can pinpoint the exact origin of the ongoing feud between cats and dogs, but John Bradshaw, author of 2013's *Cat Sense,* has a theory. "Dogs and cats have shared the same space on our planet for around 10,000 years," he tells LIFE. "For much of that time, they have been

Valery and Irina Morozov, Russian emigrés living in Surrey, England, with their dog Misha (an American Akita) and their cat Maltysh.

much less influenced by people than they are now. Mother cats would often have their litters out of doors, where their kittens were vulnerable to predators, which would have included roaming dogs. It therefore seems likely that domestic cats could have evolved an instinctive animosity towards dogs, since the survival of their offspring may have depended on it."

The enduring enmity between the animals originated with their prehistoric forebears. The domestic cat's wild ancestor is a solitary species, *Felis silvestris lybica.* Their only social groups are mothers and their kittens—and these groups are temporary, lasting only four to six months. The dog's wild ancestor, the Eurasian grey wolf, lives in permanent social groups and has evolved sophisticated communication systems that keep the pack

bonded together. In other words: dogs love to hang out with each other, while cats mind their own business. ("There's a reason there are no cat parks in the world," Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like a Cat,* points out.)

Over the centuries, domestication and breeding have socialized the dog even further, while the behavior of domestic cats varies very little from that of wild lions, tigers, and leopards, according to veterinarian Gary Weitzman, coauthor of *How to Speak Cat.* "That is, perhaps, one of the biggest draws of these animals . . . They're still part wild. They haven't gone to finishing school yet."

Cats' wildness is often at odds with dogs' highly developed social instincts. Often, dogs greet their fellow creatures by rushing up to say hi. This can threaten cats, who are far more

Who says peace isn't possible? This isn't quite the lion lying down with the lamb, but, hey, it's a start.

reserved and may try to run away, triggering the canines' chase instinct—or making them think that the felines want to play. The situation can spiral out of control in a chaos of animal mixed messages, which are sometimes exacerbated by the panicked intervention of their owners.

In addition to sociability, dogs have been bred to fulfill specific functions, beginning with hunting and herding. Over time, this grew to encompass a wide range of specialties—including protection (rottweilers and Dobermans); scent-detection (beagles and bassets); arctic exploration (huskies and malamutes); and many more.

Cats, on the other hand, "lack any inclination for performing most tasks that would be useful to humans," according to Carlos Driscoll, of the Wildlife Institute of India in Dehradun. As a result, they only started being seriously bred in the past 50 years—and then only for appearance. (About 340 dog breeds are now recognized by the World Canine Organization, while the Cat Fanciers' Association recognizes only 42 pedigreed cats.) "Unlike dogs, which exhibit a huge range of sizes, shapes and temperaments, house cats are relatively homogeneous, differing mostly in the characteristics of their coats," according to Driscoll.

Because of cats' innate independence—and the fact that we've mostly left them alone—they simply don't need us very much. "Most cats don't find human company particularly rewarding," Bradshaw tells LIFE. Indeed, the kitten you fawn over is probably more interested in your *house* than he is in you. "Cats' primary attachment is to the place where they live and the resources it contains—food, water, litter box, secure resting places. Only once they feel secure in that environment do cats form attachments to the people they share that space with."

But (sorry, cat fanciers) even these attachments aren't particularly strong. "Most cats prefer to pick their own moments for physical contact, even with familiar people, and can resent their owner attempting to pet them when they're otherwise preoccupied," says Bradshaw. "If the owner persists, this can result in the cat actively avoiding their company." If you want a close relationship with your cat, he suggests, let the cat make the first moves—and let it walk away when it's had enough.

In sharp contrast, dogs tend to be gluttons for affection. In fact, they have evolved to be overwhelmingly dependent on humans. "We have pretty good evidence that dogs actually love their humans," according to Dr. Paul Zak, a neuroscientist who conducted a recent study that showed a 57.2 increase in the "love hormone" oxytocin in the saliva of dogs prior to playing with their owners. "The dog level . . . is a very powerful response," Zak explained. "It shows these dogs really care about their owners." Cats, by contrast, showed only a 12 percent increase in oxytocin.

In addition, recent studies by animal behaviorists at the University of Lincoln, in the United Kingdom, revealed that cats don't seek human guidance when they find themselves in unfamiliar situations, while dogs turn immediately to people for help. "For pet dogs, their owners often represent a specific safe haven [while] domestic cats are much more autonomous when it comes to coping with unusual situations," according to Daniel Mills, professor of Veterinary Behavioral Medicine at Lincoln's School of Life Sciences. "Our findings don't disagree with the notion that cats develop social preferences or close relationships, but they do show that these relationships do not appear to be typically based on a need for safety and security."

Naturally, the differences between cats and dogs affect the way they each deal with their own species, as well. "Cats have yet to evolve the optimistic enthusiasm for contact with their own kind that characterizes dogs," Bradshaw wrote in *Cat Sense*. "As a result, many cats spend their lives trying to avoid contact with one another." Of course, this can create a problem when cats live with or near other cats. "When a conflict arises, perhaps just because two cats come upon one another unexpectedly, they have no way of communicating that they mean one another no harm. The consequence is often a standoff in which neither cat wishes to back down for fear of being chased and attacked by the other cat. Both cats will attempt to appear as threatening as possible, growling and appearing ready to launch an attack—until one eventually backs down, creeping away as slowly as possible to avoid provoking his rival."

In contrast, domestic dogs seem to be born to interact with other creatures—especially humans. This is partly because they recognize that human beings are a different species—and react accordingly. "As soon as

they see a human, they change their behavior," Bradshaw has said, adding that dogs play with other dogs very differently from the way they play with us.

Cats, on the other hand, can't be bothered to modify their behavior for the sake of people. "They obviously know we're bigger than them, but they don't seem to have adapted their social behavior much," according to Bradshaw. Though it's been suggested that cats are disdainful of humans, "cats don't rub on another cat that's inferior to them." They may, in fact, see their human owners as mother surrogates. Cats do think we're awkward, however: "Not many cats trip over people, but we trip over cats."

Because of the significant differences between these animals, we often define ourselves as either "dog people" or "cat people"—perhaps depending on our tolerance for independence versus need on the part of our pets. (It could be said that we love dogs because they do what we want them to do, while we love cats because they don't.) Though the preference is purely subjective, die-hard animal lovers often heatedly debate the relative worth of cats versus dogs.

Cats, in particular, are controversial. "One is permitted to assume an attitude of placid indifference in the matter of elephants, cockatoos, H.G. Wells, Sweden, roast beef, Puccini, and even Mormonism, but in the matter of cats it seems necessary to take a firm stand," Carl Van Vechten wrote in *The Tiger in the House,* his 1922 cultural history of cats. "Those who hate the cat hate him with a malignity which, I think, only snakes in the animal kingdom provoke to an equal degree." Even now, cats have their fervent detractors and have been accused of such disparate malfeasances as brainwashing humans (a noted Czech scientist blames a parasite found in cat poop) and killing off the wild-bird population (a suspect assertion at best).

Nevertheless, research in the United Kingdom and at the University of Minnesota suggests that cat owners are more intelligent than dogs owners, that cats can make single men seem "nicer," and that they can reduce your risk of having a heart attack by 30 percent. Evolutionarily speaking, cats are the winners, too. A 2015 study by an international team of scientists showed that cats have survived better than dogs over the millennia. In fact, the superior hunting skills of prehistoric cats led to the extinction of 40 species of dogs, while cats themselves remained unscathed. According to the study, dogs originated in North America about 40 million years ago. Twenty million years later, the arrival of cats on the continent from Asia created "a deadly impact on the diversity of the dog family," according to the study's lead author, Dr. Daniele Silvestro.

Why? "Cats have retractable claws which they only pull out when they catch their prey," Silvestro said. "This means they don't wear them out and they can keep them sharp. But the dogs can't do this, so they are at a disadvantage to the cats in an ambush situation."

To be fair, dogs may be smarter than cats. In 2017, a study at Vanderbilt University showed that canines have more than twice as many neurons—the cells associated with thinking—in their brains' cerebral cortex than felines do. "The absolute number of neurons an animal has . . . determines the richness of their internal mental state and their ability to predict what is about to happen in their environment based on past experience," according to Suzana Herculano-Houzel, associate professor of psychology and biological sciences at Vanderbilt. As a result, she added, "dogs have the biological capability of doing much more complex and flexible things with their lives than cats can."

> ***"Cats have yet to evolve the optimistic enthusiasm for contact with their own kind that characterizes dogs."***

One might ask what those "things" would be and why they would matter to cats, who are uninterested in doing anything "more complex and flexible" with their lives. They're perfectly happy to nap in the sun while waiting for their next meal, after all. To paraphrase an old joke: If cats could read the Vanderbilt University study, they wouldn't. What's more, they wouldn't care.

Cats' retractable claws helped them defeat many of their ancient dog rivals and to this day allow them to defy gravity . . . sort of.


NO DOGS
ALLOWED

The furry pet who curls up in your lap is, evolutionarily speaking, virtually unchanged from her ancient ancestors. Want proof? Take a look at these cats on the following pages and try to tell the difference between the wild desert dwellers and their domestic counterparts

DOMESTIC OR WILD?

The Maine coon cat (one is shown opposite) began its North American life in New England, where it may have been brought by the Vikings centuries before the arrival of Columbus. Others say that its ancestors were the longhaired cats that belonged to Marie Antoinette. On this page: A wild caracal, native to Africa, India, and Asia.

DOMESTIC OR WILD?

At left: Sumatra, an 11-month-old Toyger, a house cat bred to resemble a toy tiger, looks astonishingly like his wild relative, an endangered black-footed *Felis nigripes* at the Omaha Zoo (above).

DOMESTIC OR WILD?

A mother cat (above, with kitten) is one of more than 60 felines adopted by wildlife photographer Jane Burton and her husband, who photographed the animals at their studio in Surrey, England. Below: Though it looks like it could be a house cat stalking prey in some suburban backyard, this is actually an African wildcat that lives at Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium's Wildlife Safari Park.

DOMESTIC OR WILD?

The cat above is so cute you just want to take him home, right? Well, that would be a bad idea, since he's a wild sand cat native to the deserts of Africa and Asia, though this one lives in the Chattanooga Zoo in Tennessee. The scrunchy-faced Persian at left, however, would be perfect on your couch.

4

Chapter Four

MIRACLE CATS

Though cats are notoriously self-involved, every now and then they display what might be called heroism. Meet a cat who risked her life to rescue kittens from a fire, two others who saved human children's lives, and a tom who accurately predicts who's going to die at a Rhode Island hospice

Oscar made his rounds.

OSCAR: THE DEATH DIVINER

Not long after he was born in 2005, Oscar was adopted as a resident therapy cat by the Steere House Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in Providence, Rhode Island, which treats people with severe dementia. As a kitten, he spent his days wandering the halls and sniffing at the patients, most of whom he ignored. When he was about six months old, however, Oscar started climbing into bed with certain residents—all of whom died shortly thereafter.

Before long, the hospice staff began to consider Oscar's "predictions" so accurate that they would alert relatives when he settled, once again, into a patient's bed. At one point, employees tried to get the cat to sit with a patient they were sure was on the verge of death, but he refused. Instead, he walked down the hallway and climbed into the bed of another resident. Oscar proved right once again.

Within five years, Oscar had accurately predicted an astonishing 50 patient deaths. Indeed, if he was shut out of the room of a patient he knew was about to die, he would scratch at the doors, trying to get inside. "His mere presence at the bedside is viewed by physicians and nursing home staff as an almost absolute indicator of impending death," according to Dr. David Dosa, who wrote 2010's *Making Rounds with Oscar: The Extraordinary Gift of an Ordinary Cat*. Of course, some might find this behavior morbid, but many families feel comforted knowing that the cat is with their loved ones at the end; some have even thanked him in obituaries.

Though no one can explain Oscar's unique abilities, he may be reacting to a smell given off by dying bodies that humans can't discern. Why would this attract him? We can't be sure, but it's unlikely that Oscar is deliberately comforting the dying. Nevertheless, says Dosa, "animals are remarkable in their ability to see things we don't, be it the dog that sniffs out cancer or the fish that predicts earthquakes. Animals know when they are needed."

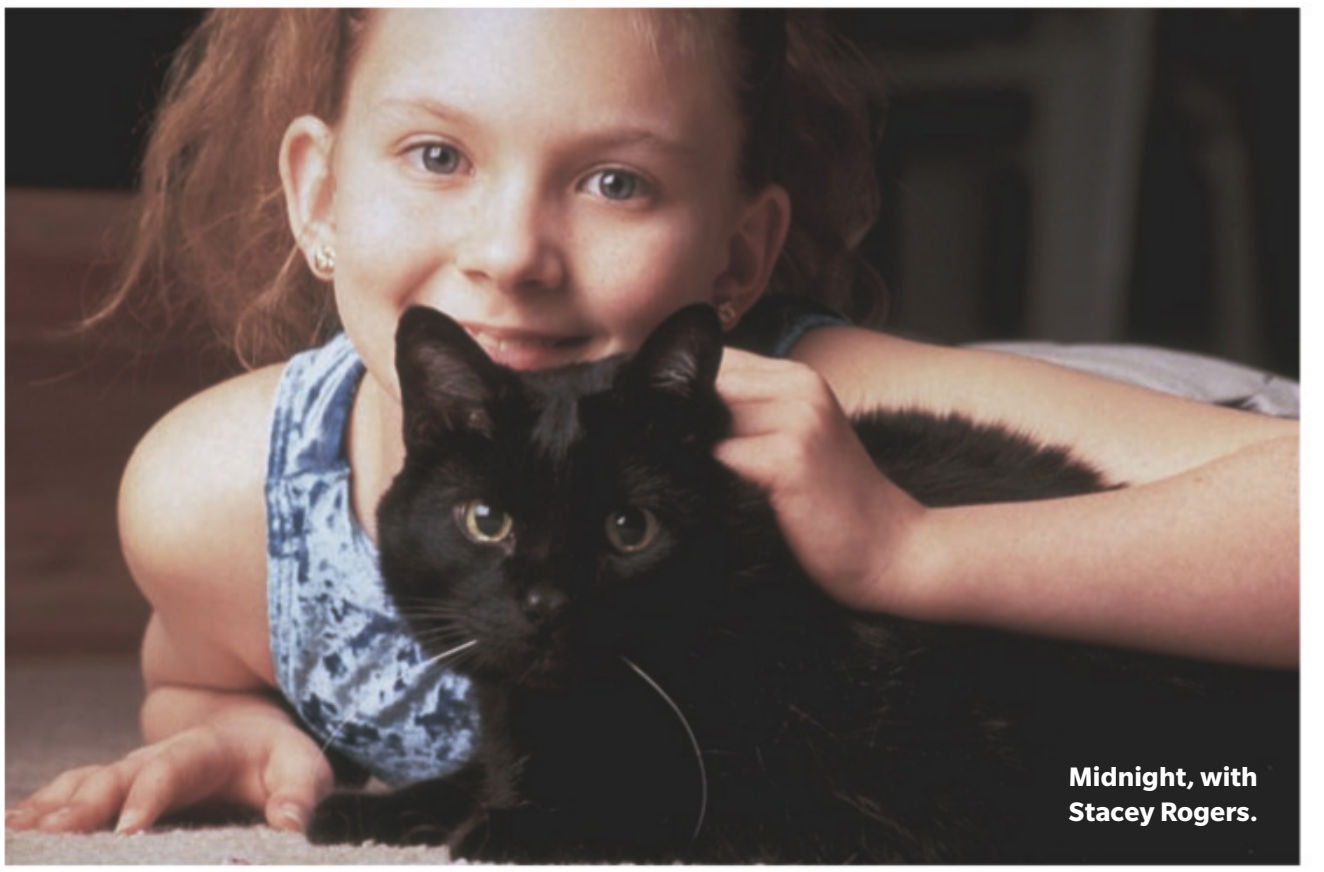
Ron rested with an unconscious patient.

RON: THE SICK ANIMAL PROTECTOR

One of four kittens born in a feral cat colony, an orange tabby named Ron was adopted (along with his siblings Hermione, Luna, and Harry) by the Northfield Veterinary Hospital in Denver, Colorado, in 2016. Before long, the kitten took an almost maternal interest in his litter mates. "He always groomed them, and the one time a dog got into my office he pushed all his siblings behind him and puffed up to protect them," according to the hospital's manager and co-owner, Jen Weston.

It wasn't long before Ron started befriending dogs, too, happily greeting new canine patients nose-to-nose. He even showed interest in an angry 20-pound cat that the vets couldn't handle. "The owner warned us that he had been very difficult," Weston told *People* magazine. "We usually lock Ronald up if we think his presence will be unwanted but that particular day he escaped our hold. He went right up to the aggressive cat and they became friends! Kitty was fine and easily managed after that."

Before long, Ron was cuddling up to a dog named Fidget, who was recovering from dental work. Soon the tabby was regularly sharing his body heat with—and sometimes even grooming—unconscious animals during non-sterile procedures. "We have taken on many stray kittens throughout the years, and he is definitely an exceptional cat," said Weston, who posted images and videos of Ron's unique behavior on Facebook. Almost overnight, animal owners started requesting the tabby's services, which ended after three months when Ron was adopted into a forever home.



Midnight, with Stacey Rogers.

MIDNIGHT: THE LIFESAVER

In May 1986, Bernita Rogers of Leavenworth, Kansas, gave birth to a girl she and her husband, Roy, named Stacey. Though the infant was premature, she was healthy, which was nothing short of a miracle for the Rogerses, whose three previous children had died at birth. "I don't know that I could put into words how long we waited and how special that made her," Bernita said.

Bernita and Roy were very protective of Stacey. "We constantly monitored her," said Roy. Even the family cat, a black tom named Midnight, whom the Rogerses had adopted as a stray about a year before, seemed to watch over the child. "He was always looking at her, always in the room with her," Bernita said. The cat's attention paid off after Stacey came down with what seemed to be a cold at the age of six weeks. Leaving nothing to chance, Bernita rushed the child to a doctor. "He told me to just put a humidifier in her room," Bernita told *People* magazine in 1997.

Returning home, Bernita put Stacey down for a nap and went downstairs to join her parents, who were visiting from out of town. Before long, Midnight interrupted the conversation. The normally easygoing animal was strangely agitated. "He came and he jumped in my lap and he jumped down and jumped back in my lap," Bernita said. "He obviously wanted me to do something, but I really wasn't interested."

Bernita shooed away the cat, who ran upstairs to the baby's room. Soon afterward, the new mom and her parents heard Midnight making "an eerie, moaning sound" on the baby monitor. "It was frightening enough that I jumped out of the chair and ran upstairs," she said. Arriving in the nursery, she found the cat screaming into the monitor. "He was sort of leaning out over the bassinet," Bernita said. "I immediately looked at the baby, and she was gasping and her color was blue . . . I thought I was going to lose her."

Bernita rushed Stacey to the hospital, where the child went into full respiratory failure, the result of a viral infection. Eventually she was resuscitated, but the real hero was Midnight. "This cat actually saved this baby's life," Bernita said. "For whatever reason, we were given . . . a second chance by the help of a cat."

Karen Wellen cuddled Scarlett.

SCARLETT: THE FIREFIGHTER

On March 29, 1996, a fire erupted in the abandoned garage of a house in Brooklyn. As firefighters battled the blaze, one of them, David Giannelli, saw a calico cat carrying her five four-week-old kittens, one by one, from the garage, where she had given birth. Most of the fur on her face had been burned, her paws were singed and red, and her eyes had been blistered shut. Since she couldn't see, she nudged each baby with her nose to be sure they were all present after they were outside. Then she collapsed.

After the compassionate firefighters took the six cats to the North Shore Animal League on Long Island, New York, the staff began to treat their wounds. Soon the story attracted international attention, and the shelter received nearly 7,000 calls from people who wanted to adopt the animals—particularly Scarlett, who was widely celebrated as a feline hero. But her actions were most likely the manifestation of a powerful evolutionary instinct rather than kitty altruism. Though Scarlett may have been more driven by that instinct than other cats, mother cats are wired to protect their young from danger. To that end, even risking death can be considered a kind of self-preservation: in saving her kittens, Scarlett ensured that her genes will live on.

Ultimately, Scarlett was adopted by Brooklynite Karen Wellen, who had recently lost her cat of 21 years and was specifically searching for an animal with special needs. Since Wellen herself had suffered injuries in a traffic accident, she empathized with what Scarlett had been through. "I just fell in love with her," Wellen said. "And even though I didn't know her, I knew that I wanted to have her in my life."

Though Scarlett needed regular doses of eye medication, the once-feral cat thrived in her new home. "She sees well, she hears well, she smells well, she eats well," Wellen said at the time. "She's getting very chubby, and she's very playful, and she's doing phenomenally well. She's such an affectionate cat, she needs people, she wants to be with people, and we want to be with her."

Tara.

TARA: THE ATTACK CAT

In May 2014, four-year-old Jeremy Triantafilo was riding his tricycle in his family's driveway in Bakersfield, California, when the next-door neighbor's Labrador-chow mix, Scrappy, attacked him. Running toward the child's screams, his mother, Erica, saw the dog clamping Jeremy's leg in his jaws and shaking him viciously. "The next thing I know I see my cat flying out of nowhere onto this dog," she said.

Hurling herself at Scrappy, Tara chased the dog away before spinning around and returning to Jeremy's side. ("She's a hero!" the boy said.) Later, the boy's father, Roger, watched the incident unfold on a security-camera video. "It was pretty amazing to see just a cat take on a dog and so selflessly just put herself out there and not worry about if she was going to get bit or injured herself," he said. "I think that dog did not even know what hit him." After Roger uploaded the video to YouTube, it became an Internet sensation, attracting more than 16.8 million viewers within 48 hours.

Though the boy's wounds required 10 stitches, he was otherwise unscathed—thanks to Tara, whom the Triantafilos had adopted five years earlier after she followed them home from a park. Had she ever shown signs of being a feline superhero before? "Every once in a while she puts our dog back into her place," Erica said, "but for the most part she's just the most mellow cat you've ever met." According to Roger, Tara wanted to comment on the incident—but the cat got her tongue.

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The Last Meow

"There are two means of refuge from the miseries of life: music and cats."

—ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Arch Badertscher's dairy farm, Fresno, California, 1954.